

**When you're not welcome anymore. Brexit vote, national cultural identity and the return intentions of self-initiated expatriates**

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*Abstract.* I analyse how a change in the host country environment, specifically a change in the host society's attitudes towards foreigners affect expatriates' intention to return to their home country. I suggest that the worsening of a society's attitudes towards foreigners increases expatriates' intentions to repatriate. I also argue that expatriates' national cultural identity and the level of expatriates' adjustment moderate the strength of this effect. I examine these hypotheses using a panel dataset drawn from surveys of self-initiated expatriates in the UK before and after the UK's 2016 vote to leave the European Union (Brexit Vote), which led to more overt anti-foreigner sentiment in British society. I find that the Brexit vote had a positive effect on expatriates' intentions to repatriate and that the strength of this effect varies with their national identity and their level of adjustment.

## 1 Introduction

Prior research has provided extensive analysis of the factors that may lead expatriates to return to their home country. These factors predominantly relate to individuals' characteristics and behaviours, or to the close (work) environment of individual expatriates. Key factors that have been highlighted include, for example, the level of adjustment of the expatriate manager, job satisfaction, or the family situation/adjustment (Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Mohr & Klein, 2002; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001). The majority of factors that have been analysed are at the individual or the organisational level (Caligiuri, 2000; Kawai & Mohr, 2015) and where general macro-level factors are examined, this mainly focusses on the potential effect of the host country culture. There has also been little research into how changes in the wider host environment affect expatriates, despite researchers stressing the relevance of the volatility of the overall environment for expatriates (Baruch, Altman, & Tung, 2016).

This study suggests that one of the factors that is likely to affect individuals' decision to live and work as an expatriate in a particular country is the level of anti-foreigner sentiment in a country. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the rise in (the open display) of anti-foreigner and anti-migration sentiment in the UK after the Brexit vote in 2016 (Brahic & Lallement, 2020), has affected the attractiveness of the UK for foreign nationals. For example, Brahic and Lallement (2020) carried out interviews with French nationals living in Manchester some of whom were told by members of the public to "go home". So far, however, there has been little research into how this increase in anti-foreigner sentiment affect expatriates' intention to return to their home country. In addition, the Brexit vote has also led to increased uncertainty regarding the residency status of EU nationals in the UK, i.e., whether or not they would be allowed to live and work in the UK in the future.

Recent research has examined the particular situation of expatriate managers in host countries with different characteristics. Various authors have looked, for instance, at expatriates in high-risk countries (Bader, 2015; Pinto, Bader, & Schuster, 2017; Posthuma, Ramsey, Flores, Maertz, & Ahmed, 2019). These studies suggest that expatriates in such countries are faced with particular challenges and depend to a greater extent on social networks and support from their organisation and family (Bader, Berg, & Holtbrügge, 2015; Bader & Schuster, 2015). Similarly, Bader et al. (2018) examine the effect of institutional discrimination on female expatriates in 25 countries. However, looking at the effect of (static) host country characteristics does not tell us much about how expatriates' intention to stay in a particular host country is affected by changes in the characteristics of a host country. The first research question addressed in this study is thus: *(1) How did the Brexit vote in June 2016 affect the return intentions of expatriates in the United Kingdom?*

In addition to the direct influence that such changes in the host environment have on expatriates' return intentions, it is likely that the nature of this influence is contingent on other factors. Specifically, it seems likely that the degree to which an expatriate identifies with her or his home country as well as the level of her or his adjustment in the host country will affect this influence. Recent research has highlighted the role that an expatriate's national identity plays for her or his level of adjustment and intention to return to the home country (De Cieri, Sheehan, Costa, Fenwick, & Cooper, 2009; Mao & Shen, 2015). This research argues that a strong and stable national cultural identity will be associated with a lack of cultural adjustment, which in turn will increase the likelihood that an expatriate will return to her or his home country. In addition to this direct effect that national identity may have on expatriates' return intention, there are grounds to believe that national identity will moderate the effect that environmental changes has on expatriates' return intention. It may be, for instance, that expatriates with strong national identity will be less likely to accept detrimental

changes to their situation in the host country and will thus be quicker to consider returning to their home country. Accordingly, the second research question addressed in this study is: (2) *How does the strength of national identity of expatriates moderate the effect that the Brexit vote had on expatriates' return intention?*

