

Contested Hospitality and Welcome at the Airport Borders: The Narratives of Non-Citizen Residents

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Abstract

This article examines the challenges faced by non-citizen residents at airport borders of their country of residency, exploring how differential treatment at the border impacts their sense of belonging. Using a critical hospitality lens and an interpretivist method, the analysis focuses on the concept of home and belonging within the liminal spaces of airport borders. The findings reveal that non-citizen residents, justified under the guise of ‘national security’, encounter normalised micro-aggressions, discrimination, and interrogation. Consequently, they experience a range of negative emotions, leaving them in a state of uncertainty between belonging and not belonging. Reflecting the theme of the special issue, this study draws attention to hostile airport border procedures for non-citizen residents and contributes to the decolonisation of tourism and hospitality scholarship by investigating the experiences of this overlooked category of travellers.

Keywords: Airports, border-crossings, non-citizen residents, belonging, welcome, inhospitable spaces, critical hospitality, home.

1. Introduction

The current global border protection regime is a natural outcome of neoliberal economic structures and ideologies, resulting in a passport hierarchy (Aitchison 2023; Torabian & Mair 2022). Airport border control procedures are hyper-normalised and rarely questioned (Bianchi and Stephenson 2014). Post-World Wars, borders, and particularly airport borders, have become liminal (non-place) spaces with contradictory desires of promoting economic prosperity through human and material flows on one hand and ensuring security on the other. This has transformed borders into complex modalities under neoliberal governance (Huang, Xiao & Wang 2018; Stoffelen 2022; Su 2024). Borders became selectively permeable, stimulating the mobility of some while blocking others, all in the name of the state’s ‘right’ to regulate these flows for national security and protection (Stoffelen 2022). In reality, the permeability of borders is a geopolitical instrument in the neoliberal world used to maximise socio-economic and political benefits (Bianchi et al. 2020). On one hand, the differential mobility of individuals is hyper-normalised and institutionalised (Stephenson 2006), while on the other hand, the political discourse of fear and propaganda surrounding border security has

frequently obstructed discussions of change among politicians and in the media (Aitchison, 2023; Bianchi, et al., 2020). Borders have been extensively studied in politics, migration, mobility, and border studies (Adey 2017; Cresswell 2006; Paasi 2013; Salter 2012; Villegas 2015; Van Houtum & Pijpers 2007; Yuval-Davis Wemyss & Cassidy 2019), with notable exceptions from the perspective of tourism and hospitality (Bianchi, Stephenson & Hannam, 2020; Stephenson 2006; Stoffelen 2022; Su 2024). Therefore, building on research from other disciplines and utilising critical hospitality perspectives, this study aims to problematise the concept of borders and narrow the gap in current tourism and hospitality mobility knowledge.

The gap is evident in the subject of academic inquiries in this area. While the topic of irregular migrants' mobility at the border—individuals who enter, stay, or work in a country without the necessary authorisation or documents required under immigration regulations—is highly politicised and extensively studied, the mobility of regular migrants, who have migrated through formal channels, has received less attention (Stephenson 2006; Su 2024). Therefore, we are investigating the experiences of a significant number of crossers who are currently neglected, called non-citizen residents in this study. We refer to our subjects of investigation as 'non-citizen residents.' These are temporary or permanent regular migrants (such as international postgraduate students, skilled workers, or permanent residents), who mostly hold a passport from their country of origin for international border crossings. Passports are arguably the most common and recognised form of travel documentation proving citizenship. Therefore, in the context of this study, we are distinguishing between citizens and non-citizens based on whether they hold a passport from their country of residency at the time of border-crossing.

This study focuses particularly on migrants' experiences as they socially construct borders and critically differentiate the borderscape (Stoffelen 2022). Borderscape depicts a broad array of social practices, experiences, and processes, shaped by political discourses and various types of flows in the transnational contexts (Dell'Agnese & Amilhat Szary 2015). Migration is closely connected to the concept of citizenship (Ong 1999). In recent years, the influx of 'capital-bearing foreigners' from developing economies has prompted 'capital-hungry nation-states' to adopt a more flexible approach to citizenship (Ong 2022). These states have opened avenues to draw in this capital by offering citizenship through investment, in addition to established point-based schemes aimed at attracting professional and skilled labour from across the globe (Ong 2022). Despite being accepted through legal channels strictly calculated to optimise human and financial capital accumulation for the neoliberal hosts, non-citizen residents can face challenges and hostility at the border. The historical core-periphery dynamics of the world shaped by colonialism dictates that without citizenship, states are not obliged to offer the full spectrum of human rights and benefits to their residents, including equal mobility rights (Ong 2022). Inequalities in mobility rights often favour the 'gated communities' of the Global North (Van Houtum & Pijpers 2007: 7) and are manifested in the differential experiences for non-citizens when crossing international borders (Bianchi & Stephenson 2014; Paasi 2013; Salter 2012; Van Houtum & Pijpers 2007). Thus, surfacing everyday inequalities of border-crossing experiences demands critical attention.

