Moral regulation and a good moral panic: UK Polish migrant workers and the 2016 EU Referendum

Abstract

The UK 2016 EU Referendum has introduced a period of uncertainty for both the indigenous population and for non-British citizens. This uncertainty is considered within a framework of the recent revisions in the sociology of moral panics through an analysis of interviews with Polish migrant workers. This analysis reveals two main discursive framing logics. The first logic refers to a self-reported anti-Polish migrant moral panic discourse that – according to respondents – was exploited by British anti-migrant campaigners. The second type of articulation illustrates the good moral panic logic, namely, a panicking discourse appearing among respondents about the vulnerability of their community in post-Referendum Britain. This article, however, problematises the good moral panic logic by eliciting competing narratives found in the interview data. The latter did not aim merely at stimulating caring attitudes but referred also to moral regulation techniques to manage Brexit-oriented risks and avoid the trap of becoming a vulnerable migrant.

Keywords

Introduction

This article explores UK Polish migrants' self-reported anxious experiences triggered by Brexit political changes following the 2016 Referendum, which introduced a substantial degree of uncertainty regarding the legal status of non-British citizens (Asthana, 2016; Sime et al., 2017). These experiences are analysed in a broader context of the discursive framing of Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants in British public space by various agents (e.g. public institutions, established media, social media, anti-migrant campaigners) (Moore and Ramsey, 2017; Robinson, 2009; Townsend, 2017). From the 2004 EU enlargement onwards the role of CEE migrants for Britain's socio-economic systems was heavily debated, with voices identifying the beneficial aspects of migrants who filled gaps especially in secondary economic sectors and contributed to economic prosperity, whilst others juxtaposed migrants with a rise in criminal activities, abuses of social benefits and taking jobs from the indigenous population (Blinder and Jeannett, 2018; Gietel-Basten, 2016; Salt and Millar, 2006). The latter voices overlapped with the growth of hostile anti-CEE migrant societal reactions, which included hate speech incidents and moral panic campaigns (Carby-Hall, 2007; Fox et al., 2012; Mawby and Gisby, 2009; Medic, 2004).

We analyse anti-migrant reactions within the theoretical context of evolving moral panic studies, and within this context the interview data with Polish migrants from the north of England reveal two main phenomena. Firstly, respondents referred to a perceived prevalence of anti-CEE migrant moral panic claims-making usually associated with the employment insecurities of the indigenous population. Even though this claims-making was misleading, as it ignored the fact that the British economy, as with any segmented labour market, depends on a constant inflow of cheap migrant labour (Ciupijus, 2011), nonetheless, anti-migrant resentments – according to interviewees – have been revolving as an open-ended moral panic in the public space. Secondly, the interview data indicate that respondents' experiences can be explained within a logic of a 'panic about an anti-migrant moral panic' which then allows us to identify the relevance of the good moral panic concept for studying migrants' anxieties. This concept recently gained some currency in the sociology of moral panics with the proliferation of new social movements concerned with progressive social problems such as environmental crisis, race, gender equality or corporate crime (David et al., 2011; Levi, 2009). For our contribution, it is especially important to mention Hier's (2017) discussion on moral panics understood as ambiguous operations of power in neoliberal capitalist societies. Hier developed here into an analytic model Stanley Cohen's insights from the new introduction to the third edition of Folk Devils and Moral Panics (Cohen, 2002) and from States of Denial (Cohen, 2001) on social problems which have the potential of stirring 'good panicking'; nonetheless, these good panics are denied by the public. Hier's intervention, although provisional, was designed to criticise the standard thrust of moral panic studies revolving around criteria of disproportion and exaggeration as well as to problematise the limitations of a moral panic-as-regulation perspective. Even though Hier's work cannot be considered as a full-fledged model of good moral panics, it is relevant for our analysis as it interrogates the role of care and compassion for good panicking. Another significant concept for our line of enquiry includes a moral breach concept applied by Carlson (2016) to American disputes on race and crime. Although this term is not conflated here with good moral panics (both concepts retain their analytical specificity), it is helpful within the context of good moral panic family resemblance. This is because it problematises the conventional model's normative bias and emphasises the fact that panics are not necessarily juxtaposed with regressive social reactions. Following these approaches, our argument pushes further this discussion by probing the ambiguities of good moral panic discourses detected in the UK Polish migrant community. Specifically, this article demonstrates that a 'panic about an anti-Polish migrant panic' has not merely been structured by the concerned discourses of vulnerable Poles confronted with anti-migrant xenophobia and post-Referendum residential right risks. We will demonstrate how self-appointed 'entrepreneurial' migrants openly rejected a victim-centred good moral panic framing logic and employed shaming narratives towards their