Prior research has highlighted expatriates' level of adjustment in their host country as a central driver for expatriate performance and their decision to stay on their assignment (e.g., Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Selmer, 1999). Adjustment refers to the level of psychological comfort experienced by an expatriate with regard to living and working in a host country (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989). In addition to the well established direct effect of adjustment on expatriates' intention to return, it seems likely that adjustment also affects the influence that changes in the host environment have on the expatriate. Specifically, Expatriates that are well adjusted in the host country might be less affected by any negative changes in the host environment. The third research question addressed in this study is thus (3) *how does an expatriate's level of adjustment moderate the effect that the Brexit vote has on his or her return intention?*

I suggest that a better understanding of the role that external changes in the attractiveness of a host country has on expatriates' adjustment and return intentions is important from both a theoretical and practical perspective. From a theoretical perspective understanding this effect is important, because most prior research has paid little attention to – potentially sudden – changes in host-country attractiveness as a driver for expatriate adjustment and return intentions. Given the importance of expatriates in the workforce of many organizations and these organizations' need to retain these employees (see, for example, Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010), understanding what drives expatriates' return intention is also important from a practical perspective.

By addressing these research questions through an empirical analysis of German self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in the UK higher education sector this study contributes to overcoming our lack of understanding how detrimental changes in the host country society, specifically an increase in anti-foreigner sentiment, affect SIEs' intention to repatriate. When compared to the vast literature on organisational expatriates, researchers have only recently begun to acknowledge the importance and particular situation of self-initiated expatriates (e.g., Andresen, Al Ariss, & Walther, 2013; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The following sections provides the theoretical background and develops a set of hypotheses on the contingent effect of the Brexit vote on expatriates' intention to repatriate. The subsequent chapter will present the sample and measurements. I then present and discuss the results, before concluding the paper with a discussion of the study's contributions and limitations as well as areas for future research.

## **2 Hypothesis development**

### **2.1 Brexit vote and expatriates' intention to return**

As suggested above, researchers accounting for environmental factors in the context of research on expatriates generally focus on the immediate surroundings of the expatriate or use general macro-level characteristics of the environment in a static way as a factor that shapes the likelihood that an expatriate will take on and/or stay on an overseas assignment in a particular country. This research suggests that expatriates decide to leave a particular country because of certain factors that "pull" them back to their home country (e.g., family ties) and/or "push" them away from their host country (e.g., missing job opportunities) (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). What remains missing from the literature so far is research about how *changes* in the macro-level environment affect expatriates' desire to return to their home-country, i.e. "push" them to repatriate.

I suggest that the Brexit vote in 2016 and the associated increase in the (open display) of anti-foreigner sentiment and in the uncertainty regarding expatriates' residency status, affected the return intention of expatriates in the UK in a number of ways. First, the Brexit vote appears to have led to greater anti-foreigner sentiment or at least the open display of such sentiment, both by members of the public as well as the government. Multiple media reports highlighted expression of anti-foreigner sentiment vis-à-vis EU nationals in the UK. In their interviews with twelve French nationals living and working in the UK, Brahic and Lellement (2020: 18) found that many of them had begun to “mentally prepare to detach themselves from UK society”. Prior research suggests that the openness of a culture shapes expatriates' response to this culture (Tung 1998). The decision to leave the UK may be interpreted as a sign that the host culture is or has become more closed, thus reducing the attractiveness of the UK for expatriates.

The increase in anti-foreigner sentiment and the doubts associated with the residency status in the UK also affect expatriates' feeling of belonging in the United Kingdom. Research has stressed that the lack of a “strong sense of belonging to their social and professional environment” is likely to increase expatriates' return intention (Meuer, Tröster, Angstmann, Backes-Gellner, & Pull, 2019). In addition to fears of not being allowed to stay in the country working with the same organisation, there is uncertainty about the possibilities of working for a different organisation in the UK in the future. There is thus uncertainty regarding the expatriates' future career in the UK, leading to an increased intention to return to the home country. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated.