Aligned with the theme of this special issue, a critical hospitality lens is employed to comprehend multiple aspects of border experiences for non-citizen residents, particularly how these occurrences shape their sense of welcome and belonging. Currently, as shown in this study, non-citizen residents in most advanced neoliberal societies, when leaving for or returning from a holiday, they are, in most cases, ushered to immigration checkpoints alongside first-time international visitors and subjected to nearly identical scrutiny. This presents a stark sense of dissonance, as non-citizens are made to feel as if they do not completely belong to the host country, embodying a sense of being neither ‘us’ nor ‘them’ (Said 1979). Therefore, the question arises: how hospitable or hostile are border procedures for non-citizen residents? How do they experience the notion of returning ‘home’? How does the current border regime (re)shape migrants’ sense of belonging? (Yuval-Davis 2006). How do airport border challenges, presumably caused by not having a passport from the host country (an objective aspect of belonging) among other factors, affect an individual's sense of attachment and connection to the host country (a subjective aspect of belonging)?

To address the above gaps, we aim to examine: 1) the limited scrutiny of bordering systems from the critical hospitality perspective and 2) the overall neglect of the experiences of non-citizen residents crossing borders and the way such experiences affect migrants’ sense of welcome and belonging. To operationalise these aims, this study first reflects on the relationships between migrants’ mobility aspirations, global citizenship, and borders; followed by a discussion on the contested notion of home and the experience of hospitality/hostility at borders; and finally, migrants and the sense of belonging at borders. A critical incident approach is employed to capture the voices of Global South residents of the West, focusing on their experiences during border crossings each time they re-enter their country of residence. This method is particularly appropriate as it highlights key moments of personal significance, offering deeper insight into how border-crossing experiences shape perceptions of belonging and hospitality.

2. Literature review

2.1. Migrants’ mobility aspirations, global citizenship, and borders

In the context of modern cosmopolitan lifestyles, mobility often signifies access to a certain level of citizenship rights. This is evident through the routine nature of mobility and connectivity for citizens of developed countries, in contrast to the limited mobility and access to global networks experienced by those in less developed countries (Bauder 2008; Cresswell 2013; Johnson 2014; Sheller 2018). Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) stipulates that everyone has the right to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their country and move within the borders of each state (United Nations 1948). Furthermore, Article 24 of the UDHR, which specifies the human right to rest, leisure, and holidays, has highlighted the ‘right to tourism’ in the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (UNWTO 1999: 6) which later was adopted into a convention by the United Nations General Assembly in 2017 (see Gascon (2020) for a review). Notable tourism scholars have contested and sought clarifications about the moral, political, and even legal foundations of the ‘right to tourism’ if it is to be interpreted solely as the right to consume cultures and environments, to

achieve greater growth, and to satisfy market profitability, rather than to celebrate free choice, to encourage travel and tourism for all, and to support the politically-guaranteed freedom of movement (Breakey and Breakey 2013; Gascon, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles 2006; McCabe & Diekmann, 2015). Besides tourism, the right to leave the host country to reunite with family and friends in their homeland and returning without bureaucratic inconvenience is among the biggest aspirations in life for the non-citizen residents (Bianchi & Stephenson 2014). In an ideal world, the frequency and significance of such movements will inform policies in support rather than against these wishes. However, in the prevailing system of neoliberal governance human needs are secondary to profitability and ‘security’ (see Moore 2012).

For nearly all purposes of international travel, the current global border regime requires individuals to possess passports. International passports tie individuals to states and international (dis)agreements between those states, by virtue of the arbitrary accident of birth. Individuals then become prisoners of this aspect of their identities, which may greatly limit their opportunities to move freely. Whether or not they approve, travellers become ‘quasi-diplomatic representatives’ of their countries simply by holding a passport (Torpey 1998). The ‘political citizenship’ by passport alone can however render them subject to profiling based on nationality and differential treatment at airport borders. Therefore, states’ monopolisation of the legitimate means of movement, including issuing passports for travel, makes individuals critically dependent on the state for the authorisation to move and access spaces. The lack of formal/political citizenship in the host country has been discussed as an important condition in rendering migrants as vulnerable to exploitation and exclusion (Anderson 2013). To address some aspects of the inequalities and exclusions generated by political/formal citizenship system, scholars have historically advocated for extending fundamental benefits, rights, and entitlements of citizens, to non-citizen residents by a post-national (Soysal 1994) or *jus-domicile* citizenship (Bauder 2008) which is based on de facto belonging to a territory and its associated community. *Jus domicile* does not deny the concept of citizenship but offers an alternative citizenship based on residency to return some rights and entitlements associated with the citizenship to migrants who are vulnerable to exclusion, exploitation, and inequalities produced by citizenship (merely based on soil and blood). This includes the right to freedom of movement.

One’s freedom of movement to visit other places and responsibly participate in the social space of others exemplifies ‘social rights’ and ‘mobility citizenship’ (Urry 2013), and non-participation means relative deprivation or social exclusion (Baum & Hai, 2020; Bianchi et al. 2020; Bianchi & Stephenson 2024; McCabe & Diekmann 2015; Richards 1999). In other words, participating in cosmopolitan-based tourism activities, which are common within ‘valued communities,’ is strongly associated with the concept of global citizenship, where individuals have rights and responsibilities beyond their national borders (Johnson 2014). Moreover, restricting or hindering the ability of legitimate border-crossers to travel is seen as a denial of individuals’ social and multicultural citizenship rights (Bianchi et al. 2020; Bianchi & Stephenson 2024; McCabe & Diekmann 2015). Structural denial of such entitlements has rarely been the case for the inhabitants of advanced capitalist societies, leading them to perceive tourism activities, particularly international tourism, as among their rights (Baum & Hai, 2020;

McCabe & Diekmann 2015). Complaints over disruption caused by recent events, such as Brexit or Covid-19, illustrated how tourism is considered as ‘a quintessential postmodern pursuit’ (Bianchi & Stephenson 2014:2) and travel as a ‘primary activity of existence’ (Urry 2013 p. 61) in the eyes of privileged citizens of the world. These citizens may even support strict enforcement and security of their borders, while at the same time desire a minimum of hindrances to their own freedom of movement (Anderson 2013; Rojek 1998). In stark contrast, migrants grapple with the daily challenges of mobility and the exercise of freedom of movement. However, for reasons this study intends to explore, their accounts of struggles are rarely theorised and addressed in practice.

