**Conditional Citizens and Hostile Environments:**

**Polish Migrants in Pre-Brexit Britain**

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**Abstract**

This article explores recent shifts in the governance of British migration and welfare regimes, considering how far a so called 'authoritarian turn' (Tyler, 2018) in immigration policy has reached into the everyday lives of Polish migrants - a population nominally protected by mobile EU citizenship status in the UK. Theoretically framed by debates about racialised governmentality, everyday bordering and conditionality, the discussion draws on a series of in-depth interviews undertaken with Poles in late 2017 into early 2018. Firstly, the article makes important contributions to understanding how broader hostile environment and welfare bordering policies are affecting people who hold more secure migration statuses - not only those deemed 'illegal' - and how this is in turn shaped both by whiteness and by socio-economic position. It also documents the relevance Brexit has to these developments and the future security of EU citizens. But it also underlines how the protections that freedom of movement extend are currently still significant, despite efforts to erode them. Hostile environment, welfare reforms, even Brexit - these were all present in our respondents' narratives, but not dominant. The discussions analysed here then bring a more nuanced appreciation of how different people come up against the state and the everyday border, as well as how these encounters are made sense of in an interview setting. They highlight the importance of acknowledging a wider range of the sources of power which shape everyday lives, from relationships to experiences in the workplace, in which hostile environment encounters and Brexit anxieties are contextualised.

**Key Words**

hostile environment, everyday bordering, conditionality, freedom of movement, Brexit, Polish migrants, whiteness

**Introduction: Polish Migrants in the Hostile Environment**

This article is about the experiences of one group of EU nationals in the UK, Poles, during the aftermath of new immigration and welfare legislation introduced in 2014 and 2016, and the 2016 Brexit referendum. Arguably a period of time characterised by geopolitical and emotional insecurity at many scales, these years have been shaped and riven by 'hostile environment' Home Office initiatives, post-financial crash recession and ongoing contexts of austerity. In this article we explore how Polish nationals - 'in between migrants' (Fox et al., 2012) cushioned by Europeanness, whiteness and the special rights and freedoms of EU citizenship, but also increasingly exposed to an intensifying illiberal immigration policy impetus - have been experiencing these politically, economically and socially turbulent times. Based on in-depth interviews with Poles in and around Liverpool, we ask, just as the protections of EU mobility citizenship are shifting, to what extent this population has already been drawn in to the hostile environment regime and the narrowing of freedom of movement privilege. These questions are important because they can tell us not only about the changes being experienced by EU migrants, and thus new recalibrations in the UK's migration regime, but they also speak to revitalised debates about governance and the diffusion, and rebuttal, of state power.

The immediate contexts for this study - the hostile environment and Brexit - are now well documented. Taking the hostile environment first, Conservative government immigration policies, and specifically the immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, have been closely scrutinised. Waite (2017:673) proposes that this era has seen the development of an *intentionally* tough and far reaching migration regime. As part of this hostile environment we have seen the high profile scandals of the 'Go Home' vans brandished to intimidate undocumented migrants, the erosion of citizenship status for 'Windrush generation' residents, the proliferation of non Home Office actors drawn into state immigration policing (schools, hospitals, rental agencies), the excruciatingly exacting and laborious bureaucracies surrounding applications for visas and citizenship, as well as the general rise in immigration offence arrests and deportations, all designed to deter immigration and settlement (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018) in highly racialised ways (de Noronha, 2019). For Tyler (2018), the behaviour of the Home Office has signalled, chillingly and resoundingly, an authoritarian turn.

While hostile environment concerns have disproportionally affected non-EU (and to a certain extent non-white) migrants and citizens, discussions about Brexit - as an unfolding bordering development - have dominated much of the literature on EU nationals. Much has been written about the racial, colonial overtones of some of the Brexit debates, as well as the rise of hate crime which has unfolded since the referendum (Burrell et al., 2019; Virdee and McGeever, 2018; Bhambra, 2017a; Bhambra, 2017b). The phenomenal emotional impact of the vote has been considered too, with Anderson and Wilson (2018) focussing on how Brexit, as an 'event', has reached into everyday relationships. There is now a very rich literature emerging which takes seriously the alienation and uncertainty that EU migrants are feeling in the face of Brexit, highlighting the various, multi-scalar and gendered impacts that new anxieties are having on belonging (Botterill & Hanckock, 2019; Guma & Dafydd Jones, 2018; Lulle et al., 2018; Duda-Mikulin 2018). In our research too, the emotional fallout of Brexit was obvious in many of the interviews, and it is important to restate here what has been at stake, personally, for EU migrants since the referendum. In the words of one of our respondents, Jacek:

... people who are less tolerant are more vocal about it. So the result of Brexit gave… enabled people to show off their hatred more. So, it affected the community in a way that it is now an a little bit less safe place, it’s a little bit less welcoming place. And it’s a place more and more people feel to leave. … there are more kind of “jokes”, but the thing about these jokes is, you never know if the joke is not hurtful. So a lot of people experience that kind of banter, where people say: “Oh, you know, we voted to leave, so why are you still here? Have you packed your bags?”... (Jacek, came to UK in 2008 aged 19)

Brexit debates distil in two distinct ways for Polish nationals. First, it is obvious that whiteness and Europeanness have been significant in the positioning of Polish migrants vis a vis the UK's migration regimes. Poles, as EU citizens, have undeniably held a position of privilege in terms of legal, social, cultural and racial capital (Emejulu, 2016). Mobility freedoms, residency rights, income barriers, welfare access - these have still been starkly more generous for EU nationals than other migrant populations affected more directly by punitive hostile environment restrictions and campaigns, whether that be skilled non-EU migrants, Commonwealth heritage residents, or those seeking asylum. This Europeanness has not gone unchallenged though. As Fox et al. (2012) and Anderson (2013: 45) argue, Poles have been inscribed in different ways with a 'not white enough' racialised otherness, often framed by tropes of 'easternness', read as backwardness (Botterill & Burrell, 2019), and visible enough to be targets of xenophobic attacks (Rzepnikowska, 2019). Intersecting with this, much of the stigmatisation of A8 migrants has come through specifically classed Brexit related discourses of conditionality relating to welfare - 'benefit scroungers', 'benefit tourists', as signalled by former Prime Minister David Cameron before the Brexit referendum (Odden et al., forthcoming; Guma, 2018; Dywer et al., 2018). Predating the Brexit vote, these discourses were heavily utilised in Leave and media campaigns, stoking popular fears about the perils of EU membership, welfare integrity and freely moving foreigners.

Second, the Brexit vote signals a new bordering regime through a reworking of the legal, practical rights that Polish and other EU nationals can expect to hold in the UK. For Bhambra (2016), Brexit parallels the erosion of Commonwealth citizenship, risking once again the turning of *citizens* into *migrants* (Guma, 2018). At the time of writing, there are growing concerns about the workability and fairness of the 'Settled Status' EU treaty, purported to offer EU citizens a smooth transition allowing continued residency based on five years of existing residence or the opportunity to apply once five years have passed in the future (gov.uk, 2018). There has been scepticism in public debates about the integrity of these claims, pointing to the current 'Windrush scandal' as evidence of ingrained and calculated Home Office incompetence and illiberal instincts when interpreting laws and guidelines. There are concerns about how the 'burden of proof' for verifying residential status will be exercised, especially for people who may not hold ready evidence of residence in the form of the preferred - *work* facing - National Insurance number (Sumption & Kone, 2018), with all the gendered and aged implications this brings. Moreover, the entire Settled Status treaty is wrapped up in moral overtones of deservingness based around standards of 'suitability' and warnings against criminal activity (gov.uk, 2018).

The focus of this article predates these future uncertainties. Here we consider what has *already* been happening to EU nationals in the UK, even before Brexit itself has materialised. We argue, as others have done (Guma & Dafydd Jones, 2018), that the hostile environment agenda and widespread challenges to EU freedom of movement not only antecede Brexit, but are clearly ideologically linked. Through recent legislation eroding certain rights, EU nationals in the UK, despite their advantageous position, have been exposed to some of the latest iterations of the kind of conditional welfare and workfare bordering practices which have reached back through British history for over a century. At the same time, their presence in the UK has been safeguarded by an EU governance which on the one hand has been protective, but on the other has been allowing a pan-European rhetoric to take hold which is asserting welfare and workfare bordering practices seeking to weaken state responsibilities towards freedom of movement migration. Even without Brexit, the status of EU nationals would be vulnerable to both of these UK and EU developments.