*Hypothesis 1: The Brexit vote will have had a positive effect of expatriates' intention to return to their home country.*

## 2.2 The moderating effect of national identity

Individuals form their identity and the associated self-image based on the perceived belongingness to particular social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals construct and adapt their identity in their interaction with individuals and their social environment (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Because of their extensive interactions with individual and social actors that differ in their cultural and national identity, expatriates are thus required to reflect on their national cultural identity and potentially adapt how they define themselves (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Tung, 1998). A strong national cultural identity increases individuals' attachment to their respective national cultural identity (Mao & Shen, 2015; Sussman, 2001). Similarly, Tung (1998) has highlighted that expatriates vary in the importance they attribute to the preservation of their culture.

Past research has suggested and found that strong national identity increases expatriates intention to return to their home country (De Cieri et al., 2009). In addition to this direct effect on expatriates return intention, expatriates' national or cultural identity is also likely to moderate the effect that the changes associated with the Brexit vote has on their return intention. The increase in anti-foreigner sentiment after the Brexit vote means that expatriates that strongly identify with their respective, foreign nationality are likely to feel particularly strong as target of such sentiments. Expatriates that identify particularly strong with their home country are thus more likely to be affected by the Brexit vote when compared to expatriates for whom their national background is a less important source of identity.

The increase in anti-foreigner sentiment also means that expatriates may feel compelled to downplay their national identity. For example, some of the French nationals living and working in the UK that were interviewed by Brahic and Lellement (2020) reported that they would downplay or hide their foreign nationality and even felt anxious about speaking French to their children in public. It might thus be assumed that such a downplaying

of one's national identity will have a particularly strong effect on expatriates that strongly identify with their home country. As a result, such expatriates are more likely to consider a return to their home country after the Brexit vote.

Further, prior research suggests that expatriates with strong national cultural identity are likely to develop strong network ties to individuals sharing the same national identity (Mao & Shen, 2015). For expatriates with strong national identity are thus more likely to have a network of home-country nationals and the associated informational and other resources that facilitate a the expatriate's return to the home country. Such expatriates would thus find the repatriation to their home country easier than expatriates without such networks, making them more likely to react to a detrimental change in the host country environment with an increase in their return intention.

Finally, the Brexit vote has increased the uncertainty regarding the legal status of expatriates in the UK. Expatriates are left unclear about whether or not they would be allowed to continue living and working in the UK. Anecdotal evidence suggests that obtaining British citizenship is seen by many expatriates as a secure way through which they will be allowed to stay in the UK (e.g., Brahic & Lallement, 2020). Expatriates with a strong national identity will thus be less likely to consider this option and are thus more likely to consider returning to their home country. Based on this discussion, I formulate the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: The return intention of expatriates with strong national identity will be more affected by the Brexit vote than the return intention of expatriates with weak national identity.*

### 2.3 The moderating effect of adjustment level

Expatriate adjustment, i.e. the degree of psychological comfort felt by expatriates, has played a central role in existing explanations of expatriates' intention to return and a lack of



adjustment has been used as a direct explanation of why expatriates return to their home country (for an overview, see Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013). The dominant way to conceptualise this adjustment was suggested by Black and Stephens (1989) who distinguish three facets of adjustment: work adjustment, general living adjustment, interaction adjustment.

