

**Home, Freedom, and European Identity:
Perspectives from European Graduate Students in the Age of Brexit**

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Part I: How It Started

When I moved from the United States to the United Kingdom in October of 2018 to begin a Master's of Philosophy in Sociology at the University of Cambridge, I had never traveled outside of North and South America before. I spent a few days in London for Marshall Scholar Orientation before traveling to Cambridge for the beginning of term. Early the next month, a friend invited me on a short trip to Scotland, and we booked train tickets to Edinburgh.

When I arrived in Edinburgh, I was in absolute awe. I loved the city from the moment that I exited the train station and was greeted by a beautiful combination of Gothic and Renaissance architecture, staircases that connected sections of the city that were on entirely different levels, and pockets of green space that seemed intentionally designed to create a sense of connection with nature in the midst of busy urban space. I asked my friend what it was that made Edinburgh so special, and her response surprised me: "Of course you love Edinburgh; it's your first European city."

I brushed the comment off at the time, but since then I have often returned to it and wondered what exactly she meant. What was it about Edinburgh that made it more "European," in her estimation, than London? Does it have to do with the proportion of European residents (bolstered in part by the promise of free tuition at Scottish universities), or is it a more amorphous sense of cultural consistency with the "vibe" that is felt in large cities in continental Europe? What does it mean for a place to be European?

I continued to contemplate this question as I traveled elsewhere in Europe, and over time it grew into a broad curiosity about perceptions of home, freedom, and European identity.

During my second year in the UK I moved to the University of Oxford to complete a Master's of Science in Comparative Social Policy. As a member of St Antony's College, I found myself regularly immersed in conversations with fellow international students from all over the world. When the opportunity to apply for a Dahrendorf Scholarship arose, it seemed like an ideal way to learn more about my fellow graduate students while contributing to the important work of the European Studies Centre.

Part II: My Time as a Dahrendorf Scholar

When I found out that I had been selected as a 2020 Dahrendorf Scholar, I was of course excited about being able to engage in my individual research project, but I was also excited about the sense of community that came with supporting the work of the Dahrendorf Programme for the Study of Freedom more broadly. Over the course of the 2019-2020 academic year, I was happy to assist with the Europe's Stories project and with logistic support during the 2020 Dahrendorf Colloquium. I felt welcomed and valued for my contributions, despite my status as an American visiting Europe for only a few years. For that, I owe particular gratitude to Professor Timothy Garton Ash, Selma Kropp, and my fellow Dahrendorf Scholars—Ellen Leafstedt and Reja Wyss.

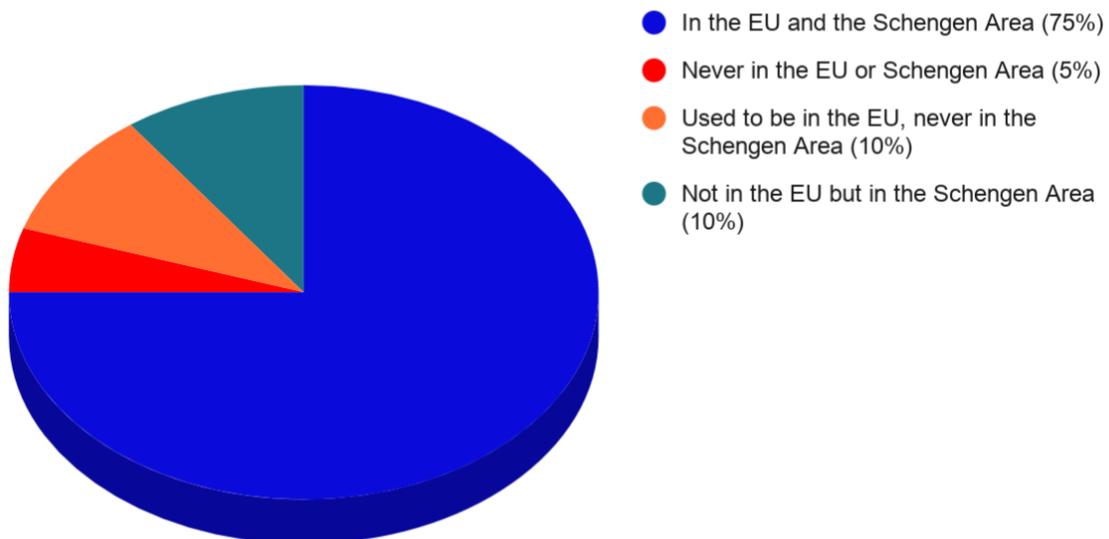
For my individual research project, I decided to conduct a series of 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews with European graduate students in St Antony's College at the University of Oxford. I considered interviewing students outside of St Antony's, interviewing students at St Antony's who are not European, and interviewing more than 20 students, but I ultimately decided against these ideas because of the project's relatively tight timeline.

I knew that I was interested in interviewees' perceptions of home, freedom, and European identity, so I developed an interview guide focusing on these topics. Because the interviews were semi-structured, I used this guide as a starting point for each interview and then asked follow-up questions. The interviews were each around 30 minutes, although a few were significantly longer. In an attempt to diversify the perspectives represented, no more than two interviewees were from any one European country. The following figures show a few additional details about the interviewees.

1 person interviewed	2 people interviewed
Belgium	France
Czech Republic	Germany
Denmark	Italy
Estonia	Switzerland*
Finland	United Kingdom (1 person from England and 1 person from Scotland)*
Greece	
Netherlands	
Poland	
Portugal	
Ukraine*	

*Not in the European Union, although the United Kingdom used to be and Switzerland is in the Schengen Area.

European Union Membership of Interviewees' Home Countries



The interviews were all conducted during February and March of 2020, and each one was audio recorded with the consent of the interviewee. Almost all of the interviews were conducted in person, although the last interview was conducted remotely as the COVID-19 case count in the UK rose.

Once I finished conducting the interviews, I went through the audio recordings and selectively transcribed key quotes. I had originally planned that these quotes would be on display in St Antony's alongside photographs taken by the interviewees of their hometowns, but an in-person art exhibit did not seem practical as the UK entered its first COVID-19 lockdown. Instead, I decided to arrange the transcribed excerpts from the interviews into an imagined conversation.

In the imagined conversation, which appears in the following section, the 20 interviewees are seated at a table together for dinner and speaking to each other. All of the regular text is directly quoted from an interview I conducted as part of this project. All of the text in italics is added by me and meant to provide context and transitions. Readers should keep in mind that the quoted material was all in response to questions that I asked during the individual interviews; none of the interviews were group interviews, and none of the interviewees heard or were responding to what any other interviewees said.

For the countries from which I interviewed two people, I refer to them in the imagined conversation as "Dinner guest #1 from [name of country]" and "Dinner guest #2 from [name of country]." For example, everything from "Dinner guest #1 from Italy" was said by one interviewee and is distinct from what was said by the other interviewee from Italy. For the countries from which I interviewed only one person, I refer to them as "The dinner guest from [name of country]." For example, excerpts from the interview with the person from Estonia would be said by "The dinner guest from Estonia." The character referred to as "The host of the dinner" is an imagined version of me, and the non-italicized dialogue from that character is directly quoted from the questions that I asked to the interviewees.