2.2 *(In)hospitable Borders and the Contested Notion of Home*

Transnational labour movements and skilled migration have become increasingly common in modern societies. The act of relocating and settling in countries outside one’s country of origin for work has given rise to a complex community of ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse individuals who possess a multitude of identities, pathways, and migration trajectories (Roberts 2019). Previous literature has illustrated various shifting patterns of how non-citizen residents navigate and negotiate their complex sense of home and belonging, given the constant arrive-settle-depart nature as people become more mobile and freer to choose their countries of abode (Yeoh & Huang 2011; Dawson & Rapport 2021). Home becomes a mobile and plurilocal notion that manifests in memories, nostalgia, routine practices, habitual interactions, and cultural rituals, far beyond the traditionally fixated geographical location (Dawson & Rapport 2021; Rouse 1991). Further, Boccagni (2022: 585) has reconceptualised the meaning of home/homing as an existential *becoming*, through the lens of mobility, and argued that home should be experienced as a ‘situated lifelong need’ of acceptance and an aspiration to enter and inhabit. Homemaking for migrants can be a prolonged or even lifelong effort that requires temporary residents to make themselves (feel) at home in foreign countries. For many, home has become plural, non-place-based and a promise of security and belonging for the future. This reconceptualization expands the geographic and temporal boundaries of the contemporary meanings of home, which sets a context to discuss the contradictory ‘coming back home’ experiences at the borders.

Home signifies the first point of hospitality we encounter and learn to be hospitable as an individual. The concept of hospitality involves the host cordially receiving, welcoming and entertaining guests or strangers of diverse backgrounds into the host’s own spaces temporarily (Lynch, Morrison & Lashley 2007). Governed by principles of welcome, reciprocity, gifts, generosity and unconditional kindness, hospitality is considered a threshold concept. It depicts the “interplay between inclusion and exclusion, welcome and estrangement, and hospitality and hostility” when one crosses the threshold from one space to another (Derrida 2000; Molz & McIntosh 2013; Cockburn-Wooten et al. 2014: 112). Thresholds manifest in tangible and intangible forms, situated at the edges and within, at home (door) or nation (borders). On a national level, Derrida’s (2000) notion of conditional hospitality differentiates between the reception of a guest and that of a parasite, reflecting the current global migration realities in

which unconditional immigration / hospitality remains unattainable. Transnational migration has fostered new social identities, professional networks, cultural bonds, and everyday routines among non-citizen migrants, subsequently developing roots in the new (home) country. However, perceptions of how societies host strangers can often be subject to geo-political and media narratives. Hospitality can also be conceptualised as a means of social control that determines who is welcome (and not welcome) on the state level, by producing and legitimising certain social categories and identities (Alderman & Modlin 2013). Migrants often face xenophobia and become scapegoats for perceived threats in countries, due to oversimplified portrayals of societal issues and their vulnerable positions. This can potentially exclude migrants from full participation in social and political life. To navigate this complex 'home yet hostile' dissonance, migrants often selectively acquire, appropriate, and mobilise certain social sophistications and cultural traits to gain cultural capital and avoid social exclusion (Ho, 2011). The realities of migrants' lives reflect bordering, essentially practices of othering, where some people assimilate and are included, whilst others become alienated or marginalised (van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002). Barriers and mis/under-representations are omnipresent for migrants both in their communities, neighbourhoods and societies, and upon entry/exit of the country, fuelled by persistent stigma and media exploitations towards the migrant populations. Such issues of othering call for further scrutiny of hospitality and its affinity to hostility, especially expressed on societal and state levels.

The critical hospitality lens is a meaningful conceptual frame to unpack the paradox of hospitality through the metaphor of threshold, iterated by Lynch et al., (2021: 294) as "...both a point of entry as well as a point of exclusion". The critical conceptualisation of hospitality has been examined in multiple disciplines and contexts to surface the power asymmetry and showcase how identities are performed in the hope of combating injustice for marginalised communities. When crossing a threshold, such as a national border, individuals are often exposed to uncertainty and potential hostility, whilst navigating the incongruence of belonging, identity, and the status of their residency (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2014; Friese, 2009). Experiences at national borders are examples of this paradox in the politics of hospitality. Borders simultaneously welcome and control, enabling outsiders to pass through, while normalising separation and hostility between the insiders and the outsiders (Boudou, 2015). The liminal nature of the airport borders suspends social orders and produces power imbalances through bureaucratic processes, which reflects how hospitality can be overshadowed by inadequate reciprocity or worse - hostility (Henry & Wood, 2022; Zare & Ye, 2023). Situating the airport border as the gateway to a nation, this study unravels the enigma of national hospitality and the disconnect between a country's professed openness to skilled migrants and the reality of their reception at the border.