High levels of adjustment, i.e., of psychological comfort in these three domains can be expected to mitigate the effect that the detrimental environmental changes associated with the Brexit vote have on expatriates' intention to return. High levels of adjustment are associated not only with high levels of integration into the work environment but also with strong integration into the local society (Haslberger et al., 2013). Prior research has highlighted how expatriates rely on the support provided by family members or other social networks to deal with the particular challenges associated with living and working in a high risk environment (Bader & Schuster, 2015)

The strong integration of expatriates into the local society is also likely to be associated with high levels of structural attachment. Well-adjusted expatriates are more likely to have developed strong ties to co-workers and the local community in general. Such ties may offset the effect that a detrimental change in the environment might have on the expatriates' intention to return to her or his home country to avoid the loss of such social ties (Meuer et al., 2019). Beside the creation of ties and the potential access to emotional, informational, and other resources available through such ties (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Ren, Bolino, Shaffer, & Kraimer, 2013), well-adjusted expatriates are also more likely to have invested more time and other resources into both their social and work life in the host country. They may have obtained qualifications, degrees, or similar that are specific to the particular host country environment and not be transferable to other environments, including the home country (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). This is particularly important for the specific case of

self-initiated expatriates. Whereas organizational expatriates keep their formal affiliation with a home country organization and colleagues at this organization, SIEs have no such continuous formal home-country network (Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008) and would thus have to find a new job in their home country. The particular resources developed during their time in the host country are thus more likely to be lost. Some of the French nationals in the UK that were interviewed by Bahic and Lellement (2020: 19) suggested that their lives had become “non-movable”. Expatriates fearing the “loss” of such investments are less likely to respond to the detrimental changes associated with the Brexit vote with an increase in their intention to repatriate.

Based on this discussion, I suggest that the Brexit vote will have particularly strong effects on those expatriates that have low levels of adjustment prior to the Brexit vote, i.e., expatriates that report low levels of psychological comfort in the United Kingdom. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*Hypothesis 3: The return intention of expatriates that are well-adjusted, will be less affected by the Brexit vote than the return intention of expatriates that show low levels of adjustment.*

### **3 Method**

#### **3.1 Sample**

I test my hypotheses using data collected from German self-initiated expatriates working in the Higher Education sector in the United Kingdom. Prior research on expatriates has frequently used academics (Froese, 2012; Richardson & McKenna, 2003; Selmer & Luring, 2010, 2011, 2012). This is because self-initiated expatriation is relatively common among academics (Froese, 2012; Selmer & Luring, 2012) given the increasingly global nature of research, the relatively greater transferability of skills, and the comparability of qualifications across nations. In addition, with only 40% of research students being keen on an academic

career (Metcalf, Rolfe, Stevens, & Weale, 2005) , growing student numbers, and academic institutions striving to compete in an increasingly global market for higher education, SIEs play a significant role in many countries' higher education sector.

Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), i.e. foreign individuals who decide to expatriate 'on their own' and are not transferred to an overseas position by an employer (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Jokinen et al., 2008: 979) constitute an increasingly important source of skilled employees for organizations. Froese and Peltokorpi (2013) suggest that between 50%-70% of the expatriate workforce are SIEs.

A database of 804 German academics in the UK that was compiled using directories, university staff lists and web-searches. These were then invited via email to complete an online questionnaire. Questionnaires were sent out in September 2015 and in March 2017, i.e., the first survey took place before the UK's 2016 vote to leave to European Union. From the 804 participants who received the two surveys, incomplete surveys and surveys from respondents who participated in only one survey were eliminated, resulting in 124 participants who completed the questionnaire before and after the Brexit vote. By collecting data at two points in time, the study avoids the problems associated with the commonly used cross-sectional approach in expatriate research, which include their limited use for capturing dynamic and causal relationships (Meuer et al., 2019).

The average age of respondents at the time of the first survey was 45 years, with a minimum of 29 years and maximum of 67 years. 54% of the expatriates were male and 46% were female. This is broadly in line with the gender split in the UK higher education sector (HESA, 2014). All participants in the sample moved to the UK at least two years prior to the date of the first survey. At the time of the first survey, expatriates had lived in the UK between two and 36 years. Using panel data allows us to account for the expatriates' characteristics and return intentions before and after the Brexit vote took place in June 2016.

The measurement of the dependent variable, i.e. *intention to repatriate*, was taken from Tharenou and Caulfield's (2010). Each of the three questions was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale: "I intend to return to Germany" (1 strongly disagree – 5 Agree), "I intend to remain abroad permanently" (reverse coded) and "I plan to return to Germany within the next two years" (Cronbach's alpha = 0,8629).