I am conscious of the fact that this identification method does not indicate the gender identity of the speaker. When it was necessary to use a pronoun to refer to a particular speaker, I opted for a singular they. While information about the speaker's gender identity might provide additional context to the statements that the interviewees made, gender was not a focus of the questions that I asked during the interviews.

In the interest of approximately equal representation, the imagined conversation features two quotes from each interviewee. I say approximately equal instead of equal because not all of the quotes are the same length, which is largely a function of how different interviewees expressed their thoughts.

In choosing where to set the imagined conversation, I reflected on my own experience at the Dahrendorf Colloquium in March of 2020. Meals were the backdrop of casual yet intellectually

engaging conversations, and I hoped that setting the imagined conversation during a dinner would make it easier to replicate this same atmosphere.

Fourteen of the interviewees agreed to be identified by their hometown, and six of the interviewees preferred to be identified by only their home country. The chart below shows the hometowns of the interviewees that agreed to disclose this information.

Pseudonym of interviewee	Name of hometown
The dinner guest from Belgium	Genval, Belgium
The dinner guest from the Czech Republic	Brno, the Czech Republic
The dinner guest from Denmark	Copenhagen, Denmark
The dinner guest from Estonia	Saku, Estonia
The dinner guest from Finland	Espoo, Finland
Dinner guest #1 from France	Paris, France
Dinner guest #2 from France	[interviewee prefers to be identified by home country only]
Dinner guest #1 from Germany	[interviewee prefers to be identified by home country only]
Dinner guest #2 from Germany	Neuhausen, Germany
The dinner guest from Greece	[interviewee prefers to be identified by home country only]
Dinner guest #1 from Italy	Trento, Italy
Dinner guest #2 from Italy	Verona, Italy
The dinner guest from the Netherlands	The Hague, the Netherlands
The dinner guest from Poland	[interviewee prefers to be identified by home country only]
The dinner guest from Portugal	[interviewee prefers to be identified by home country only]
Dinner guest #1 from Switzerland	Basel, Switzerland
Dinner guest #2 from Switzerland	Widen, Switzerland
The dinner guest from Ukraine	Ternopil, Ukraine
Dinner guest #1 from the United Kingdom (Scotland)	[interviewee prefers to be identified by home country only]
Dinner guest #2 from the United Kingdom (England)	Chatham, United Kingdom

Part III: An Imagined Conversation

As a reminder, all of the regular text is directly quoted from an interview I conducted as part of this project. All of the text in italics is added by me and meant to provide context and transitions.

Home, Freedom, and European Identity: A Dinner Conversation

Act I: Home

Oxford, United Kingdom. The scene opens on a dinner host tapping a knife against a glass to capture the attention of 20 dinner guests. Everyone is seated around a single rectangular table and talking among themselves. The room is dimly lit with candles situated at regular intervals along the table, but everyone's faces can be seen.

The host of the dinner: *Thank you for joining me for dinner tonight. I am grateful for your time and company. It is a pleasure to have all 20 of you here, representing 15 different European countries. As you read on your invitations, tonight's meal comes to you in three courses of food and three courses of conversation. To begin, let's talk about home. Would anyone be willing to tell [us] about the place that you consider to be your hometown?*

Dinner guest #1 from Italy: My hometown, Trento, is a beautiful town. It's in the mountains. The whole region is in the mountains. When we speak of home and homeplace, I feel that it's the Alps rather than a particular town... Trento itself has a long history. It was a Roman town. It has many Italian influences, but the architecture is quite Austrian as well. People are very, well, we call ourselves bears because we like to mind our own business most of the time. It's a very chill town, not much happening, but very beautiful... It's childhood memories that make it feel like home to me. If I walk around town, I see the places I went to with my grandma, I see my school, and the space itself is easy to navigate through without having to think about it. I don't consider it home though, because home is the mountain region more generally. What makes that home is that I feel happy in the mountains. I feel free. It's difficult to explain. It's like a dimension of freedom and a dimension of feeling like I don't have to think about what I'm doing to fit in.

The dinner guest from Finland: *I agree with Dinner guest #1 from Italy that home isn't necessarily a specific town, but for me it's also not necessarily a particular region. The way I create home is by making connections to the people around me. I will go to every shop in the area, go to the local yoga classes, and talk to people on the street. Over time those patterns turn that place into home, because it becomes a refuge and a safe place. Beyond that, I think it also really depends where your social circles are. For me, when I was in London, because so many of my other friends lived in London, and we would have routines together that we would do, places that we would go to eat and places that we would go for picnics and doing things in the city, that makes it quite easy for me to believe that I belong there, because I function well and I'm happy there. In that sense, the concept of home is quite transient for me. It can either sort of come to me, or I can make it. Of course you can't make the place where you were born*

somewhere else, because you were only born in one place. But for me home has been a different kind of concept where I'm at peace with my surroundings—that's the best thing I can describe it as.

The dinner guest from Denmark: *It's interesting that you say that, about your sense of home being connected to where you function well and where you are at peace.* I actually didn't have a big feeling of where my hometown was until I came here [to Oxford]... The fact is that until I was around 25, I always had a feeling of homesickness to other countries. I wanted to travel abroad all the time. It didn't feel like Denmark was my home, I felt like I just needed to see as many places as possible and didn't feel that I was connected to one place in particular. [After traveling abroad for an exchange program], I got to spend two years in Denmark and really connect with my family and friends again... going here to Oxford [has emphasized to me that Denmark is my home].

Dinner guest #1 from the United Kingdom (Scotland): *I can see what you mean about living elsewhere giving clarity to your understanding of where home is. That's also something I experienced.* For me, home is Scotland, and I feel an affinity to [my hometown] *in particular.* I didn't go to university there, so in a way I haven't really lived there as an adult, but I left living there full time when I was 17 and going back for holidays isn't quite the same. My grandparents are from there, my parents are from there, all of my extended family, everyone is really rooted there. I still pass by the street that my Gran grew up on. It feels like I have an ancestral tie to it and for more generations back than that, they were Scottish, so I feel a real connection with Scotland. I also feel like the place I went to college, *which is also in Scotland,* feels like a hometown to me. I know it so well, it's small, it really felt like a place that I lived independently as an adult.

The host of the dinner: *I can see that the concepts of home and hometown are linked but not entirely overlapping. I would love to hear from a few people about how you would describe your hometown to someone who has never been there.*

Dinner guest #1 from Germany: [My hometown is] a small town, but it's very big at the same time... part of the city feels a bit industrial, but it's not really an industrial town. It's very diverse for a German city of that size. [Because of some companies that have buildings in the town], there are a lot of people coming for a year or two from India or China, but we also have a lot of people who have been there for ages, and by that I mean generations... it's a bit of a hodgepodge, but it's very cute. Our old town is super old. It predates World War I. Some parts of it are from the 1600s... it's one of those cities that's so unique because it has this combination of big companies and other things. I've been to other places in Germany, and none have felt like [my hometown]... The best thing about my hometown is the fact that my family is there... One thing I wish I could change is to make it a bit more friendly to people who are not there with families. [The city] has nothing for people above the age of 16 and below the age of 30.