**Governing Racialised Everyday Borders**

It seems to us that understandings of the hostile environment need to start with an exploration of literatures surrounding racialised workings of governance. It makes sense to consider policies like those of the hostile environment through the theoretical lens of governmentality - the 'art of government' (Foucault, 1991: 92), the *how* of governing, and 'a perspective ... that seeks to connect questions of government, politics and administration to the space of bodies, lives, selves and persons' (Dean, 2010: 19). These approaches are incredibly useful for understanding how migrants are governed - how immigration policy and discourse is circulated through different actors in different settings, and how migration policies are thus connected to migrants' bodies. Attention to debates about governmentality clearly underpins contemporary interest in 'everyday bordering', i.e. the re-territorialization and internalisation of the border (Burridge et al., 2017), the 're-scaling' of border work by 'multiple local actors within the state's territory' (Johnson and Jones, 2016: 5), and the proliferation of new 'technologies of governing' (Fassin, 2011: 216). The result is that the encroaching securitization, and 'policiarization' (Fassin, 2011: 221), associated with immigration control now works as extensively *inside* states as at their frontiers. 'Hostile environment' appears to be a textbook example of aggressive, diversely distributed governance in action.

Two threads stand out from these linked literatures especially here. First, governmentality writings take care to not overstate the hegemonic reach, or dominant 'cold hand', of the state (Miller & Rose, 2008: 200; Gill, 2010). Power is understood as a 'continuity' (Foucault, 1991:91), but one which is diffused and pluralised (Miller and Rose, 2008: 65), enacted through multiple actors and agencies, 'routines of bureaucracy'(Dean, 2010: 37) and 'technologies at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 2008: 16). For Ferguson and Gupta (2002: 982), the state is not just an apparatus, but is simultaneously a multiscalar, spatialised *expression*, symbolic construction, of both vertical and 'encompassed' power, reaching into people's lives. The successful diffusion of this power, real and imagined, in turn rests on the ability of those governing to 'dispose' (Foucault, 1991: 95) people to certain favoured behaviours. Subsequently, there is a strong focus on *how* governance works in practice, and appraisals of the inevitable limitations embedded within it. This is prominent in the bordering literature: bordering practices, despite their apparent omnipresence, are increasingly understood to be haphazard and chaotic (Burridge et al., 2017: 244-5; De Genova, 2002: 426), and definitely penetrable and resistible. When central border policy planks are delegated to local organisations and institutions to uphold, power rests in a wider range of people making decisions about other people and the extent of their 'transgressions' (Fassin, 2011: 212). Morris (1998) outlines the limits of governmentality exposed in the rolling out of the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act, where some local authority actors resisted new surveillance expectations. Humphris (2019: 108) has documented how in contemporary austerity Britain, where services are increasingly hollowed out, this work is often down to volunteers who bring their own moralities and rationalities to state directives. There is always an uneven geography being created, as intended policies are variously and inconsistently implemented in different regions, localities and spaces.

Secondly, while there seems to be broad agreement on this pluralistic, unfixed manifestation of the state as it acts, perhaps the more significant question posed in terms of governing migrants, is *who* is being targeted by certain forms of governance. Goldberg (2002), for example, asserts the centrality of race in modern state governance. For Bigo (2002: 65), migrants are immediately governed in different ways to non-migrants because, as outsiders, they are viewed as a threat to a perceived pre-existent spatialised relationship carefully orchestrated between population, polity and territory. Governing migration is therefore inherently about determining who is 'allowed' to join the polity and who is not, who is more or less risky, and how this is (mis)managed (Morris, 1998). The significant stratifications at play at the centre of migration governance come through strongly in the, implicitly and explicitly tagged, everyday bordering literatures. As Burridge et al. (2017: 244) note, these kinds of borders are only 'everywhere' for certain excluded parts of the population; they are not 'designed to ensnare everyone, everywhere' (Jones and Johnson, 2016: 3). At their most extreme when directed at 'illegal' migrants, those 'without documents' are subjected to all manner of quotidian immigration enforcement encounters (De Genova, 2002: 422). And as Ferguson and Gupta (2002: 981) alert us, not only do the various manifestations of the state, or the border, impact differently on different people, they are experienced and made sense of subjectively too.