The independent and moderating variables were measured as follows. The effect of the *Brexit Vote* was captured using a binary variable that assumed a value of "1" for responses after the Brexit vote and "0" for responses before the Brexit vote in June 2016. The level of SIEs' *national identity* was measured Cameron's (2004) measures of National Identity adopted to the particular national background of the respondents. This was a nine-item construct and included questions such as "I have a lot in common with other Germans" and "In general, being German is an important part of my self-image". These questions were answered on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' (Cronbach's alpha = 0.8508). The second moderating variable, i.e., expatriates' *level of adjustment*, is measured using items for the three different facets of adjustment (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens, 1989). I used three items for work adjustment, four items for interaction, and seven items for the expatriates' general living adjustment. To capture an expatriates' overall adjustment, I combined all items into a single construct, which was supported by factor analysis.

I control for a number of factors that have been suggested to affect a SIEs' level of adjustment and their intention to return to their home country (De Cieri et al., 2009). I control for the *time an SIE has spent in the host country*, based on prior research on expatriates suggesting that adjustment to new cultures does not increase linearly (Oberg, 1998). Given the relationship of job (dis-) satisfaction with employee turnover in general (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000), I include expatriates' job satisfaction. This was measured using the

following three items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.9132): "I am satisfied with my job", "I would recommend this job to a colleague", and "This job measures up to my expectations." I also control for the *gender* and *age* of expatriates based on suggestions in prior research on organizational and self-initiated expatriates that these factors may affect expatriates' intention to return to their home-country (De Cieri et al., 2009; Selmer & Luring, 2010, 2011).

#### 4 Results

Table 1 shows the correlation matrix as well as the mean values and standard deviations of our variables.

\*\*\* Insert Table 1 here \*\*\*

Given the multi-level panel nature of our data, mixed effects ML regression is used to test the hypotheses. Table 2 shows the findings of the mixed effects ML regression. The use of mixed effects ML regression as opposed to a linear specification is also confirmed. Model 1 shows the baseline model. Model 2 shows the full model. Models 3 and 4 show the results for sub-groups of the samples with high vs. low adjustment or national identity to test the moderating effects suggested in hypotheses 3 and 4.

\*\*\* Insert Table 2 here \*\*\*

In *hypothesis 1*, the Brexit Vote was expected to have a positive effect of expatriates' intention to return to their home country. The results in Model 2 in Table 2 show that coefficient for the dummy for the Brexit vote is positive and statistically significant (0.197,  $p < 0.01$ ). This result supports hypothesis 1.

In *hypothesis 2*, I argued that the effect that the Brexit vote had on expatriates' return intention would be weakened by the expatriates' level of adjustment. To test this hypothesis, I

formed two groups of respondents with either low or high levels of adjustment before the Brexit vote. I use the mean value as a cut-off point to divide the sample into two groups. Running the models for these two subgroups (see Model 3 in Table 2) shows that the coefficient reflecting the effect of the Brexit vote on the return intentions of the low-adjustment group (0.364,  $p < 0.05$ ) is larger than the coefficient reflecting the effect of the Brexit vote on the return intentions of the high-adjustment group (0.178,  $p < 0.10$ ). This finding provides support for my second hypothesis.

In *hypothesis 3*, I expected that an expatriate's national identity would strengthen the effect that the Brexit vote would have on his or her intention to repatriate. To test this hypothesis, I select two groups of respondents with either very high or very low levels of national identity and run the model on the two sub-groups. I use the mean value of national identity for this selection. Model 4 in Table 2 shows a statistically significant and positive effect of the Brexit vote on the intention to repatriate of expatriates with low level of national identity (0.34,  $p < 0.01$ ), but a no statistically significant of the Brexit vote for the respondents with high levels of national identity (0.102, n.s.). This is the opposite of what is suggested in hypothesis 3 and the results thus do not support this hypothesis.