The dinner guest from the Netherlands: *I also have experience feeling like my hometown is boring, but now my hometown, The Hague, is changing a bit. It used to be quite a boring city, and now it's a city of politics... there are also a lot of businesspeople and people walking around in suits. In recent years more and more students have started coming there. It's started to become more dynamic, a lot younger, there are cooler initiatives in place than there were before when it was just government people living there. It's a little bit more energetic and exciting now.*

The dinner guest from Belgium: *My hometown has also been changing a lot recently. My hometown, Genval, has a lot of shops that weren't there when I was a child growing up there, but you have everything you need. You have bakeries, primary school, middle school, high school, which is quite rare for this size of town. There are lots of different shops and boutiques, but at least when I grew up there, there was nothing commercial, no high street brands. It was only local shops. It also has very nice greenery and a very nice lake, which is probably what it's most known for. You can walk around and see nice little houses and pastures, and you also have a little center with cute shops. The quality of the food is great. Bakeries are amazing... the quality of life is good [there]... *at the same time*, when you are in a small town, the people talk and know everything. It sounds very cliché, but it's true. You go everywhere and you feel like you're watched, because everyone knows everyone, so you're never really anonymous. If I could change something, I would like the ability to be anonymous, which is something I really love about a big city and can't have in my hometown.*

The host of the dinner: *Thank you for sharing that with us. Dinner guest #1 from Germany spoke about their opinion of the best thing about their hometown and one thing they wish they could change about their hometown. Would anyone else like to comment on that in regards to their own hometown?*

Dinner guest #2 from Switzerland: *I would be happy to. The best thing about my hometown, Widen, is that it's absolutely beautiful. It's really quiet, that's actually something I really appreciate, and it's close to nature, and I can be myself. I don't think there's anything that I would change.*

Dinner guest #1 from France: *In my hometown, Paris, there are all of these little luxuries that you grow up having and get to have when you go back that you might not have in other places. For example, the food is amazing. With that said, unlike Dinner guest #2 from Switzerland, I do think that there are things that I would like to change about my hometown. It's quite a large city, so sometimes my hometown is a bit smelly and dirty. It would be nice to keep that in consideration. Also, people from Paris sometimes have a bit of a snarky and snobby attitude, but I think that's more applied to all of France, and it's something that needs to evolve and change.*

Dinner guest #2 from France: *I agree with Dinner guest #1 from France on the pollution point. [One thing I wish I could change about my hometown is to have] no cars... you can cycle everywhere, and... the public transportation network is very good and you can just cycle or walk to places. It would be so much better without pollution.*

The dinner guest from Portugal: *For me, the best thing about my hometown is the weather. One thing that I wish I could change is that I wish it had a more international context, more international opportunities. Sometimes I feel it's very domestic.*

The dinner guest from the Czech Republic: *It's interesting that you say that, The dinner guest from Portugal, because it's pretty much the opposite of how I feel about my own hometown. The best thing about my hometown, Brno, is that it's a young, dynamic, student town... during term about a quarter or a fifth of the population is just students, and with it goes more varied food options when it comes to eating out... there are quite good vegetarian and vegan options, [which] I like to have available. Also because there are a lot of exchange students it internationalizes the place both in the general vibe but also when it comes to food options... One thing that I wish I could change about Czech society in general is this sort of close-mindedness of some segments of the population. This would also include my hometown, this distrust of foreigners. You see a bit of a paradox, because you have this huge student population which also includes a lot of international students, so maybe it's more accurate to say that there are islands of close-mindedness. Definitely the living situation of the Roma people in my city... there are already different social programs, but there's still so much work that can be done in helping integrate this minority group better and prevent further marginalization, which is unfortunately happening. Generally the idea of [the Czech Republic] being more open-minded and welcoming would help.*

Dinner guest #2 from Germany: *The best thing about my hometown, Neuhausen, is that whenever I'm home, I have people there with whom I really like to hang out. It's never that everybody's gone. Often some friends are not there, but others are there. I can always spend quality time with friends... With that said, I agree with what The dinner guest from the Czech Republic said about some people being close-minded. One thing that I wish I could change about Neuhausen is that, given that it's a rather small town, I think people are a little bit stubborn at times or close-minded. There's not much diversity. A lot of people who are LGBTQ or other people who don't fit in the very traditional norms, they tend to move to bigger cities. It's not really open racism or open discrimination, it's a subtle feeling of sticking out.*

Act II: Freedom

The host of the dinner: *I hope that everyone has been enjoying the first course of food as well as the perspectives shared by those who just spoke. As the second course of food is being served, let's move on to talk about freedom. Building on the conversation we just had about home and hometowns, what specific freedoms do you think are fundamental to society in your hometown? What freedoms do they lack?*

Dinner guest #1 from Switzerland: Because my hometown, Basel, is a Swiss city, most of us would probably automatically identify freedom with political freedom and freedom of speech and the freedom to vote, not just to elect representatives, but the freedom to disagree with them on certain subjects and questions... I think that's what most people [in Switzerland] would think freedom is. Although being so close to the border, I keep thinking about freedom of movement. Especially thinking about the coronavirus situation now, I just don't think it's feasible for many European countries to close off their borders. Not just because it's logistically extremely difficult, but [because] I don't think that civil society would agree with that. So I think that's the two concepts I automatically think of: [political freedom and freedom of movement].

Dinner guest #2 from Switzerland: *I am also from Switzerland, and I have similar views to Dinner guest #1 from Switzerland about the prevalence of political freedom.* I think we have a lot of freedom in the sense that the Swiss political system is very built up with different layers of government. On a communal level there's a lot of self-determination. You can decide basically anything from if we want to merge our fire brigade with the neighboring village to where we are investing money with the taxes that are being collected on the communal level. It also requires a lot of participation by the people in the community. I think that's something that is very enriching, that in Switzerland a lot of power is delegated to the lowest level possible and that you also have authority through that. Self-determination is a big aspect of freedom... There is a trust that is given to me without having done something. That [trust] was given to me by virtue of being a Swiss citizen, and to some extent I feel a responsibility to give back to society, but I don't feel pressured into that. Instead, I feel like I have the freedom to do so. Nothing comes to mind very obviously in terms of freedoms that are lacking.

The dinner guest from Greece: I think there's a lot of freedom in Greece. I think there is a huge amount of freedom, but also because there is not great state regulation. As an example, I'm registered in Greece, so I can vote there, and I've lived in a house for 13 years. I've tried to move my address to that house six or seven times, and I haven't been able to. In other countries [the government says] "please update your address," and here they say "no no," so I've just given up at this point. There are also certain conservative restrictions in Greece which there wouldn't be in other countries. There is relative freedom I would say. It's quite relaxed. If you don't follow a rule, it's so so and not a big deal. I know that's terrible, but it's true. [In terms of freedoms that are lacking], freedom to be who you are is a little bit lacking. People I know suppress who they are or how they feel. Even religion. Nobody will really outright say "I'm not religious," even though half of them are probably atheists or heavily agnostic. They'll still go through the routines of the traditions of religious rituals to fit in and appease older generations.

The dinner guest from Poland: People in [my hometown] are *also* enjoying a pretty broad spectrum of freedoms. Even if you have a different view of certain things, in Poland you can protest, you can challenge the political authorities. There are no real restrictions that I see.