For the UK, the longstanding racialised elements of immigration policy have been closely analysed (de Noronha, 2019), from the exploitative neocolonial frameworks established for postwar migration from the Commonwealth (Sivanandan, 1976), to the later pivot from Commonwealth to EU migration from the 1970s (Morris, 1998: 954), further underlined by the role of the 1971 Immigration Act and 1981 Nationality Act in defining Commonwealth citizenship along 'patrial' and 'non patrial', effectively white and non-white, lines (Spencer, 2002: 143; Solomos, 1989: 69), crucially leaving non-patrials subject to greater internal controls. For Tyler (2010), British citizenship has been 'designed to fail' certain groups, working as a biopolitical regime with race as a key reference point. In terms of contextualising the contemporary experiences of Polish migrants, it is worth reiterating here that a focus on a white migrant population does not negate the need to recognise the racialised operations of British immigration policy (de Noronha, 2019). In this case, the UK's intensified participation in European freedom of movement can be seen as a significant racial realignment in its immigration regime. EU expansion in 2004, moreover, and the UK's decision to eschew any transitional entry restrictions on would-be accession migrants, took place amidst the backdrop of a recent history of tightening asylum policy (Kushner and Knox, 1999), arguably further entrenching the de facto racialised contours of immigration control. These legacies are therefore all wrapped up in Polish migration, which on the one hand embodies this racialising of mobility privilege, while on the other signals the fundamentally contingent nature of migration regimes.

**'No Recourse to State Funds': Immigration, Risk and Responsibilisation in the UK and EU**

As with race, so with class. Migrants, historically, have always been governed along class and wealth lines. De Genova (2002: 438) discusses the 'heightened policing directed at bodies, movements, and spaces of the poor'. Governing migration is infused with economic intent, tied up in rhetoric of morality, conditionality and deservingness. The governmentality literature is especially useful here again; as Foucault argues (1991: 92), the art of government was to introduce the 'correct' way of managing not just individuals, but also goods and *wealth.* In Dean's (2010: 4, 181, 194) analysis, classic liberal government 'yoked the poor to their responsibilities and moral obligations', and has since developed into a 'self actualization' culture, where people are responsibilised for their own risks. This is well established in the UK, which, as Anderson (2013: 13) notes, has a long history of controlling the movement of the poor. Most discussions on mobility and poverty note the 1905 Aliens Act which formalised the 'link between immigration control and access to welfare', through the categorisation of an 'undesirable alien' as somebody who had no means to support themselves or their dependents and who was at risk of becoming a 'charge' on public funds through illness (Mynott, 2002a: 22), and which established a new body of officials, including medical inspectors, to police the ports (Hayes, 2002: 34).

Since the Aliens Act, this 'synthesis between welfare entitlements and immigration status' (Cohen, 2002: 221), and its accompanying logics, has intensified. Relative deservingness (Valentine & Harris, 2014) is a central, and easily usable, binary trope of immigration discourse - skilled or unskilled, hard worker or scrounger, genuine or 'bogus', legal or illegal - valued or just barely tolerated in an ever shifting 'community of value' (Anderson, 2013: 6). The practice of assessing a potential new citizen or resident based on whether they can support themselves 'without recourse to state funds' (Gordon, 1986: 25) has endured. And in the UK this has played out in deeply racialised ways (Hayes, 2002: 40). Gordon and Newnham (Gordon, 1986: 27; Gordon and Newnham, 1985: 70) have highlighted the disproportionate impact of policy changes on black welfare claimants in the 1980s, at the mercy of the prejudices of health and social services officials who were recruited to police the new welfare bordering regime.

What we have now, across different liberal democracies, is a situation where various degrees of welfare chauvinism (Huysmans, 2000: 767), and relative economic status more generally, have become integral planks of immigration control (Zamora-Kapoor, 2017). More conceptually, there is a wider connection to be made which ties together this equation of economic worth with right to residence, deportability (De Genova, 2002) and the forces of commodification seen in work and economic and social life more broadly. Anderson (2010), for example, explores the interconnection between immigration controls and work status in the UK, arguing that certain visa and work permit arrangements create precarious working conditions which can cause confusion, fear about making mistakes with paperwork, and ultimately leave migrants at the whim of their employer, or more usually the agency fixing their work (Sporton, 2013; Rogaly, 2008; Yuval-Davies et al., 2018). It is not only low wage workers affected; Shutes (2016:700) discusses the high income restrictions the UK has set for skilled non-EU migrants, for residence and to be able to bring in a partner.