The findings for our control variables in the main model 2 in Table 2 indicate that the length of time an expatriate has already lived in the host country has no statistically significant effect on her or his intention to return to the home country. Similarly, neither age nor gender appear to influence an SIE's return intention. In contrast, an SIEs' satisfaction with her or his job leads to a significant reduction in the SIEs' intention to return to the home country. The findings also show that in addition to their moderating effects, both the expatriates' level of adjustment (-0.356,  $p < 0.01$ ) and their national identity (0.220,  $p < 0.01$ ) have statistically significant direct effects on expatriates return intentions.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

This study was motivated by the importance of a better understanding of how changes in the host country environment drive self-initiated expatriates to return to their home country. Prior research has focused predominantly on individual- or job-level factors in explaining the return intention of (self-initiated) expatriates. In contrast, there has been relatively little research on the effect that changes in the overall environment in the host country has on an expatriates' intention to return. The Brexit vote in the UK in 2016 provided the opportunity to investigate the effect of such a change in the environment on expatriates' intention to return. In line with expectations, I find that expatriates' intention to return increased significantly after the Brexit vote.

I suggested that this positive effect that the Brexit Vote had on expatriates' intention to repatriate would be moderated by the degree to which expatriates identify with their home country and the degree to which feel comfortable in their host country. With regard to the degree to which expatriates identify with their home country, the results show – contrary to the hypothesis – that for those expatriates that had comparatively low levels of nationality identity, the Brexit vote had a strongly positive effect on their intention to repatriate. In contrast, the findings suggest that that the Brexit vote did not have a statistically significant effect on the intention to repatriate of expatriates with high levels of national identity. One potential explanation for this unexpected result may be that expatriates with high levels of national identity had a very clear idea about their intention to return to their home country and the Brexit vote had little effect on this intention. The findings show a direct positive and statistically significant effect of national identity on return intention. This is in line with prior research that has investigated the role that national identity plays in the expatriation process (e.g., Mao & Shen, 2015). The result for the direct effect of national identity on repatriation intention also means that expatriates with low national identity had greater intentions to stay

in the host country. A worsening of the situation in the host country, i.e. the increased uncertainty and greater display of anti-foreigner sentiment resulting from the Brexit vote, may thus have had a greater effect on the return intention of this group of expatriates.

Prior research has highlighted the direct effect of *adjustment* on expatriates' intention to repatriate. Although not the focus of this study, this is also supported by the results of the empirical analysis, which shows a statistically significant, negative effect of adjustment on expatriates' intention to return. I argued that -- irrespective of any direct effect of adjustment on intention to return -- an expatriate's adjustment would moderate the effect that the Brexit vote has on his or her intention to repatriate. This argument was supported by the empirical results. This finding highlights the important role of adjustment not only for expatriates' intention to return, but in shaping the effect that changes in the host country environment may have on expatriates' intention to return. It also means that there is no empirical support for a potential counter-argument, i.e. that the Brexit vote might have the greatest effect on the return intention on well-adjusted expatriates because they have "most to lose" from the Brexit, whereas low-adjusted may have little to lose.

From a theoretical point of view, the study highlights the important and contingent role that (changes) in the overall host country environment can have on expatriate managers. Despite the existence of such change, prior research on expatriation has so far provided little analysis of its effect on expatriates in general, and on expatriates' intention to repatriate in particular. This lack of research is concerning given the recent surge in populism and nationalism in various countries, including the UK, the US or Hungary, which arguably has important effects on the situation of expatriates and their intention to repatriate (e.g., Brahic & Lallement, 2020). This study provides a first attempt of exploring the effects of changes in the attractiveness of a host country on expatriates' intention to repatriate. Recent studies have



provided anecdotal evidence of how expatriates react to detrimental changes in their environment. What remains missing is quantitative evidence on this effect.