2.3 Migrants and the Sense of Belonging at the Border

Individuals' identities may evolve through living in locations other than their birthplace and travelling extensively around the world. Migrants and diaspora communities simultaneously navigate questions of identity and belonging in a new homeland while maintaining ties to their

places of origin. For migrants, belonging develops over years and stages of life (Antonsich, 2010). The notion of belonging has been applied in numerous disciplines, including migrant studies, as a crucial source of identity, wellbeing, safety and emotional attachment (Ignatieff 2000; May 2013; Yuval-Davis 2006). Belonging can be deeply personal through self-identification or collectively identified by others, and can be stable, contested, or transient (Yuval-Davis 2006). In groundbreaking work, Yuval-Davis (2006) theorises the relationship between belonging and the feeling of home, involving emotional investments and the desire for attachments, a process driven by yearning. Yuval-Davis (2006) has also discussed how belonging can be politicised and mediated by hegemonies of power to maintain and reproduce community boundaries through political citizenship, status, and entitlements. Evolving global mobility patterns and superdiverse modern societies have created hierarchies of belonging between citizens and non-citizens, fuelled by the politically driven ‘deservingness’ discourses (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. 2021; Back & Sinha, 2012). The political discourse of citizenship in relation to migration creates hierarchies between citizens (by birth or blood), deserving migrants (legal, young, able-bodied, and hard-working) and undeserving citizens or migrants (failed citizens, threats, benefit claimants), bestowing them varying degrees of freedom of movement.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that a sense of belonging is a constructed experience that can be performed in various contexts (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. 2021). Belonging can occur on a spectrum of different levels, from home, community, nation/country to transnational domains (Westwood & Phizacklea 2000). The process of how non-citizen residents forge and negotiate their sense of belonging is highly situational, uneven, and mediated by differential forms of inclusions and exclusions, as well as the conditions of their entry to the residing country (Basok & George 2020). Particularly, the feeling of (un)belonging can be expressed in transient and mundane moments, in situations such as crossing the border to return home.

The post-World Wars era, characterised by the redefinition of global border regimes and the emergence of new geopolitical realities, has posed significant challenges to individuals' psychological and political identities in relation to cross-border movements (Nasser 2019). There has been scant research specifically addressing how border crossing experiences shape non-citizens' sense of belonging to and perception of hospitableness upon the point of entry to the host country. The intensified border scrutiny driven by political xenophobic narratives establishes a collective sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, underpinned by ‘views on who has a right to share the[ir] home and who does not belong here’ (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019, p.7). Overall, in today’s world, capital, ideas, and information flow across borders more freely than ever. This raises the question: do human border crossings still need to be as highly selective, hierarchical, and discriminatory?

3. Methodology

Following a shift in international migration and border studies from macro-level analysis towards micro-level embodied experiences of border-crossing (Sheller 2018), this study adopted a qualitative, semi-structured interview approach, informed by an interpretivist paradigm. This approach allows a co-constructive, shared and emotional evaluation of the social phenomenon, making it suitable for micro-level analysis of experiences (Manfreda, Ye & Nelson 2023). The questions were designed to bring to light the experiences of non-citizen migrants at airport borders. The rationale behind this approach is that to understand a social process or encounter, the views of different participants affected by it need to be taken into consideration (Hill-Collins 1990). In fact, such an empirical approach distinguishes this study from most of the studies reviewed in the literature section, which are conceptual. The study also responds to the call by Stoffelen (2022) to place the voices of the border-crossers at the heart of border discussions.

A purposive sampling was adopted to recruit ten non-citizen residents of the UK from the professional network of the researchers. The participants were between 26 and 37 years old, highly educated, with eight holding PhD degrees and two working towards a doctorate. The participants recounted their experiences during the time they held either UK student visas (a standard long-term but temporary visa for those who study) or UK skilled worker visas (allowing them to stay in the UK to do an eligible job with an approved employer). A diverse range of nationalities was represented among the participants, including individuals of Iranian (3), Jordanian (2), Vietnamese (2), Sri Lankan (1), Ghanaian (1), and Nigerian (1) citizenship. On average, they had been residing in the UK for five years. Table 1 provides further details regarding the background of the sample. Most participants reported travelling alone (8) and two travelled with their partners and children. Eight respondents provided insights about their entry to the UK, while two respondents shared their border accounts of when they were exiting the UK to the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. The interview length varied between 30 to 40 minutes, producing extensive, rich, and detailed data for analysis (Creswell & Poth 2016).

Respondent's ID	Gender	Passport at the time of border-crossing	Age	Duration of residency in the UK	Traveling with	Education	Occupation
R1	Female	Sri-Lankan	25-34	< 2 years	Alone	PhD	Lecturer
R2	Male	Jordanian	25-34	< 2 years	Alone	PhD Candidate	Lecturer
R3	Female	Nigerian	35-44	2-5 years	Alone	PhD	Lecturer
R4	Male	Ghanian	35-44	2-5 years	Alone	PhD Candidate	Associate lecturer
R5	Female	Vietnamese	35-44	5-10 years	Alone	PhD	Lecturer
R6	Female	Iranian	35-44	5-10 years	With family (including children)	PhD	Lecturer

R7	Female	Jordanian	25-34	5-10 years	Alone	PhD	Associate lecturer
R8	Female	Iranian	25-34	5-10 years	With family	PhD	Associate lecturer
R9	Female	Iranian	25-34	2-5 years	Alone	PhD	Lecturer
R10	Female	Vietnamese	35-44	5-10 years	Alone	PhD	Lecturer

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Participants were asked to recall their typical experiences of returning to the UK from a holiday or visiting friends and family. The specific travel purpose was not central to the discussion. They were then asked to isolate an incident they considered their most intense border-crossing experience (critical incident). The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) spans multiple disciplines, including psychology, tourism, and marketing, and has been used to understand experience and service failure. It focuses on recalling and deciphering events that trigger intense emotional reactions or psychological distress in individuals (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954; Zare & Pearce, 2019). Informed consent was sought, and participants could withdraw from the interview at any point without explanation. We allowed participants to control the directions and depth of disclosure and provided options to pause if needed. In addition, our positionalities as researchers are integral to shaping this study, from its inception and research design to the interpretation of findings. Both authors are seasoned travellers, having lived, studied, and worked as migrants in countries outside their countries of birth. We both hold passports (Iranian and Chinese) that require extensive and onerous visa or pre-clearance processes when entering the West. Our experiences at the borders have enabled us to relate to participants and better appreciate the richness of their stories.