It is within these contexts that there has recently been greater scrutiny of the welfare bordering practices which are happening within EU states which target residents from other EU countries. It is undeniable that EU migrants within other EU states are bestowed with a richer set of (in practice largely white) privileges often elusive to those from elsewhere (Sardelic 2018). However, Heindlmaier and Blauberger (2017: 1198) note the fundamental tension which exists between 'exclusive welfare states and free movement in the EU'. As Lafleur and Mescoli (2018: 481) illustrate, since the economic and financial crisis, across the EU 'welfare policies are increasingly being turned into instruments for limiting the mobility of EU migrants' and creating precarities within EU citizenship which have produced new stratifications of the poor, undeserving (Valentine & Harris, 2014), and even undocumented EU migrant. As they argue, the move to austerity regimes in particular has enabled pre-existing tropes about conditionality and deservingness to extend to previously better protected migrants. A new impetus of *rebordering* (Cassidy et al., 2018), of eroding previously held rights, has been creeping in. The EU mobility regime can therefore be understood less as a sharp binary of interior freedom verses 'gated community' (Van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007), and rather as a long continuum of conditionality and exclusion.

It is of course true that freedom of movement has always been economically conditional (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018: 487; Dwyer et al., 2019); after three months, residence in another EU state is officially contingent on either being in or seeking work, and if that is not possible (through study, caring responsibilities or age) then EU migrants must make sure that they have 'sufficient resources ... not to become a burden on the social assistance system of the host Member State' (Heindlmaier and Blauberger, 2017: 1201). The change has come in a more evangelical policing of this clause. This is 'no recourse to state funds' again; the continuity of rhetoric across different times and spaces is striking. While this still does not leave EU migrants as *deportable* as other migrants (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018: 493), although there are many cases of homeless EU migrants being deported, it does mean that the right to reside is linked to welfare status. Not only are EU migrants 'stratified by their economic status' (Bruzelius etal., 2016: 405; Dwyer et al., 2019) but in the words of Heindlmaier and Blauberger (2017), EU citizens now enter other EU states 'at their own risk'.

These developments, while EU wide, have been especially evident in the UK. O'Brien (2015), Dwyer et al. (2019), Guma (2018) and Drozdowicz (2018) have all highlighted how in 2014 extensive new restrictions were brought in limiting EU nationals' rights to social benefits, a development which paralleled the more overt hostile environment immigration legislation but which has received less attention. These affected EU migrants' entitlements to Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit, bringing in new three month residence rules for them, and saw the withdrawal of Housing Benefit for new migrant jobseekers, along with the removal of job centre interpretation services and a general increase in associated, difficult to navigate, bureaucracy and delays (O'Brien, 2015: 111, 126; Dwyer et al., 2019: 7). For Guma's (2018: 8) Czech and Slovak participants in Glasgow, this translated into the unexpected cancellation of benefit applications and having identity documents retained by welfare authorities. As O'Brien (2015) and Dwyer et al. (2019) argue very powerfully, in a political climate where EU nationals were increasingly being depicted as scroungers and benefit tourists, these developments signalled new depths of welfare segregation, allowing EU migrants to be used as a ' test-bed for unalloyed welfare conditionality – neoliberal ideals taken further than possible for UK nationals' (O'Brien, 2015: 127).

These reforms were not only about access to certain social benefits but illuminated very clearly this conditionality inherent in contemporary mobile EU citizenship and the often hidden dangers, for migrants, of its explicit orientation around work (Drozdowicz, 2018; Valentine & Harris, 2014). The introduction of the 'Genuine Prospects of Work' test in 2014, and a new 'Minimum Earnings Threshold' (O'Brien, 2016: 956, 958), signalled a tightening of the interpretation of 'worker' and 'jobseeker' for EU migrants in the UK, ultimately calling into question the status of low paid and part-time work - which is of course still *work* **(**Bruzelius et al., 2016: 405) - as sufficient to justify the right to reside. And as Alberti (2017) and O'Brien (2016) assert, the ramifications of these policies - as with austerity (Hall, 2018) - are inherently gendered and disproportionately affect people who are already struggling or vulnerable in some way (Duda-Mikulin 2018). This includes people on zero hours contracts, lone parents working around childcare responsibilities, people in abusive domestic or employment situations who cannot risk leaving, for fear of losing their status. They can also impact on people who have been resident for many years, paying taxes and national insurance, but have suddenly lost their job or are going through difficult times. It is no longer enough to be a worker, even one who does *not* claim 'recourse to state funds'; EU migrants have to be in 'valid work' (O'Brien, 2016: 938) to have associated worker residential rights. These are indeed 'workfare logics of migration control' (Alberti, 2017: 11). And of course, as with all of these welfare and workfare bordering practices, they have been deliberately rescaled and diffused in ways which are able to infiltrate and shape, in very uneven ways, everyday spaces and encounters (Dwyer et al., 2019).