'vulnerable' compatriots. In other words, apart from victim-centred claims-making we found in the interview data moral panic-as-regulation perspective discourses (Hier, 2002) featuring grievances related to folk devils within the Polish community itself. The latter were portrayed as irresponsible individuals who failed to manage Brexit-related risks, therefore increasing their vulneability, which may result in downward mobility and unemployment issues among other harms. Conversely, 'prudent' Polish migrants employed self-interpellating discourses which identified them as entrepreneurial subjects managing risks through improving their professional skills and assimilating with the local British community. Our case is thus not identical to either Hier's (2017) study on benevolent caring relations to non-human subjects or Carlson's (2016) analysis on moral breaches, even though we find important similarities in our analysis especially to the latter study. Neither case was concerned with the universal law and order dimension but were driven by particularistic community-oriented anxieties.

Importantly, the analysed antagonistic narratives within the Polish community itself, besides having been informed by neoliberal imageries of an entrepreneurial ideal citizen who avoids harm (related to employment insecurities), have also drawn on a local Polish citizenship interpretative framework of reality internalised during the socialisation period in Poland and 'exported' with migrants to Britain. Both imageries coexisted and reinforced each other in their interpellation capabilities. The latter interpretative framework of social reality underpinned by a deep-seated post-feudal lord/boor binary differentiating 'civilised' individuals (educated and community-minded responsible members of an intelligentsia) from 'non-civilised' individuals (poorly educated and not taking part in civil life) has been shaping the modern Polish citizenship model since the late 19th century onwards (Czepulis-Rastenis, 1985; Hertz, 1951; Tazbir, 2013; Zarycki et al., 2017). The boorish 'bad' citizen figure historically had been associated with different categories of individuals (e.g. landless peasants, lumpenproletariat) labelled in the public space as irresponsible and who due to their educational and cultural capital deficiencies were not able to contribute any value to a national community (Gressgård and Smoczyński, 2020). This stereotypical figure appeared also in the shaming discourses detected in our interview data. A prevalence of this binary among Polish citizens has usually been explained by the fact of a leading national role played by the post-gentry Polish intelligentsia elites over the last century, whose particularistic values informed by a lord/boor binary have been transformed into the horizon of formal and informal citizenship obligations (Zarycki, 2014). This citizenship model understood as doxa has governed social expectations concerning upward mobility, civic responsibilities, and status competition, creating hierarchies of desirable and undesirable public conduct, not only among intelligentsia members but also among a substantial number of the population regardless of class position (Gella, 1971; Kennedy, 1992; Smoczyński, 2018; Zarycki, 2009). We argue that intelligentsia doxa-driven exclusionary

articulations detected in the interview data facilitated their resonance with neoliberal governance discourses identifying 'responsible subjectivities' capable of managing various categories of risk.

To fully explain these aspects our article consists of four main sections: firstly, we explain the sociological development of moral panic studies with special emphasis on the emergence of panics as a moral regulation model; secondly, we detail our methodology regarding the prevalence of the intelligentsia habitus claims-making appearing among respondents; thirdly, we present our findings detailing respondents' comments concerning the two main framing logics and provide details of respondents' competing narratives echoed through a lord/boor binary. We close with the conclusion.

Revisions of moral panic studies

Over the last two decades, the sociology of moral panics has witnessed important reformulations including efforts to link this concept with non-sociology of deviance-oriented theories (e.g. the risk society concept, moral regulation studies and Eliasian sociology) which would give a revised description of late modern society's control mechanisms (Critcher, 2003; Garland, 2008; Hier, 2003; Rohloff, 2011; Ungar, 2001). This process started with McRobbie and Thornton's (1995) article stipulating the necessity for 'updating' the theory of moral panics – even though today this work calls for rethinking several of its postulates, as the role of 'new media' has changed since the article was published. The latter not only functions as a useful tool for folk devils' efforts to blur the conventional division between moral entrepreneurs and deviants. New media, especially Internet-based social media, may also stir moral panics and online firestorms, creating scapegoats or diverting the social problem setting agency away from the established mainstream media to new gatekeepers who may not pursue a progressive agenda (Hier, 2019a; Pfeffer et al., 2014).