To further probe rich details about the aspects of participants' border-crossing journey, the interview was divided into three sections: the arrival to the UK airport, the immigration checkpoint encounter, and the period thereafter. When recounting their border-crossing experiences, participants were guided to describe their physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social states. Then, the respondents were asked questions about their perception of the treatment they received and how everyday experiences of border-crossing have evolved for them with life/career/citizenship status and how it has affected their sense of belonging and welcome to the UK as their country of residence. These semi-structured interviews provided ample opportunities for holding the direction of the study while probing further in-depth insights (Rubin & Rubin 2011). Thematic analysis was adopted to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights from the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke 2006). For example, the physical sensations and emotions described were coded separately from the thoughts, cognitive processes, and actions, into four categories of codes, to provide a clear picture of various aspects of the experience (Pearce & Zare 2017).

4. Findings

The study aimed to understand the border-crossing experiences of non-citizen residents, with an emphasis on their return to their country of residence, the UK. Findings are presented in chronological order of the lived experiences of participants arriving, queuing, interacting with border control staff and reflecting on how the experiences of border crossing impacted their sense of belonging and welcome to their countries of residence ('home').

4.1. Experiencing the arrival at the airport

Participants began their descriptions of their border-crossing incident by recounting their physical sensations upon arriving at the airport. These accounts highlighted embodied experiences and mental exhaustion, stress, uncertainty, agitation, and a sense of anticipation of what was to come. The array of negative and intense emotions experienced contrasts with what one might hope to experience upon arriving home, that is, a sense of safety, security, belonging, and welcome:

... I was in the middle seat, and I could not wait to get off the plane, obviously you have to wait for everyone before you to get out. Meanwhile there are babies crying and people are doing all sorts of activities in preparation to disembark. We are looking at more than 10 to 12 hours of journey time by this point. So, I was tired, frustrated, stressed and hungry. [R4]

I went back to my country for nine months due to the COVID-19 interrupting my studies. It was the first time coming back to the UK after such a long time. So, it was hard for me to leave my family and come back to my studies. I was sad, stressed and already homesick. I was also so tired physically because I'd spent all night just travelling. [R7]

The walk to the passport control felt particularly extended for all interviewees. Participants described the eventual appearance of lines segregating those arriving at the border. In this arrangement, citizens of the UK, US, Canada, Australia, European Union and selected Asian countries were directed to one side, and an 'all other passports' sign signalled passport holders from the rest of the world to go to the immigration checkpoints on another side:

It is frustrating, to say the least, that other nationalities have much swifter access at the border checkpoint, while we, as the residents of the UK, have to queue up with the first-time visitors. [R6]

This phase of the experience highlighted an evident disparity in processing times because of the disproportionate allocation of airport workforce between the two lines. 'They had allocated 3-4 people for the EU and British citizens whereas only one member of staff was there to check the All Other Passports line'. The minimum waiting time was reported to be 1.5 to 2 hours at the border checkpoint queues across UK airports, according to the accounts of our respondents:

Direct flight between Sri-Lanka and the UK is about 12 hours. With the transit it can go up to about 18 hours a day. Sometimes it can take you up to 2-3 hours just standing

in the line. It is inhumane. I once nearly fainted as I had no food with me standing in the queue. [R1]

Standing in long, slow, and segregated queues not only stretched the physical and emotional capacities of travellers but also commonly triggered at least three mental processes in their minds. The first process is the anxious experience of time as relates to how delays might affect pre-planned logistical arrangements made. Interviewees reportedly felt worried about missing their scheduled transportation:

I was worried I was going to miss my train, and I did at the end, so I had to wait from 1 AM to 5 AM at the train station all because of the slow queue at the Border. [R9]

The second process appears to be the attempt to stay highly alert and prepared for the immigration encounter:

Standing in the queue, I started rehearsing potential questions that I might be asked by the border officer, while I was checking my passport every five minutes to see if I still had it or dropped it somewhere without realising. [R2]

The third cognitive process involves mustering the energy to display a demeanour contradictory to one's true feelings:

My experiences told me that if I don't say hello and smile, they [the immigration officers] judge me for it. If you don't speak, they may think you have something to hide. [R1]

Experiences of arriving at UK airports can be summarised as exclusionary by design. The layout of the physical border, including the signs, symbols, and languages used, was not perceived as hospitable, inclusive, or inviting, from the non-citizen residents' point of view. The sense of arriving 'home,' which is usually instilled by welcome messages in other contexts of tourism and hospitality services, such as flight attendants' final announcements, officers' language, or welcome banners of destination management organisations, was not particularly sensed by the non-resident citizens upon arrival at the airport. Nor was there any mechanism to facilitate their border experiences and show them appreciation for their valuable contributions to their society of residence.