The dinner guest from Ukraine: *I can appreciate what you mean about restrictions not being easily visible, The dinner guest from Poland.* I think people in my hometown, Ternopil, are totally free on paper, to make their decisions in terms of what job to choose and what university to [attend], but people there tend to live by social standards, meaning that—it's not in the law, but—you have to get married by a certain age. You have to have a particular number of kids, you don't accept certain jobs. I think stereotypes and social norms are deeply entrenched in the life of my city... [people are lacking the] freedom to live their lives the way they want, not the way society requires them to. Freedom to make their choices without fear of being judged by other people, because I think people are afraid of being rejected by other people, and this is why they don't feel completely free to make these choices for themselves.

The dinner guest from Estonia: *I understand what you mean, The dinner guest from Ukraine, about social pressure to do particular things, although I think the context in which I have experienced that is somewhat different.* I do think people in my hometown, Saku, are free, now. [Even when Estonia was being invaded, Saku did not face as much destruction as some other places. My grandparents could live quite calmly there. People are free because they can do their own stuff. Our media is one of the freest in the world. People can say what they want, do what they want, we have internet freedom, and there is freedom in the sense that the digital governance we have [means that people] can use the benefits of the state anywhere they are. You could be at home and do your taxes or consult with your doctor. It makes people free because they are free to move and do everything they want in that minute... When I think of some words which are most important to me, freedom is very on top, and it must be quite similar to all people in Estonia because of the past, because of hundreds of years being [occupied], and now we are free. Sometimes I feel pressure because of this. For example, when I had the opportunity to go on an exchange year or take part in some camps, my grandfather would cry and tell me "Wow, these opportunities you have, you have to use them." I kind of feel pressured sometimes to take everything that is available, because my parents and grandparents and great grandparents never had these opportunities... I'm happy I have these opportunities, but it has made me really sad when your grandparents are crying. One of my grandmothers, she has never traveled abroad, and now I am 24 and have traveled in close to 30 countries. It's insane. There is a big generational gap in freedom. I feel like I have ultimate freedom in everything, whereas [my grandparents, and even to some extent my parents] did not have this.

Dinner guest #2 from Italy: *I agree with you, The dinner guest from Estonia, that a big part of freedom is what opportunities you have. I, similarly, see a big disparity in opportunities for different groups of people, although I see it more in the context of social class than generational differences.* My hometown, Verona, has freedom of movement, speech, faith, sexual orientation. I'm not an expert on typologies of freedoms, but there are those freedoms which are freedom to be able to do something (for example freedom of faith or movement), and then there are

freedoms that are more an entitlement to something, a right such as freedom to be free from hunger. I would say that is still a freedom. The fundamental ones in my hometown are political freedom and civil freedom. Whatever beliefs you want to have, you can have them. You can move across social environments, you don't have to do a specific job, you have the freedom to do whatever you want to do. These freedoms are fundamental. What is lacking sometimes is freedom from poverty. In my hometown, and even more here in Oxford, when I see all of the homeless people around, or the huge inequality and disparity that you can feel around here, I feel that's also something that is lacking. I can see that as a freedom rather than just a right. You're not free to live your life as you want to live it if you don't have a house or a job or money more generally. To put it in an American way, the freedom to pursue happiness is lacking sometimes.

The host of the dinner: *Thank you for sharing your thoughts on freedom in your hometowns. I would like to learn more about the ways that your understanding of freedom translates into a sense of empowerment to bring about positive change at a community level. To what extent do you feel free, empowered, and capable of creating change in your hometown? To what extent do you feel free, empowered, and capable of creating change in Oxford? Dinner guest #2 from Italy, this question builds on what you were just saying. Would you like to continue?*

Dinner guest #2 from Italy: *Sure, I would be happy to.* If I really wanted to, I could feel free and empowered and feel that I could change things in my hometown, because I know people around me, including professors, politicians, friends, and activists. I've seen change happening, even though most of the time the political landscape is a bit not what I like. Still, I see you can at least challenge the status quo... I feel even more empowered to create change in Oxford, because here in the college the decision making process is quite transparent. You can run for an office, you can send emails to people who you know are powerful and can change things. I know I can send an email to the board or to a dean, and it's more clear what I can do here. That empowers me. It's easier to get to people who can change things. Here, if I can't change things on my own, I can get to the people who can.

The dinner guest from Denmark: I definitely feel free and empowered to make a change in my hometown, Copenhagen, but I acknowledge that my position is neither representative of the people living in Copenhagen nor in Denmark in general because I had the support and the means to get a university education from one of the sought-out degrees and had the funds to get a good place to live, which created a stable environment for me to thrive and progress in. I feel like I am very much capable of making a change where I want to, especially because it's almost expected of you to strive for that in Copenhagen if you have the kind of degree that I have. Most people do that. All of my peers from my degree are in really interesting places, and it's super cool what they're doing. In Oxford it's weird because on one hand you feel very privileged to be here, it's not everybody who has the chance to come here. That also means that it is a population of high achievers in one place. The question is whether you can feel as empowered and able to make change when everybody surrounding you is as or more qualified to make the same change or has made that change or has made similar change in the past. I'm not sure I feel as empowered in Oxford, but that might just be due to a pretty significant Imposters' Syndrome that I think a lot of people suffer from.

Dinner guest #1 from Germany: *I see what you mean, The dinner guest from Denmark, and I think it's important to recognize the inertia of institutions in which specific ways of doing things have been entrenched over the course of time.* I can try very hard [to create change], but I also believe that institutionally some things are so deeply ingrained that it would be a battle that would require a lot of effort. I think both in my hometown and in Oxford that would be the case, so I do have the power in the sense that I have the right to vote, I am in no way restricted from being politically active, both in terms of strikes or protests, but as a student here at Oxford I have also noticed how deeply ingrained institutions can be and how difficult change can be. I could do something, but unless we have the critical mass for it, the change might never actually occur.

The dinner guest from the Netherlands: I think in order to be capable of contributing to a change in a place, experience within that place, local knowledge and networks, are very important. I wouldn't necessarily see myself as capable of achieving that in Oxford, or at least to a much smaller extent than I think I could bring about in my hometown, The Hague, purely because of my local knowledge and networks there.

The host of the dinner: *I would be remiss if I failed to ask you about Brexit, which has been looming ahead of us for years at this point.* Do you think that Brexit makes the United Kingdom more free or less free?

The dinner guest from Greece: *I can say without hesitation that Brexit makes the United Kingdom less free, absolutely.* The European Union, there was a bit about currency, there was a bit about freedom of movement and also opportunities. I think, in my mind, I question why I would come here if I'm not going to have the freedom to do whatever job I want or I'm not going to have the freedom to vote. I was able to vote in the December 2019 election as a commonwealth citizen but not as a European citizen. Some political parties have been saying that they're going to ask for another referendum, but that would actually be degrading the democratic process, because it's been three years and lots of money has gone to—I think they couldn't have backtracked at this point, but what does me [having citizenship of a commonwealth country] have to do with the election? But me being Greek and being European is more important in terms of voting in the UK. The sentiment also about going back or not being welcome, whilst of course in Greece as well there are, now with the refugee crisis, there are sentiments, but it's not the same. It's not the same. I actually believe that Brexit was a response to the refugee crisis. I'm convinced about it. But then it also brought up really ugly racism toward certain other people and cultures.