Arguably, the most comprehensive attempt to broaden the theoretical reformulation of the sociology of moral panics relates to an area of research associated with the work of Sean Hier, who in a series of publications has demonstrated the analytical and empirical value of linking moral panic scholarship with moral regulation studies (Hier, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2011, 2020). The latter examines Western societies' discursive practices of moralisation that have been interpellating the subjectivities of 'prudent individuals' capable of managing risks and avoiding harm (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985; Hunt, 1999; Valverde, 2008), whilst moral panics – according to Hier – constitute episodes of long-term moral regulation failure. To be sure, for Hier (2019b) a convergence between risk, personal responsibility and harm assumes its strategic agency vis-a-vis the conceptual backdrop of normative neoliberalism (Davies, 2016), which values an individual's right to freedom from harm. Normative liberalism – which might also be understood in a Laclauian manner (Laclau, 2005) as a discursive governance formation – identifies problems and interpellates entrepreneurial

subjectivities: 'by transferring responsibility for injury and insult from external agencies or forces to self-care as an autonomous domain of choice and action' (Hier, 2019b: 887). Consequently, responsibility for avoiding harm is individualised by a myriad of discursive agents resembling decentralised 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (media, experts, politicians, 'right-thinking people'), whereas failing in managing risks 'associated with irresponsible care of the self' (Hier, 2019b: 884) and leading to vulnerability implies a 'bad citizen' stigma. Once routine moral regulation procedures fail in taming 'irresponsible individuals' volatile moral panics enter the scene as last-resort control mechanisms by inverting moral regulation dialectics in the form of grievances collectivising risk and individualising harm. We identified this logic in the interview data featuring elements envisioned in Hier's model: entrepreneurial migrants articulated grievances which reversed individual responsibilisation for managing downward mobility risks related to, for example, educational deficiencies and lack of innovativeness, by collectivising them, and linking this harm with 'reckless migrants'.

Importantly, while Hier elaborated new concepts like grievance-based problems or individual risk management he aimed to go beyond inherent limitations of the conventional model of moral panics underpinned by normatively biased measurement criteria of disproportion. Since it is analytically problematic to give a clear explanation of what represents a proportional reaction to harm, the recurring criticism has pointed out that a value-laden moral panic approach has got stuck in exposing normatively regressive claims-making perpetuating social inequality and conservative cultural hegemony (Hier, 2008; Rohloff and Wright, 2010; Waddington, 1986). The development of a moral panic-as-regulation model was meant to surpass this narrow thrust of analysis and open new analytical avenues by providing accounts of, for example, how new collective identities and political agendas are established. However, after a decade of developing this model, Hier (2017) self-critically noted that it ignores a broader intermediary space of collective and individual responsibilities, which do not interpellate individuals merely as entrepreneurial subjectivities. Following Butler's (e.g. 2004) insights on the inherent ambiguities of social norms, Hier (2017) argued that there are various coexisting/competing modes of responsibility in the public domain – including those which derive from positive social obligations and as such are capable of stimulating progressive claims-making campaigns, for instance, aiming at managing the risks affecting animals. The latter modes of responsibility thus imply the possibility of a conceptualisation of moral panics as defensive social reactions or good collective indignations, as it was in victim-oriented grievances opposing harm associated with poaching. There are other fields of resistance where this social logic might mobilise activism concerned with environmental security, the well-being of migrants, or race and gender equality, for instance. Eventually, moral panics understood as ambivalent operations of power enabling 'a degree of transferability across divergent claims-making activities' (Hier, 2017:

882) could be useful in revealing the empirical diversity of contemporary panics (on differential moral panics within a Bourdieusian perspective, see Dandoy, 2014). This was the case with our study, where 'a panic about an anti-Polish migrant panic' includes competing discursive frameworks: victim-centred and entrepreneurial subject-centred oriented narratives. The latter consist of ideological elements of a neoliberal responsibilisation logic and indeed a Polish local citizenship model informed by the lord/boor binary.