4.2. Experiencing the peak at the border control

The physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from flying, the transit time, and the passport control queue set the stage for a taxing arrival at the immigration counter. Indeed, respondents shared experiences of critical incidents during interactions with immigration officers. Incidents often involved extensive questioning and what was mostly perceived as subtly aggressive, discriminatory, unnecessary, unpleasant, and humiliating treatment:

Her expression [the immigration officer] was annoying me. Then I got angry and irritated as well. She asked: Why were you away? What reason did you have to travel? Why didn't you go through London? And I'm like, really? So, it got quite back and forth between us. She was really rude, which I thought was unnecessary and then asked questions I didn't think were relevant since I was on a student visa. [R3]

Then he [the immigration officer] started asking me questions. Where are you coming from? Uh, obviously my ticket shows everything. It was as if I was lying! He asked so many questions until I started to doubt myself! Am I telling the truth?! [R1]

In this interrogative process, what seemed to puzzle the residents the most was the extent and the type of questions they received, despite having been to the country before and the evidence of residency based on a legitimate visa:

I was surprised because he [the immigration officer] saw my BRP card [British Residence Permit]. The card says all about my identity, where I live, work etc. There must be a reason why it is called a biometric card. No? Because it holds all my biometric information?! Yet the questions came as if this is the first time I'm entering the country. [R2]

There were two respondents whose critical incidents were accounts of events at border control in the origin (the UK). One was a student in the UK but living in the Republic of Ireland with an Irish residence visa. Travelling between the UK and Ireland was a smooth and frequent journey until an instance in which the border officer treated her differently:

This [the flight between the UK and Dublin] was a frequent flight for me. I knew the whole process inside out. It was always smooth, and I never had any issues. But this time the officer started going through my passport page by page to find my visa and did not accept my residence card which is indeed equivalent to the visa in this case. He started accusing me of misusing the British-Irish visa agreement all the while he was the one who was not familiar with the law. I was confident about my right, but he did not want to hear me. It somehow looked personal to him as he was getting increasingly agitated and did not want to be wrong. I was "lucky" my White husband was with me. He came forward and talked to the officer until he calmed down and let us pass. [R8]

In the second incident another PhD student resident of the UK was travelling from the UK to Belfast in Northern Ireland. Holding a valid UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Island) student visa, she was shocked, embarrassed and humiliated in front of her peers when she underwent extensive and overtly discriminatory interrogation upon boarding at the airport. In this case too, the white middle-aged male university professor accompanying the student came forward to enquire about the reason behind the treatment and 'vouched' for her to be let onboard. The intensive negative feelings that these individuals experienced are evident in the below reflections:

I was like what on earth is happening. Do they suspect me as a criminal? I was so embarrassed in front of everyone, particularly my professors and peers travelling

with us. When we landed in Belfast, all I wanted was to quickly disappear from there and not see those people again! [R6]

It felt horrible and unfair as I was not doing anything wrong. I was being treated that way probably because of my passport or maybe this guy didn't like how I looked or whatever. It was really annoying and upsetting. [R8]

In both cases above, profiling and scrutinising individuals based on their passports created a discriminatory treatment. The intervention of white, middle-aged men to facilitate the border crossing in these cases highlights the non-uniform nature of border experiences, as well as the socio-racial hierarchy, gender and power dynamics at play in these spaces.

After describing the critical incidents, the respondents were asked what they thought were the reason(s) for their treatment at the border. The passport showing the country of origin was commonly named as the key underlying factor.

'It is less about who you are, and more about where you are from'. [R10]

The diplomatic relationship between the states was also highlighted to have been a cause for differential treatments at the border. These differential treatments signal how state-level organisation of (un)welcome continues to perpetuate xenophobia that emphasises difference based on politics and deep-seated prejudice.

It is pure politics. For example, if my country requires a visa for another nation and treats them differently, that country will begin requiring a visa for people with my nationality and treat us differently. The ordinary citizens are held hostage to these kinds of politics. [R10]

The findings suggest that the negative emotions experienced by border-crossers reached their peak at the immigration checkpoint due to the systematic Othering processes carried out by border officers as representatives of the state. These processes were evident through officers' expressions, double-checking procedures, fingerprinting, questioning, and interrogations. It appears that the design of this process intentionally keeps individuals in a state of confusion, doubt, and uncertainty. Non-citizen residents found themselves on trial, needing to prove their rights to enter. They presented not only documents but also adopted soft tones, smiles, and submissive gestures in hopes of facilitating a smoother passage. Meanwhile, they questioned the necessity and morality of the border policing processes. From the participants' perceptions, residency cards and travel histories did not make a great difference in reassuring the officers that these individuals were in fact entering their 'home'. On the contrary, all other legitimate evidence was overshadowed by their passports, tying them to their birth country and determining their deservedness to enter.