Dinner guest #2 from the United Kingdom (England): *I agree that* Brexit absolutely makes the UK less free, not just in terms of individual citizens having fewer rights about where to live and work. Traveling will probably still be fine, but it always felt like I could [work] anywhere in the European Union and didn't really have to think things through that much. You could just go. I did a two-month internship [in another country in the EU] and didn't have to think about visas or anything like that. We've lost those freedoms. People also lose social freedoms in the sense that if you're married to an EU citizen at the moment your life is fairly easy; you don't have to worry about visas and the sort of stuff that I have to worry about with my husband, someone who is going to have a [DPhil] from Oxford but would still have to pay thousands of pounds to get a spousal visa. You have to go through so much bureaucracy and paperwork. It's really sad

for British people who are in relationships with EU citizens that they're now going to have to go through that too. We lose social freedoms, political freedoms, and economic freedoms for business owners to trade freely. In every sense I think we're losing so much.

The dinner guest from Portugal: *I'm not sure that I would say that Brexit "absolutely" makes the UK less free.* I think that in the minds of a lot of people, [Brexit] makes the UK more free. They are stepping out of an organization that has rules, and rules by definition restrict your freedom. I think my understanding of how it's going to happen is that it's likely to actually restrict the UK's freedom in some policy areas, but in others it will enhance it. I suppose you'd have to distinguish between different kinds of freedoms and then decide which freedoms you value most. Setting your own standards for health, setting your own environmental standards—is that really that important for you, to have the sovereignty to do that? But then you don't have the freedom to travel as freely. It's tricky because there's so much involved, but I guess you could make the case for both [Brexit making the UK more free and less free].

Act III: European Identity

The host of the dinner: *Our last course is ready now. As we dine, let's move on to talk about European identity. Dinner guest #1 from France, do you see your hometown as being distinctly French, and do you see your hometown as being distinctly European?*

Dinner guest #1 from France: My hometown, Paris, is both French and European, and I think that being French is being European. At least for someone my age, I've always—I remember when France switched from the franc to the euro when I was really young, so I grew up in a country where we used the euro. It was just taken for granted that France was European, that French people were European. We can travel and use the same currency, you don't have to go through passport control—it's just super easy, convenient, and nice. I think that being French goes hand in hand with being European.

The host of the dinner: *Thank you for sharing that. Would anyone else like to comment on this?*

The guest from Belgium: *Sure, I would be happy to.* My hometown, Genval, is definitely Belgian, and it's not very far from Brussels. Usually people who live in these suburban kinds of towns commute to Brussels every day and work in Brussels. Therefore, I think a lot of people have a link to an international perspective, because their parents go to work at an international firm in Brussels—I think Genval could be European, but I don't think it's distinctly European. I do think that people in Genval could be a bit more internationally oriented than another town in Belgium which is further away from Brussels, so I think that its proximity to a big city that is very international makes it a little bit more European.

The guest from the Czech Republic: *I can comment on this as well.* I definitely would consider my hometown, Brno, to be distinctly European, also because over the course of only the past century or so it belonged to three or four different countries, so the borders may have changed on multiple occasions, but the city remained, and sadly also there were demographic changes. Most of the city's Jewish population was deported to concentration camps, and most of them perished. At the end of World War II the German population, which constituted the majority in the pre-war era was—there's an attempt to whitewash history or use euphemisms—but basically the city and a lot of the border regions of Czechoslovakia were ethnically cleansed of the German speaking population, and most fled to Germany or East Germany. Sadly, Brno was more European in character in the past just because of sheer linguistic diversity and cultural diversity. I think in that respect Brno lost part of its European identity because certain parts of its population were either forced to flee or were murdered. All things considered, there's still so much affinity to towns across the border in Austria and Slovakia and Hungary, so in that respect it's very European. I would not see it as Czech. Czech identity or Czech statehood cannot really monopolize my hometown. Also because there is a regional identity that people would sometimes identify with, and my city is the biggest city in that region, in that way they might feel a certain affinity toward Slovakia. I think when it comes to the Europeanness of Brno, it is European, but maybe more important than European, it is Central European. It's something that

most Czech people don't give too much of a thought to, but then when traveling within the confines of the historical empire, there's an affinity that becomes more evident. Also, most of my peers studying in France and the UK, it comes as a shock that we would be considered Eastern European. On its own it should be a value neutral characterization, but because of the association that people have with Vienna and the Austrian empire, nobody in the Czech Republic would really consider oneself as Eastern European. The insistence on Central Europeanness would be quite strong. I don't have very strong opinions when it comes to being called Eastern European. I got used to what people mean by that, but as a self-identification I would probably not spontaneously use the label of Eastern European. When it comes to Europeanness, I guess that's also something that's slowly disappearing, the legacy of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall and the very arbitrary geopolitical division of Europe. I think with younger people nowadays who mostly just experience open borders, these labels will all matter less with time and the European dimension of identity will probably be stronger with each new generation.

The guest from Poland: *I see why you would ask about my hometown being distinctly Polish and distinctly European, but I agree with Dinner guest #1 from France's sentiment; I wouldn't separate those two things. If the European Union is based upon this assumption of being united in diversity, then every capital in the European Union is first a national one and then it's European. I wouldn't go into the separation... [I think that people are European by nature of living in my hometown].*

The host of the dinner: *The guest from Poland raised an interesting point just now, and I'd like to talk about it further. Is someone European by nature of living in your home country, or is living in the country separate from "being European?"*

Dinner guest #2 from France: [Being European] is something that you definitely acquire. You can become European. I have a very good Colombian friend who has been living in France now for seven years, and we always laugh—some friends of mine, I mean—because we think that she's become more and more French or European. She's probably going to become French soon—she's going to ask for the French passport I mean—and one of the things is that, I don't know if this is really European, but it's European in our heads. She cares about food a lot, whereas before she really didn't care. We like having dinners, and she will come and she will try to make something kind of sophisticated. She will buy us flowers and will bring nice wine, and we laugh because this is something that she didn't do seven years ago. These are small things, and I'm sure they exist in other places in the world, but there's a strong culture around food. We say that she is becoming French more and more. These are big stereotypes, [I know].

The dinner guest from Estonia: I would say that [living in Estonia] is different from [being European]. You could come from Western Europe and not understand the culture at all and our values. Politically I think it's quite similar. We appreciate democracy and freedom of speech and so on, which are overall European values. I think beyond that, the language is very important for us, and not many people study it. It depends how open you are. We really welcome people who are interested in our country, because not many people have a dream destination of Estonia.

We are always happy to see people who know about us, and if you show this, we consider you a friend of ours.