Since we detected competing panic narratives in the interview data, it is relevant to mention here Carlson's (2016) analysis, for whom moral panics are associated with conservative strategies of cultural hegemony reproduction (e.g. law and order ideologies confronted with racially stereotyped folk devils). Whereas moral breaches constitute counter-hegemonic claims-making opposing 'Ideological State Apparatuses' in their efforts to connect folk devils with threats allegedly posed towards mainstream societal values. While referring here to Carlson's contribution we do not obscure the difference between moral breaches and good moral panics, the latter, e.g. compassion-driven mobilisation, may exceed the specific power relation domain of moral breach campaigners. Good moral panics have been typically analysed as complementary rather than competing narratives within the broader ethical domain of contemporary neoliberal order. Importantly, a moral breach understood as a defensive framing logic in contrast to moral panics recasts folk devils as victims and frames their claims-making on the harm done to particularistic communities rather than done to universalistic social order. This aspect, where several Polish migrants articulated their plight in terms of a vulnerable community affected by the harmful effects of Brexit and xenophobia, will be analysed further.

Methodology

This article draws on data from interviews in March 2017 with 35 Polish migrants based in the north of England. Interviews were conducted by phone or face-to-face in Polish and lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. Interviews were semi-structured and revolved around issues of the perceived British social reactions towards Polish migrants and the life prospects of the Polish community. Instead of analysing newspaper cuttings or other channels presenting anti-migrant campaigners' claims-making, this research used respondents' self-reported post-Referendum experiences with both the British public and fellow Polish migrant community members. This inverted perspective has proved reliable not only in studying perceptions of ethnic bias and moral panics (Fitzgerald and Smoczyński, 2015), but is also a well-known approach as demonstrated by the Transparency International index in measuring clandestine phenomena such as corruption (Torgler, 2007). The interview data were condensed, coded and analysed following Strauss and Corbin (1994) with special attention to narratives connected to proxies of risk, harm and responsibility that were used

by respondents. Efforts were taken to compose a sample of respondents representing a variety of jobs and class positions. The sample included 21 females and 14 males holding the following occupational positions: 1 highly skilled professional (a medical doctor), 11 professional workers (e.g. a secondary school teacher, a data analyst, clerks, social workers), 6 employers (e.g. charity, gardening business), 7 low and non-skilled workers (e.g. factory line operator, warehouse packer, cleaner, care assistant, construction worker), 7 semi-skilled workers (e.g. a factory line manager, a baby sitter), 1 student, and 2 unemployed.

Similarly, as in other studies of Polish migrants covering the dynamic status of their occupational ranks, this research acknowledges a classification ambiguity concerning migrant social hierarchies (Eade et al., 2007). For instance, some migrants' original class position (established in Poland) was not necessarily equivalent to the occupational position held in the receiving country: these positions may have changed throughout upward or downward mobility in the UK. More importantly, we have assumed that respondents' claims-making did not necessarily express – to use the Marxian category – their original class interpretative framework of reality. This is because the application of Western class categories for studying social stratification in semi-peripheral Polish post-agrarian society might be problematic. Following Zarycki (2015) and Eyal et al. (1998) our conceptual approach was informed by a perspective of a dual-stratification order which emphasises the fact that in Poland over the last century the class system has been in constant tension with the system of rank. The latter Weberian category of social stratification, among other aspects, implies the crucial role of cultural capital resources (education, informal codes of conduct, expressive social rituals, and related to these moralisation strategies which use, e.g., the lord/boor binary) that have been actively used by the Polish intelligentsia elite to obtain a hegemonic position in the Polish field of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The dual-stratification order significantly impacts the pattern of civic responsibility that shapes the interpretative frameworks of reality of Poles in Poland, but it is also evident in Polish migrants, as demonstrated by studies which have analysed how, for instance, the intelligentsia's habitus has led to antagonistic status competition of Polish migrants in the UK (see Smoczyński et al., 2017). Thus, in line with enquiries on habitus attitudes understood in a Bourdieusian manner (Bourdieu, 1977) as a transposable disposition that directs individual and collective action aiming at achieving the desired position in the social hierarchy, we argue it is possible to identify moralisation discourses appearing among some respondents due to a Polish culturised model of civic responsibility (Zarycki et al., 2017). While revealing the presence of intelligentsia habitus driven claims-making in the interview data (e.g. the tendency to present oneself as righteous in giving opinions as to what is right and wrong or practising the shaming of different categories of irresponsible individuals) we are instructed here, as mentioned earlier, by scholarship demonstrating how the intelligentsia stratum managed to universalise its values and

interests in 20th-century Poland (Janowski, 2008; Jedlicki, 2008). Precisely, the intelligentsia habitus driven claims-making overlaps with moral regulation/moral panics and is understood here as an inherited 'cultural kit' or as a probabilistic tendency that has been programmed during the socialisation period among respondents and since then has governed – to some extent and along with other motivational scripts (e.g. instrumental rationality) – their interpretative frameworks of social reality (Polavieja, 2015).