The questions to explore here then, are whether Brexit, such a high profile and emotive disruption, is really the whole story for UK Poles? Has this population already been exposed to these hostile environment currents, or has it been protected? Who has been impacted the most? Where have these borders been encountered, and how have these experiences been understood and resisted? After explaining our research and methods, we present our empirical findings of Polish experiences in Liverpool, charting encounters with the hostile state, but also questioning the dominance of these concerns in our interviews and thinking more carefully about where the most hostile environments that our participants have been experiencing really are.

**Research and Methods**

The empirical material for this article is based on research collected for a transnational project on Polish migrants across the UK, Sweden and Norway. The project as a whole gathered over 5000 survey responses to questions about welfare and work, and undertook 45 more targeted in-depth interviews with Polish migrants across Liverpool (the focus here), Malmo and Stavanger about their everyday experiences of living in these 'second tier' national cities. Due to space constraints there is no scope to consider Liverpool itself in depth in this article, but the wider relevance of the city is clearly important. Although Liverpool has a long history of migration as the 'second city of Empire', a significant EU population (Burrell, 2017), and has befitted substantially from EU funds and voted strongly for 'remain' in the 2016 Brexit referendum, it has not attracted post-accession migration to the same extent as some other UK cities. It has, however, been hit hard by recession and austerity in recent years (Kennett et al., 2015; Gray & Barford, 2018), and so the questions about welfare and work resonated with many of our respondents. In this sense, Liverpool proved to be a significant case-study through which to view the intersections of immigration, welfare and workfare regimes.

The paper here draws specifically on the interviews collected in Liverpool between October 2017 and March 2018, approximately 18 months after the Brexit referendum. Eighteen people were interviewed in total, nine men and nine women, aged between 28 and 59. Interviews took a two stage approach, starting with an initial biographic discussion followed by more targeted conversations around work, welfare, the Brexit vote and any hostile environment encounters. With one of us being Polish speaking, we were able to reach, through a process of building trust, networks and snowballing, a wide cross-section of participants from different socio-economic positions. These included 'expert' community leaders, one of whom was working on homelessness in the city, and people in a range of types of work and with varying educational backgrounds (for example, we interviewed people in professional and low paid, precarious agency work). All names used here are pseudonyms. Interviews lasted for an average of just over two hours each and were undertaken in people's homes, community premises or in public places such as coffee shops, at the direction of the participant. Interview transcripts were translated into English during the transcription process, and, in keeping with the size of the dataset, were analysed thematically but 'manually', allowing us to take in the whole testimony, rather than isolate key words or phrases and risk losing important nuance and context. Our article here presents these interview testimonies and what they revealed about interactions with and responses to the hostile environment and welfare bordering strategies, but also makes space to consider other aspects of people's lives which tell us something important about how the state is encountered and made sense of.

**Encountering the Everyday Border: Hostile Environment and 'No Recourse to State Funds'**

As perhaps anticipated for EU nationals, our respondents positioned the hostile environment as something still sitting in peripheral vision, not necessarily overwhelming, but there in the background. Duda highlighted the problems he knew newer migrants were having opening bank accounts:

They made it a bit more difficult to open a bank account. Because I opened my bank account in December (2016), and there was no problem at all, everyone just opened their bank account the next day after they arrived. But now it is the case that you have to have a National Insurance number, you have to have some utility bills from the place you are staying at. It was easier before. I know that it changed. (Duda, came to UK in 2016 aged 46)

Lidia, who works extensively with Poles in the city, spoke implicitly about new everyday bordering practices which had been creeping in and how draining this was becoming for those experiencing it:

... actually the system is becoming harder, people have to prove that they have residency, they are asked that by the banks or any other services, you know, there are some questions in hospitals, whether people are entitled. And in some ways, you don’t want to be bothered all the time, you feel in a way the society is against or the system, not the society, the system is against you. (Lidia, came to UK in 2000 aged 27).