The host of the dinner: *Your responses are thought provoking, and they lead me to a broader question. What does it mean to be European?*

Dinner guest #2 from the United Kingdom (England): *When I think about this question of what it means to be European, it's hard for me to detach it from EU citizenship, because that's what plays on my mind a lot at the moment... being European wouldn't have formed part of my identity until a few years ago with Brexit. [Before that,] I would have probably just said "British." I think a lot of my identity comes from political institutions. I think of myself as being British because I have a British passport and I'm familiar—well I actually hadn't traveled to that much of Europe before university. In a way there are such massive cultural differences between, say, Britain and Bulgaria, which seem in many ways as different, if not more different, than Britain and Australia or Britain and Singapore, which have cultural ties of a different nature through history.*

Dinner guest #2 from Germany: *To me, being European means that I understand everyone living in a European area as belonging to a group that shares certain values that are shaped around democracy and personal freedoms and human rights. I think that being European means acknowledging that this is not a thing that is unique to Germany or unique to France, but that this is something that combines us all and that is common among all the people living here. These common shared values are what makes it European. First is sharing these values and second is realizing that it's not something unique. It's not "Germany that is the most democratic on everything, things are right in Germany, and everything that's going on in Italy is wrong." It's sharing the understanding that everyone has a place in this diverse group.*

Dinner guest #1 from Switzerland: *I have absolutely no clue [what it means to be European]... I was just having a conversation about this, and now I'm wondering if being European means valuing this idea of freedom of movement. Maybe that's what it is. I'm not sure. I don't really know what European means.*

Dinner guest #1 from Italy: *I agree with Dinner guest #1 from Switzerland that defining what it means to be European is difficult. I think it just means knowing that you are so connected to things that you would initially consider being completely different than what you are. And that through history and—let me rephrase. Through history and through things that happened and keep on unfolding, you feel a sense of wholeness in a way. You know that you've got your own individuality, you know that you're different, and... you [also] know that it's not just you in your little box that is your country. You know that you're part of something that is much bigger and that you can reach and that you can relate to. You always have your individuality and your difference, but... the conversations I have with people from Europe always have a sense of "Okay, we're both European, so we both have a level of mutual understanding that is there despite other national differences."*

The host of the dinner: *Thank you for sharing that. Before we conclude our dinner, thinking about your understanding of what it means for a place to be European, is the United Kingdom European? Is Oxford European?*

The dinner guest from Ukraine: I think I haven't experienced a very European Oxford so far, because I spend most of my time with my classmates here at school, and they represent 54 nations. They come from different parts of the world. I wouldn't say that even that many of them are from the European Union. We are from Latin America, from Asia, from Africa. Oxford seems to be more international [than specifically European]... *As for the UK more generally*, when I visited the United Kingdom in 2015 for the first time, I felt it to be more European than now. I get this impression from media, people's conversations, [and] perceptions from the discussions that I hear here at Oxford.

Dinner guest #1 from the United Kingdom (Scotland): *What The dinner guest from Ukraine said about the UK feeling progressively less European over the last few years resonates with me. In my opinion*, the UK does not feel European anymore. Maybe it did once. Especially not when I'm in England, and especially not when I'm in the south of England, where people vote conservative and voted for Brexit. It feels old and kind of, in lots of ways, it's right wing. It feels kind of out of step with Europeanness. And more than the way that people voted, the reasons that people voted are absolutely counter-European. The Vote Leave campaign was fueled by a very othering, xenophobic narrative of swarms of people coming here and taking jobs. How effective that campaign was, and the support that it had, and how conservative people vote in the UK generally—the fact that we have a Tory government and have for a long time is proof that the UK voted maybe for the right thing for them, as depressing as that is. It doesn't feel European. *I also agree with The dinner guest from Ukraine on the point that Oxford doesn't really feel European*, it feels international... to me it feels international but not European mainly because to have this kind of European feeling, it would be more accessible and not as crazy elite. It still very much feels like an elite bubble that you're in. Because everyone is a transplant here—I've only met one person who is from here—it's kind of hard to get a reading on how European it feels... but if I had to answer anyway I would say that Oxford doesn't feel European.

The dinner guest from Finland: *I hear what you're saying, Dinner guest #1 from the United Kingdom (Scotland), but I would politely disagree.* I would say that the UK is European. Obviously in the light of the recent exit from the European Union it's something that has been on everyone's minds a lot. When I think of what brings together European countries versus what separates them, I think the UK is definitely still more similar rather than more different. That's purely based on—I don't know why, maybe it's because I think a lot about political science—but this form of identity feels like a very political one, and political in the sense of certain shared values and certain shared rules and the upholding of certain democratic institutions in a parliamentary way. Maybe even more so than what I know, it's a feeling of "things work here," which is by comparison to the United States, where it feels like things don't work. I would describe the UK definitely as European, also with our shared history. Of course, every European nation has its own identity and way of being and customs, and the UK has that too, but not in a way that would really set it apart from being European. In terms of whether Oxford is European, I think when you go down to city level, this idea of identity becomes more difficult to define because while Oxford is not London, London is an example of a city that I actually wouldn't

describe as particularly European. I would describe it as a genuinely global city because of the various influences and large waves of immigration that have shaped the city. Oxford, I've only lived here for a couple of months, so I can't say that I know the city extremely well yet. I know the University of Oxford well, and I have some contacts that live in the area and have been living in the area for a longer time. I suppose yes, it is European, for the same reasons that I was talking about [in regards to] the UK more generally, but Oxford also has traits of this global hub purely because of the University and the transient nature of people moving in and out all the time to come and study and then leave.

The host of the dinner: *That brings us to the conclusion of our dinner. I would like to thank you all for joining me tonight and for sharing your thoughts on home, freedom, and European identity.*

The guests rise from the table and collect their coats while continuing to chat with each other and with the host of the dinner. When the last guest leaves, the host of the dinner walks along the table blowing out the candles until the room is dark.

Part IV: Identification with Geographic and Geopolitical Entities

There is one question that I asked every interviewee but couldn't easily include as part of the imagined conversation above. Near the end of every interview, I asked this question: "I would like to ask you to rank the following places, where the one you list first is the one you identify with the most and the one that you list fifth is the one that you identify with the least. The options are: [name of hometown], [name of home country], Oxford, the United Kingdom, and Europe." For the two interviewees from the United Kingdom, I replaced "[name of home country]" with "Scotland" for the person from Scotland and "England" for the person from England. The responses to this question are shown in the table below. The figures afterward provide various ways of looking further into the responses.

Pseudonym of interviewee	Ranking of places
The dinner guest from Belgium	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Belgium/Europe 2. Belgium/Europe 3. Oxford 4. hometown 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from the Czech Republic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. hometown 2. Europe 3. Oxford 4. Czech Republic 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from Denmark	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. hometown 2. Oxford 3. Denmark 4. Europe 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from Estonia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Estonia 2. hometown 3. Europe 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from Finland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. hometown 2. Europe 3. Oxford 4. Finland 5. United Kingdom
Dinner guest #1 from France	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. hometown 2. France/United Kingdom/Europe 3. France/United Kingdom/Europe 4. France/United Kingdom/Europe 5. Oxford
Dinner guest #2 from France	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. France 2. Europe 3. hometown 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom

Dinner guest #1 from Germany	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Germany 2. Europe 3. hometown 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom
Dinner guest #2 from Germany	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. hometown 2. Germany 3. Europe 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from Greece	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greece 2. Europe 3. hometown 4. [declined to rank Oxford and the United Kingdom; does not identify with them at all] 5. [declined to rank Oxford and the United Kingdom; does not identify with them at all]
Dinner guest #1 from Italy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Europe 2. hometown 3. Oxford/United Kingdom 4. Oxford/United Kingdom 5. Italy
Dinner guest #2 from Italy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Italy 2. Europe 3. hometown/Oxford 4. hometown/Oxford 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from the Netherlands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Europe 2. Netherlands 3. hometown 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from Poland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poland 2. hometown 3. Europe 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom
The dinner guest from Portugal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Europe 2. hometown 3. Portugal 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom

Dinner guest #1 from Switzerland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Europe 2. Switzerland 3. hometown 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom
Dinner guest #2 from Switzerland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Switzerland 2. hometown 3. United Kingdom 4. Oxford 5. Europe
The dinner guest from Ukraine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ukraine 2. Europe 3. hometown 4. Oxford 5. United Kingdom
Dinner guest #1 from the United Kingdom (Scotland)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scotland 2. hometown 3. Oxford 4. Europe 5. United Kingdom
Dinner guest #2 from the United Kingdom (England)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. United Kingdom 2. Europe 3. Oxford 4. hometown 5. England

As a reminder, a ranking of “1” is given to the place with which the interviewee most identifies, and a ranking of “5” is given to the place with which the interviewee least identifies. The lower the number, the more strongly interviewees identified with the place.