In addition to exploring the direct effects of changes in the host country environment, the study suggests that the strength of such effects will be contingent. Specifically, it is argued that both an expatriates' national identity and his/her level of adjustment will moderate the effect that a detrimental change in a host country – in this study reflected by the Brexit Vote in the UK in 2016 – has on expatriates' intention to repatriate. The choice of these two moderators was based on their importance in prior research examining the factors that (directly) affect expatriates' intention to repatriate. The study suggested and found evidence that in addition to the direct effects of these factors, which have widely been discussed and empirically supported in the literature, also act as contingencies on the effects of environmental changes on intention to repatriate. There may of course be various other factors that may play such a moderating role and the identification and examination of such factors would be a worthwhile avenue for future research interested in understanding what makes expatriates want to return to their home country.

The findings also have implications for organizations employing or seeking to employ SIEs by highlighting how an expatriates' level of adjustment and their national identity affect their responses to changes in the broader attractiveness of a host country. Organisation thus need to be aware that the negative changes in the attractiveness of a country affect expatriate managers' intention to repatriate. This is particularly important for organisations that heavily depend on foreign employees. In the UK, which provides the context for this study, this is not only the case for the higher education sector that was examined in this study, but also for organisations in the health and research sectors. A high dependence on foreign employees has also been identified for various countries in the Middle East, where the share of foreign employees in the total working population may reach 80% (Forstenlechner, Selim, Baruch, &

Madi, 2014). Similarly, organisations that depend on foreign employees may attempt to support expatriates adjust not only because of the likely positive effect that such adjustment has on their intention to stay overseas, but also because such adjustment may insulate or buffer expatriates' against potential negative changes in the host country environment over which the organisation has very little control.

This study has a number of limitations. It examined a particular type of expatriate that differs in important aspects from organisational expatriates, i.e. expatriates that are sent on an overseas assignment by an organisation in their home country. The latter group may be less affected by changes in the host country environment, because such assignments are usually scheduled to last for a predetermined length of time. Self-initiated expatriates, in contrast, move to a country on their own account, do so potentially not only for work reasons, and are more likely to stay for extended period of time or even expect to stay overseas (Baruch et al., 2016). It would be worthwhile to find out if organisational expatriates and self-initiated expatriates respond differently to changes in the host country environment, such as those associated with the Brexit vote in the UK in 2016.

Similar to most prior studies on SIEs (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Jokinen et al., 2008; Richardson & McKenna, 2003; Suutari & Brewster, 2000; 2010) I focus on SIEs from a single home-country. Future research may be able to better account for the influence of home-country factors when studying the effects of host-country changes on expatriates. Additionally, the focus of this study was on expatriates in a particular sector and future research should investigate expatriates in other sectors.

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## Tables

**Table 1. Correlation matrix**

		Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1)	Return Intention	3.276	1.079						
(2)	Time in UK	14.347	10.447	-0.049					
(3)	Adjustment	4.924	0.866	-0.395**	0.073				
(4)	Identity	4.462	0.9134	0.222**	0.168**	-0.200**			
(5)	Job satisfaction	3.793	0.889	-0.272**	-0.107	0.437**	0.002		
(6)	age	45.089	7.541	0.050	0.234**	-0.131*	0.084	0.117	
(7)	Gender	0.5	0.5	-0.036	0.070	0.071	0.187**	-0.089	-0.118

**Table 2. Mixed Effects ML Regression**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		Model 4	
			High Adjustment	Low Adjustment	High Identity	Low Identity
Brexit Vote		0.197***	0.178*	0.364**	0.102	0.34***
Adjustment Identity	-0.356*** 0.220**	-0.378*** 0.222***	0.274***	0.327	-0.434***	-0.318**
Job Satisfaction	-0.197**	-0.173	-0.409***	-0.238	-0.182	-0.191**
Time in host country	-0.002	-0.004	-0.007	0.005	-0.004	-0.002
Gender	-0.132	-0.144		-0.241	-0.088	-0.295
Age	-0.004	-0.011	-0.016	-0.123	-0.01	-0.008
# Individuals	124	124	63	61	62	62
# Observations	248	248	126	122	124	124
Wald Chi2	40.66***	54.77***	31.76***	11.56*	17.44***	28.72***

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$