Brexit crisis and an anti-Polish migrant moral panic

The interview data reveal two differing panicking framing logics. The first type of articulations refers to a self-reported anti-Polish moral panic discourse that – according to respondents – was exploited by political actors and self-appointed anti-migrant campaigners. The second type of articulations illustrates the good moral panic logic, namely, a panicking discourse commonly appearing among respondents about the vulnerability of the migrant community in post-Referendum Britain. Both framing logics are structurally distinct, especially in terms of the emphasis placed on the allegedly jeopardised values/interests of either the British public or the Polish migrant community (whether these are applied to broad societal sectors or narrowed to the migrant community); also, regarding the role of a folk devil imagery used for the reinforcement of community normative frontiers or the enhancement of responsibilisation techniques.

A moral panic framing logic

The interview data suggest that during the period of the EU Referendum campaign and the consequential Brexit process, Polish migrants' image as abusers of the welfare state or those who 'steal British jobs' has been consistently used in the media, social media, and through word of mouth. Obviously, a Polish migrant figure was used as an umbrella stereotype for differing nationals from Eastern Europe. This type of claims-making has been perpetuated as the economic situation after the EU Referendum has worsened:

> Last week I heard that another Newcastle factory had closed, companies are closed constantly… So that will lead to an intensity in the number of British attacks on the Poles… Polish discrimination will increase because Poles will try to get additional income in increasingly difficult conditions. Whilst the English will never consent to this work at the lowest domestic rate. But they will complain that the Poles have a job. [9]

> Near our school, two large factories were closed. One is a factory that produces jeans and the other one is a wool processing plant. These factories employed hundreds of people… This is a big loss of jobs for such a small town and the villages around… this situation may also turn into a security problem… I mean when local people are fired from their jobs this may

produce a hostile attitude among locals towards Poles who will be blamed for their unemployment. [19]

This moral panic discursive structure has been primarily organised by risk-charged articulations appealing to broad British social interests aimed at explaining the employment insecurities of the indigenous population as threatened by Polish migrants. A Polish folk devil provided a stereotyped figure – as the interview data suggest – against which job protectionism ideologies were reassured. Within this explanatory perspective of moral panic claims-making – as we have extensively argued elsewhere (Fitzgerald and Smoczyński, 2015) – the Poles deprived British citizens of the very possibility of exercising their rights to act as prudent subjects taking care of their employment security:

The British feel that we are taking their jobs [but] where I work there are always vacancies… There is a big staff turnover… people are coming to this job and then leaving, and the English say we are taking their jobs… it's not true! [7]

Importantly, respondents noted that 'taking British jobs' claims-making was not due to Brexit turmoil, but has been consistently distributed since the 2008 financial crisis broke out:

I have heard these comments before Brexit… can't say they came out only after the Referendum. I remember at the beginning when I came to England… when I was working and studying, I heard such opinions that we are here just to take their jobs. [12]

These slogans that 'Britain is for the British' and 'Polish go home' started when this financial crash happened… Before this moment Polish work was appreciated. [2]

Following Hier's (2019b) insights, the open-ended character of the analysed panicking discourse might also be understood here as a symptom of the crisis of neoliberal hegemonic order which is marked by new forms of 'coercive responsibilisation' techniques where moral panics are exploited to reinforce this order when feasible political alternatives are not available. The case of anti-Polish migrant panic signals thus the absence of a remedying politics for the liberal right to freedom from harm (e.g. unemployment) in an advanced capitalist system troubled by structural issues (e.g. short-term contracts, multi-generational unemployment, class and gender inequalities on the labour market) (Mythen, 2005). These contradictions were thus projected by moral panic proponents onto migrants who allegedly threatened 'fair job competition'. Here, the claims-making blamed Poles for depriving the British of the possibility of acting as responsible participants in a capitalist society, and functioned as an ideological agency aiming at concealing contradictions. But this panic also constituted an authoritarian responsibilisation intervention urging British workers to manage their

employment obligations, especially after Brexit when the inflow of Eastern labour migrants was to be curtailed.