Average ranking of hometown	2.325
Average ranking of home country	2.175
Average ranking of Oxford	3.675
Average ranking of the United Kingdom	4.500
Average ranking of Europe	2.325

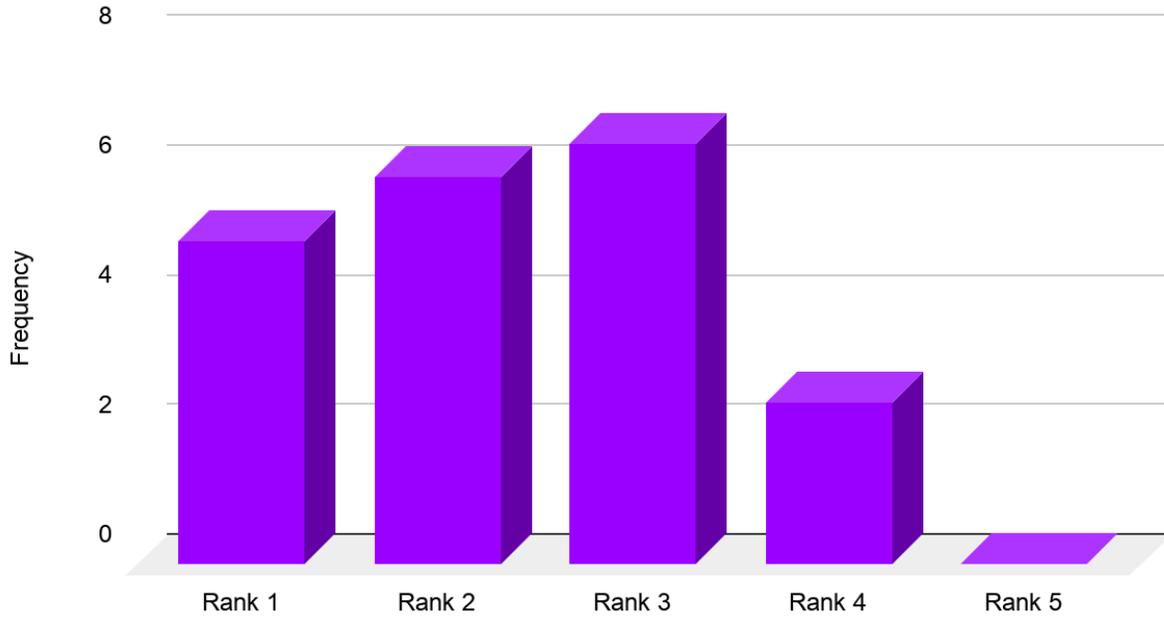
Therefore, the overall average ranking was:

1. Home country
2. hometown/Europe
3. hometown/Europe
4. Oxford
5. United Kingdom

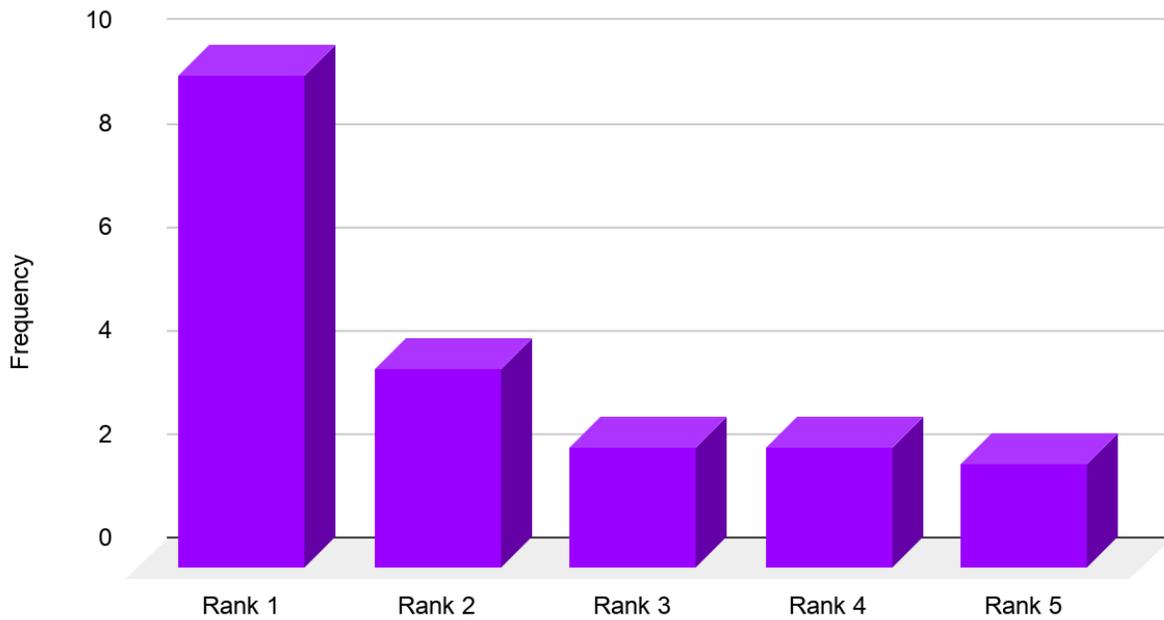
Frequency of each ranking for each place:

Example of how to interpret the chart below: six interviewees ranked "hometown" second.