4.3 Experiencing the after – returning home.

Through reflecting on their experiences of returning 'home', participants revealed a complex relationship with their country of residence where they legally and socially belong, but do not

feel welcome at its borders. The differential scrutiny at the airport border brought self-doubt and insecurity for non-citizen residents, and a feeling of remaining a ‘forever outsider’. Some believed that their status had changed while living in the UK, with improvements in attitudes towards them throughout their life and career. However, others remained sceptical, feeling that they were still treated as outsiders. Reflecting this, one participant described how she perceived her nationality as continuously affecting her sense of belonging to the host country:

That experience kind of made me internalise that no matter the position or the visa I may have, I am still kind of an outsider with a different nationality. [R1]

Experiences of hostility and unwelcome at border control led some participants to mentally separate their subjective meanings of home from their physical residence in the host country. They no longer felt like a person, but rather a flattened collection of information on the passport they held. In the excerpt below, one participant labels the act of coming back to the UK as “arriving at my workplace”. By using such metaphor, non-citizen residents created a psychological distance to the host country as a coping mechanism to protect their feelings:

I am kind of reduced to my passport at the border control, and the way they ask me questions makes me feel like this is not my home. I’m not returning home; I’m just arriving at my workplace. [R10]

The increasingly commercialised meaning of hospitality as transactional and conditional added intricacy to the nuanced sense of belonging among participants. Two participants, interestingly both citizens of a former UK colony, considered themselves as uninvited guests, thus not deserving of welcome. The colonial past and the self-imposed beliefs about their rights to hospitality shaped participants’ expectations of welcome. Despite their active decision of migrating ‘I chose to come here’, participants’ adaptation strategies factored in potential unwelcome and facilitated the rationalising of indifferent and hostile reactions from hosts, which helped with navigating the complex borderscape:

I don’t have the notion that the host always has to welcome the guests. I don’t feel that way because they didn’t invite me to come. I chose to come here. So, I don’t expect them to have the responsibility to welcome me. [R10]

Finally, a key aim of this study was to explore how non-citizen residents perceive and experience border crossing and how they deal with the affective aspects of it. Our findings revealed that some internalised or suppressed their fear and anger, accepting these as an inherent part of border-crossing experiences as a non-citizen who is perpetually an outsider, with little possibility for change. These internalisation, avoidance, dissociation, and eventual acceptance, were key features in how non-citizen migrants negotiated their membership and belonging to the host countries:

In the whole cab ride home, I was just thinking to myself, is it so necessary that we have to feel like criminals every time we pass by immigration? Does everyone go through this,

or is it just a select few of us? Luckily, I had years of experience living and travelling abroad, and I could brush those negative feelings aside. [R1]

It takes forever to forget. Just now, I told you about my experience that happened a few years ago. So, you can see that the effect stays with you. [R4]

There are some elements that you kind of get used to, you know. That you have to join the visitors' line, you have to queue, and you have to expect to stay longer in that queue to be checked etc. It becomes a norm after a while and you kind of don't notice that it is unfair because it perhaps becomes more subtle [R6].

5. Discussion

The contributions of this study are four-fold. First, the study highlights how tourism and hospitality research has been shaped by privileged perspectives, often overlooking issues faced by those with less powerful passports, particularly from the Global South. Therefore, it attends to the decolonisation of tourism and hospitality scholarship through more research on the less privileged travellers. Second, applying a critical hospitality lens, it reveals how border practices frequently exclude and conditionally treat non-citizen residents, challenging their sense of belonging and exposing contradictions in national hospitality. Third, the narratives in this study demonstrate how passport origin could affect border experiences, with those from less developed countries facing greater discrimination and profiling. This study also emphasises the clash between migrants' integration desires and systemic border restrictions, calling for the reassessment of citizenship rights and border policies to combat social exclusion. Fourth, border crossers often remain silent about negative experiences due to internalised self-regulation and surveillance, compounded by a lack of transparent grievance mechanisms and normalised border procedures. While citizenship can ease travel, it does not eliminate all forms of discrimination, such as those based on race. Future research could investigate how personal characteristics like race, age, gender, religion, and appearance intersect with border-crossing experiences.

The state border regime exists to regulate the flows and movements of people and protect national identity and security (Khosravi 2007). However, the procedures exercised at airports are often considerably onerous, differential, and hostile, all justified in the name of security and the common good. Previous studies have noted the inequality in mobility rights and the normative profiling practices among travellers with different backgrounds at airport border control, shaped by an amalgam of historical colonial orders, capitalist-oriented ways of thinking and asymmetrical power (Torabian & Mair 2022; Bianchi, Stephenson & Hannam 2019). This paper has drawn attention to the lived experiences of a specific, numerically significant, and often overlooked group: long-term residents of a host country, 'home', who lack formal citizenship and still use the passport of their country of origin when travelling. Tourism and hospitality as a discipline has been founded by scholars from advanced neoliberal societies and continues to be mostly dominated by their ideologies and perspectives (Chambers & Buzinde 2015; Wijesinghe, Mura, and Culala 2019). It is, therefore, not surprising that tourism and hospitality as a discipline have primarily focused on the issues faced by those who hold 'whiter passports' (Salter 2004: 16), who are granted smooth entry and exit to most places

around the globe and are referred to by Anderson as ‘good citizens’ (2013: 6). In contrast, we draw attention to the mobility challenges faced by migrants, who hold passports from their original countries and are considered ‘tolerated citizens’ in the West (Anderson 2013: 7). By placing non-citizen residents at the centre of this study, we contribute to a more holistic understanding of border experiences in migrant studies and tourism scholarship, challenging dominant narratives of universal rights to movement.