A good moral panic framing logic

The second framing logic detected in the interview data provides an example problematising an assumption that moral panic serves only to perpetuate mainstream norms (e.g. job protectionist ideologies sustained through anti-migrant campaigns). If we agree that moral panics can be conceptualised as normatively ambivalent operations of power that stir either regressive or progressive modes of engagement, our case can help to illustrate how moral panics stem from the harm experienced by migrants (e.g. an anti-Polish migrant moral panic campaign). At the outset, we must note the limited impact of this framing logic on the analysed heterogeneous group as a whole since it was only articulated by certain respondents. Grievances concerning a self-recognised vulnerability were contested by 'entrepreneurial' respondents who perceived the victim-centred discourse of their 'shiftless compatriots' as exaggerated and indeed as a panicking narrative:

> I think this state of panic has something to do with the information in the media, we are bombarded by the Polish and British media, where negative potential scenarios of Brexit are considered all the time. [23]

> It seems to me that these reactions are exaggerated… Personally, I was not affected by anything like that… so my friends were… very emotionally charged. I think this situation is due to… more people relying on these opinions than on individual experiences. [8]

> The UK has about 800,000 Poles and in general, these are young people… Now, some English may demonstrate an unfriendly attitude towards them, and later such incidents are very quickly picked up by other people and media. [22]

Before deepening the peculiarities of competing narratives detected among respondents, we turn to an analysed good moral panic logic, which did not draw on moral substance as its core point of reference. Instead, it was enacted by risk and self-care-oriented themes employed by Poles who felt they might not be able to secure their residential/citizen rights in post-Brexit UK:

> People are wondering whether they must return to Poland… or can they stay here? And this anxiety appears in every conversation. [4]

> I have been here for over 13 years and I will tell you that I have never felt so… uncomfortable. I'm worried about what's going on… what's next… what will our futures look like? Will I stay here, or should I consider a return? [5]

This is generally a case of depression caused by the persistent state of uncertainty and danger… what will happen to me… will I have a job, will I be able to feed my children, or will I have money to send back to Poland?… This is the vicious circle of all these questions… it causes such aversion to any contact because the individual closes within oneself. [9]

These grievances were related primarily to post-Referendum political ambiguities concerning the residential rights of non-British citizens which has meant that some respondents have seen themselves as unwelcomed foreigners deprived of legal protection:

I have a feeling that English people just do not welcome us here… this is my inner impression. I now understand how Blacks could have felt in the past, where formally no one told them they are not welcome, but they felt they were not welcome. It is a terrible feeling… to feel unwelcome in the country where you live… This situation is not a result of any bullying action, but it is a result of the Referendum. The Referendum provoked such psychological harm to some Poles… I have heard from people that they spoke to their children and said 'listen, maybe we'll have to leave this country'. It is a bad experience for those 5–6-year-olds who think about this country as their home. [24]

This recognition of vulnerability cannot be described as a counter-hegemonic moral breach since respondents' articulations were usually evident either in volatile word-of- mouth narratives or apparent in Polish language social media, hardly aimed at encouraging a broader audience to acknowledge their harm. We are rather confronted here with hectic articulations illustrating a collective distress and not driven by accusations and condemnation (Allport and Postman, 1946; Victor, 1998):

I ran a training course, which took place the day after the Referendum… for volunteers. I thought that my volunteers, who all have comprehensive knowledge and are well informed should take it [the Referendum vote] calmly, but instead, they were crying, they wanted to pack [their bags] right away and leave this country. [32]

There is anxiety… because everywhere the government writes, says, and announces that the Poles who were here before Brexit have nothing to fear. Yet in a moment something completely different is said… such a swing… the one is calming… but in a moment the uncertainty arises. One starts to think they are going to try to send us back to Poland in a gradual manner and this possibility should be taken into account. [14]

In contrast to an anti-Polish moral panic framing logic stirred by universalistic ideologies of national employment security, the good moral panic logic was principally arranged by defensive

articulations accentuating the harmful effects of Brexit-related insecurities for non-British citizens who were concerned with their particularistic residence status interests. These grievances did not create any specific British folk devil imagery. Moreover, in line with Carlson's (2016) insights on the self-declared 'worthiness' of folk devils, in our case defensive narratives have frequently referred to the value of the Polish community for an imaginary British neoliberal community appreciating the ethics of hard work. These themes expressed a common experience of low-skilled migrants in a British dual labour market economy echoing Michael Piore's (1979, 1986) advanced capitalist model where markets require a near-constant inflow of migrant workers to fill gaps in their secondary sectors. This structural demand for low-skilled migrants for the prosperity of the British economy has been internalised by some respondents who used it as a critical point of reference for their defensive narratives:

> The Poles who work here in factories used to say that if they left England . . . it would be very hard for their companies to replace them. In my neighbourhood, there is a slaughterhouse where 90% of the employees are Poles . . . The remaining 10% of employees came from Eastern Europe and if these workers had to leave suddenly . . . it would be a disaster for the employer. [35]

Competing articulations

As signalled earlier, the interview data elicited competing articulations that cannot be subsumed under a single victim-centred master theme. Namely, several respondents did not employ defensive articulations towards post-Brexit risks and instead, while identifying their subjectivities, referred to both personal responsibility and cultural capital resources (e.g. university education attainment, foreign language proficiency and entrepreneurship), which they have been using to avoid the trap of becoming a vulnerable individual. Simultaneously, this self-interpellating strategy included shaming articulations that targeted working-class Polish migrants who were perceived as unable to develop their adaptive skills that would have reduced the probability of being affected by both anti-migrant xenophobia and downward mobility risks. Working-class migrants were not portrayed as subjects deserving compassion; on the contrary, they were perceived as stereotypical folk devils blamed for failing to exercise a prudent form of risk management. This failure was usually attributed to the absence of a compliant attitude with entrepreneurial neoliberal principles affecting both economic and non-economic realms. We encounter here elements of the moral panic-as-regulation discourse: entrepreneurial subjects articulated grievances which dialectically inverted individual responsibilisation for managing downward mobility risks by collectivising them and associating this harm with irresponsible Poles. This mechanism, naturally, gains its intelligibility in

the normative neoliberal governmentality context with its indicators of competition and efficiency to value the worth of subjects:

> I personally have not come across any bad treatment as I think if one can communicate in the native language, if one is interested in the native culture and wants to integrate with the indigenous population then there will be no problematic situation… On the other hand, if someone does not speak any English if one isolates oneself… even the very isolation can be perceived by the local population as a sort of aversion or hostility, and in such a situation one can encounter these types of reactions. [32]

> I think that those who are not completely settled… have families in Poland, so these people actually think about returning to Poland. This applies mainly to people working in factories, at least I think so… [Whilst] engineers and doctors do not necessarily want to come back to Poland. [25]

> I did everything to be safe here. I got a permanent resident permit. On the other hand, I meet many Poles and I know that they are really concerned. But I noticed also that even though these people are concerned they take little action to secure their stay here… I recommend them frequently – collect these documents for the residency permit – but there is no reaction… then they are getting relaxed and they say – you know, everything will be fine… And for me, it is not a rational action… and not logical thinking. [33]

Harm associated with downward mobility has been individualised to specific Polish working-class folk devils to dialectically foster a sense of the 'entrepreneurial subjectivity' capable to benefit from a 'fair' neoliberal system, which promotes hard-working, autonomous citizens regardless of their ethnic background. This dialectic bears a certain similarity to the discussion on changing citizenship legitimacy in a neoliberal community underpinned by the opposition of the hard work ethic confronted with economical worthlessness, which has been noted recently by McGhee et al. (2019). They analysed how Polish migrants have discursively positioned themselves in Britain's imaginary community informed by the ideological parameters of economic efficiency, antagonistically confronted by the benefit dependent migrants. In our case moral panic grievances blamed 'shiftless Poles' for backward tribalism (locking themselves in 'ethnic ghettos') and for ignoring the advantages of the neoliberal citizenship model. Namely, according to 'prudent' respondents the violation of the desirable risk-avoidance conduct was, among other factors, due to the excessive reliance of working-class Polish migrants on ethnic networking (Ryan et al., 2008). 'Prudent' respondents suggested that the self-containment of the Polish community constrained their integration into the host society, and eventually blocked upward mobility:

I talk to some Poles who are cut off from the realities of the UK, I know people who watch only Polish TV and read only Polish newspapers and they are not aware of what is going on here… They panic that the English will throw us out, but nothing points to that. [8]