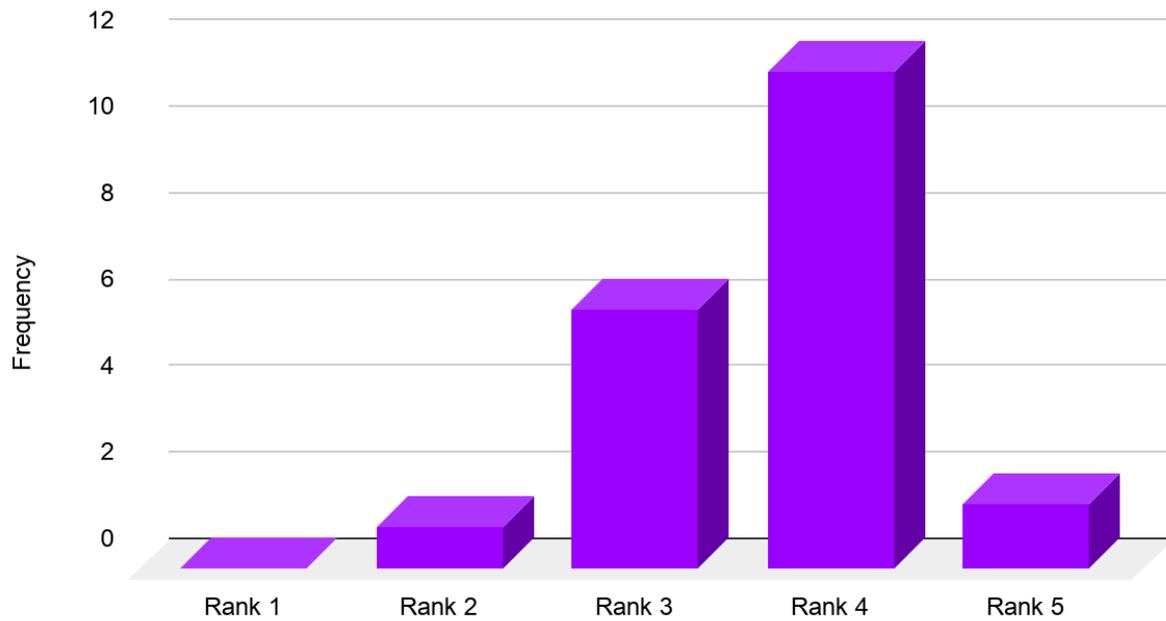
Rankings of hometown



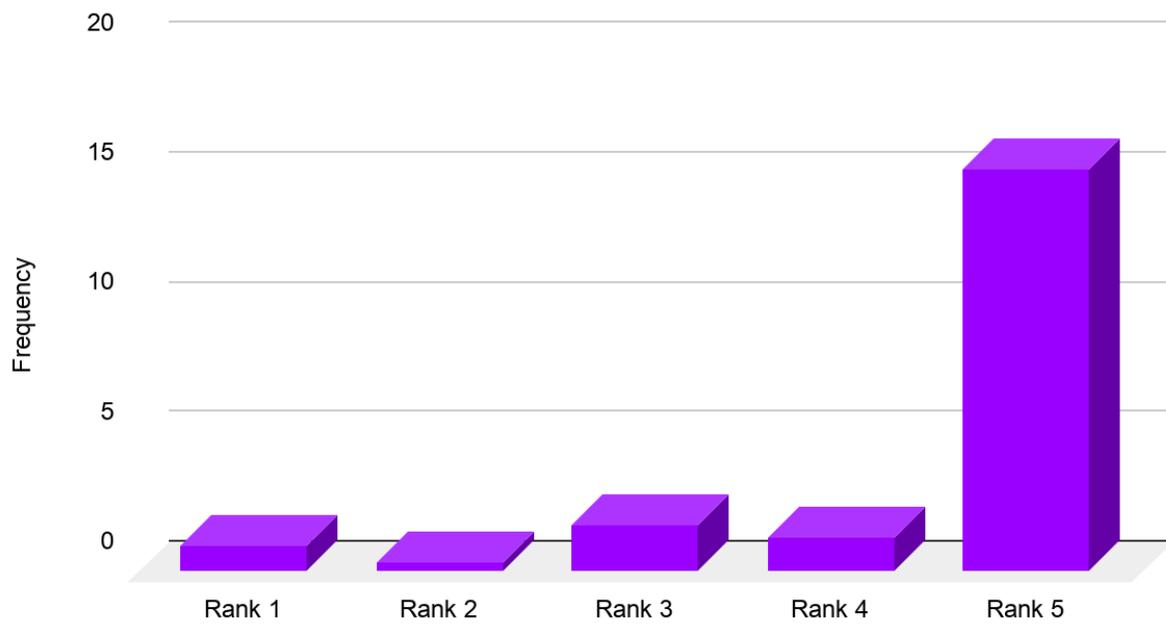
Rankings of home country



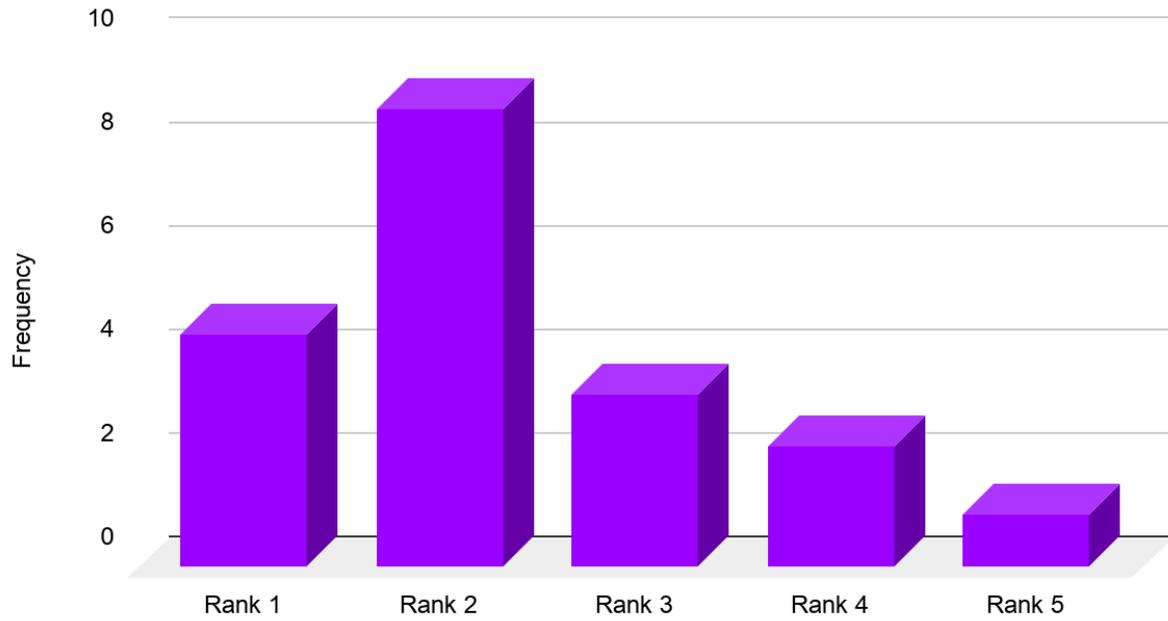
Rankings of Oxford



Rankings of United Kingdom



Rankings of Europe



Part V: Reflections

With the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union looming, early 2020 was a particularly interesting time to have conversations with European graduate students about home, freedom, and European identity. While it is my personal opinion that these topics are always relevant and worth discussing, Brexit gave them additional temporal relevance. As the COVID-19 pandemic intensified and European countries grappled with the question of what public health measures to put in place individually and collectively, I often considered how—if at all—interviewees' responses would have been different if we had spoken in the middle or end of 2020.

I returned to the United States in September of 2020, one day before my first day of (virtual) class at Harvard Law School. It was surprising to me how quickly I felt at home in Cambridge (the Massachusetts kind), given that I had never lived anywhere in the United States except Chicago and its suburbs. At the same time, I was immediately nostalgic for the sense of belonging and community that I felt in the United Kingdom. Over the following months, that nostalgia softened into a quieter, reflective fondness that strikes me at unexpected moments and then retreats into the recesses of my mind for days or weeks at a time.

I love talking to people, learning from them, and hearing about how they see the world around them. It was a pleasure and a privilege to work on this project.