The critical hospitality lens applied to this study helps make visible the normative border practices and problematise otherwise neglected aspects of exclusions. Specific to this study, we explored the dialectic nuances of border experiences between inclusion and exclusion, unveiling the persistent power hegemony in cross-border mobility. Our findings reflect the way social constructions of hospitality/hostility shape institutional or state-level organisation of (un)welcoming others, influencing the home-returning experiences of non-citizen residents and their sense of belonging. Reflecting Derrida’s (2000) concept of conditional hospitality, the participants’ narratives reveal that non-citizen residents face hostile encounters when returning home, while enduring physically, emotionally, and cognitively draining border experiences. Applying this threshold metaphor to the borders, the findings show that despite the layers of security scrutiny, national hospitality at the border remains conditional. The portrayal of diaspora and migrants as outsiders, continues to emphasise differences, rather than commonalities. Such asymmetrical emphasis on the differences in many countries extends national hospitality on its own terms, reflecting each country’s self-interests, rather than the shared humanity. Negative border encounters clash with the state-promoted welcome and hospitableness in marketing campaigns by organisations such as destination management bodies, which subsequently creates confusion, reinforces inequality, and exclusion (Alkan 2021). For non-citizen residents, despite their established attachment and network with(in) the UK, such coming home experiences taint their affinity with the host country and again, highlight the duality of hospitality and hostility as “embeddedness of risk, violence and harm in any act of reception” (Lynch et al. 202: 305).

In line with previous mobility studies (Butcher 2017; Bauder 2008; Cresswell 2013; Sheller 2018), holding a passport from less developed countries was found as the key factor in creating differential experiences at the border. This study empirically demonstrates how the internal desire to belong, assimilate, and fully exercise social citizenship—including travelling as a marker of cosmopolitan citizenship—clashes with the external, structural, and arguably intentional design of these rights being restricted by Othering processes at airports. This clash causes intense emotional and existential reflections among non-citizen residents and raises questions, doubts, and frustration about whether their situation will ever improve or if their ‘diasporic existence’ will always be reminded to them by the neoliberal capitalist systems (Stephenson 2006: 294). The mobility challenges faced by non-citizen residents, due to their lack of formal citizenship in the host country, contribute to the ongoing debate about extending citizens’ mobility rights to non-citizen members of society. This issue highlights the need to reevaluate the current political structure of borders and their associated mechanisms of social exclusion (Breakey and Breakey 2013; Gascon 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles 2006; McCabe & Diekmann 2015).

These findings also contribute to our understanding of why border-crossers typically remain silent about their experiences of criminalisation, intimidation, and humiliation. Through recounting their experiences, we observed that participants did not engage in overt acts of resistance, seek justice or resolution, or file official complaints about their treatment at the border. Under the current global border regime, self-regulation seems to have been internalised within mobile subjects and individuals increasingly participate in their own surveillance, particularly through advanced new technologies, such as the use of biometrics, facial recognition, and AI-powered systems (Bianchi & Stephenson 2014; Stoffelen 2022; Su 2024). The hyper-normalisation of borders as places without transparent grievance and resolution mechanisms for border-crossers to raise their concerns, partly contributes to the internalisation of the intense emotions and moral concerns these individuals feel but do not have a safe channel to voice. Advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, coupled with the global drive towards de-globalisation and a return to nationalism could further tighten the borders and build more walls rather than making these spaces more responsible and ethical (Stoffelen 2022). Therefore, critical reflections on the moral and ethical justification of everyday interactions between border officers, border technologies and border crossers are timely and of utmost importance.

Travel and freedom of movement may become easier after acquiring citizenship from the country of residence, although it does not necessarily eliminate all other types of discrimination, such as those based on race, religion, gender, age, and appearance. Stephenson's (2006) study on the movement of European citizens of ethnic minority backgrounds within Europe confirms that these groups continue to be the main targets of random checks and border policing. Torabian and Mair (2022) also emphasise that dual citizenship facilitates international travel, but as long as citizenship remains hierarchical, those at the top of the passport hierarchy will always enjoy greater mobility than those at the bottom. Even if one acquires a strong passport later in life, being born in certain countries may always be a cause for exclusion and differential treatment at the borders of other countries. Therefore, it is critical to explore the intersection between the passport and other characteristics of individuals in future studies. Such investigation falls under the 'bodily scale' of Sheller's (2018) mobility injustice scale categories, where individuals' bodily movements should be legally protected and not constrained by individuals' characteristics such as gender, race, or ethnicity through threats of violence, including segregated means of movement and applying spatial limits. Further application of such scales could be a valuable topic for future investigations.

6. Conclusion

Overall, we hope that this study provides a foundation for the necessity and urgency of moving beyond a purely academic enquiry and influencing policy, design and social movements. A reform is required in the current regime and policing practices of border control. For example, airport designs could better recognise the embodied experiences of all travellers by allocating proportionate resources, using inclusive signs and language, providing regular training for border-control officers, and establishing a clear mechanism for reporting discrimination to cultivate inclusivity and challenge conditional hospitality.

With regards to the limitations of this study, we acknowledge that the intersection of passports with other individual characteristics and circumstances, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and appearance, which could shape border-crossing experiences, requires further in-depth exploration. We were unable to address these factors in this paper and focused primarily on the passport as the key factor determining airport border experiences. Second, although the depth of the data and analysis in this study is arguably comparable to that of the few existing studies which also relied on the views of informants (see Stephenson, 2006, for example), the sample size and the fact that the participants were highly educated and held academic occupations are limitations that could be further addressed in future studies. Finally, the nuances in the political, cultural, and linguistic framing of migration and borders of each country can directly influence the borderscape, including the design of signs, symbols, and procedures at immigration checkpoints. Understanding such nuances requires comparative study and a deeper dive into specific country contexts in relation to culture and migration policy before findings are generalisable to the entirety of the Western world.

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