Not denying the relevance of insights on the growing significance of economic utilitarianism, which compete with conventional ethnic-based citizenship interpretative frameworks of reality (McGhee et al., 2019), we wanted to demonstrate how the ideology of economic contribution can sometimes interplay with the former. As noted earlier, in the semi-peripheral CEE a culturised imagery of social hierarchy ('civilised lords' vs 'uncivilised boors') has historically acted as a potent resource in the reaffirmation of the idealised figures of the 'good' and 'bad' citizen. Thus, moral superiority articulations built around the opposition of migrants blamed for 'reckless' lifestyles and those who internalised the neoliberal ideals may offer an example of how the global moral regulation governance discourse acts as a reliable script of reality overlapping with the lens of a local feudal lord/boor binary. It is symptomatic that during Poland's post-communist transition period a 'boor' stigma was usually associated with individuals who were not able to assume an entrepreneurial lifestyle required for adaptation to capitalism (they were called 'Homo Sovieticus'). Since then, different categories of Polish citizens (usually the working-class members and farmers) were accused of lacking 'proper civilisation competences' required for European integration, modernisation, open-mindedness, etc. (Buchowski, 2006). This contempt towards 'boorish' 'Homo Sovieticus' is visible in the interview data:

Some Poles have never established any relationships with English citizens… they are not integrated… they are contained in their Polishness… Even though they live in England they feel like they live in Poland… They are really scared of Brexit… because they did not learn the English language… Among these people probably predominates fear… These are people who work in factories, in shops, in the cleaning business… These are people who have low self-esteem. [11]

In contrast, 'lordish' and 'responsible' respondents avoided post-Referendum risks by resorting to, for example, their innovativeness for British labour market engagement, which included pursuing training courses, upgrading their communication skills, establishing reciprocity with members of the indigenous population. All these measures facilitated their social and professional safety in the UK:

I have a good command of the English language and secondly, I feel confident here… I do not have any problems if someone told me something unpleasant, it does not make me depressed… I know my civil rights… However, those who do not watch British television

and are contained in their ethnic communities, watch just Polish satellite television they may feel anxious. [24]

I belong to a group who bought a house here and I have no major concerns… I live here as normal as a British citizen… I planned my life here… I adapted. On the other hand, when Brexit started and the pound lost its value… then many specialists… the mason, the plasterer, had a panic in their eyes. [9]

I have not come across any hostile attitudes towards me. This might be related to my professional position… One of my colleagues who works at the factory said that after the Referendum his British factory colleagues greeted him with the following message, 'Hey you Pole get the f*^k out of here'!! But this is probably the only one case I have heard of… because most of my Polish friends did not experience any hostile reactions after Brexit. [19]

Conclusion

This research was carried out before the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak thus the analysed moral panic dynamics are measured according to pre-pandemic parameters of risk, harm and responsibility set by neoliberal governance discourses. The pandemic situation may significantly redefine social control mechanisms, the stakes of acceptable risks in the public domain, the degree of responsibility assigned by states to 'prudent' citizens, all this will affect ways of reacting towards a myriad of social problems including global mobility and migration in Britain, Europe and beyond. Bearing in mind this important temporal limitation we have found that it was a dialectic of risk, harm and responsibility rather than a substantive moral concern that has stood at the core of two analysed panic framing logics. Firstly, in line with the panic-as-a moral regulation model, we have argued that for some segments of the British public Polish migrants have represented a symbol of foreigners who constrained them from acting as responsible individuals in managing their employment risks in the unstable post-2008 financial crisis and further post-Brexit labour markets. Secondly, this study should be understood as an exploration of the Polish migrant community's anxiety-driven discourses triggered by post-EU Referendum insecurities. Besides finding similarities to a good moral panic logic the moral regulation perspective's features were also identified in this hybrid framing logic. We have argued that a tendency to target folk devils within the Polish community itself assumes its intelligibility in the context of a normative liberalism governance machinery since these articulations typically use a vulnerable individual figure against which various self-appointed responsible individuals reaffirm their entrepreneurial subjectivities. However, these universalistic responsibilisation strategies, as it was suggested, achieved synergy with a Polish culturised citizenship interpretative framework of reality. The question though remains whether the 'prudentialist ideology' in its current form, which over the last decades

legitimised shifting risks by neoliberal states to responsible citizens expected to manage various insecurities on their own (O'Malley, 2004), will be able to reproduce itself against a background of deterioration of public health, unstable employment prospects, rediscovery of state protectionism and the growing significance of identity politics. These ongoing changes will affect the dynamics of moral panics in the future.

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