Given the extensive reach of the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, it is perhaps surprising that our interviews did not reveal more concrete experiences like this, of bordering encounters with landlords, doctors, schools. One explanation would be that this is clear evidence of the uneven impacts of bordering policies. Most of our respondents were already well established here at the time of interview - with arranged accommodation, bank accounts, access to health services - and so did not have to go through the more demanding processes of registering for these. Another possibility is that the bordering nature of some of these interactions could themselves be occluded, or downplayed, within the encounter. There were plenty of stories about difficult landlords for example, and taking a more holistic reading of the interview conversations, it seemed apparent that the enormous stress of securing safe rental accommodation eclipsed any concerns about being asked to prove nationality status on applying for a property. Certainly some respondents, too, did not think it invasive or unreasonable to be asked about their citizenship in more formal encounters of different kinds. This is an important point, because while much of the existing everyday bordering/hostile environment literature would tend to indicate a more conscious sensitivity to Home Office directives among different migrant groups, the evidence here also underlines, as Ferguson and Gupta (2002: 981) remind us, that the state - perceived by Lidia here as a bureaucratic system - is constructed and understood subjectively. Edicts of governance, in their diffusion, do not result in universal experiences, neither in terms of situation or sentiment.

The most critical discussions were aimed at the citizenship application process itself, its financially exclusive nature, and the relentless form filling and document collation required to become British. For some of our respondents, the spectre of Brexit had forced them outside of the freedom of movement comfort zone to confront the hostile environment's 'routines of bureaucracy' (Dean, 2010) head on. Jadwiga had been thinking about applying for permanent residency rather than wait for any promised post-Brexit resolution. It is worth quoting her account at length here, for the way it juxtaposes the crushing burden of an arguably deliberately punitive, expensive, unrealistic and out-of-touch bureaucracy with her strong sense of home and rootedness:

But generally, for the Poles, it's this uncertainty. Like me, I am used to living here, I have been here more than ten years, it has become my home here, I already settled here, here is my home, my son goes to school here, I have friends here, I have work etc. And just now I started to think about applying for a permanent residence card. And it turned out it is really a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of filling out forms, its 86 pages probably, that you have to fill, you have to prove to them, what you did throughout this five years, where you worked, how many times you left the country, to where, with what goals, what kind of breaks there were. You have to provide them with documents, you know, all the tax receipts, how much you earned, you know, it’s simply really a lot of paperwork. And this again is necessary in order to be able to apply for citizenship. And this again would cost me around £1,200 for a British Passport, I can have dual citizenship, Polish and British, if I wanted to, I could do that. For my son it would be more than £800, these are additional costs, you know, it’s a lot of money. But you feel forced to do something in order to have a bit certainty. (Jadwiga, came to Britain in 2007 aged 26)

Not everybody had a negative view on the citizenship process; Renia spoke of a more straightforward situation where 'you just had to fill in the form', talked of helping others with filling in the forms and printing out the documentation, and offered to show pictures from her brother's citizenship ceremony. Even this discussion, however, presented citizenship as something which still necessitated practical help, usually provided by fellow migrants, and for those without sufficient funds, something which would only ever be out of reach - conditional citizenship indeed.

Similar findings came through regarding evidence of welfare bordering. While most of our respondents were keen to assert that they have never claimed any benefits, and so would not have been affected by these changes, a point which will be returned to, other experiences were discussed. Bartołomiej was able to speak about this at length because he had been working with less economically secure Poles in the city, and had seen changes in accessing benefits through their struggles:

It is not that easy, because they don’t want to give Poles benefits. It used to be easier before, now it has got more difficult. If they give you benefits, then only for three months. And if you get jobseeker allowance, you do not always get the housing benefits as well. If you don’t get the housing benefit you have nothing to pay your apartment.(Bartołomiej, came to UK in 2005 aged 25)

Mariusz spoke about the introduction of different job seeking allowance forms for Brits and Poles, the latter marked out by new bureaucratic procedures:

… actually there are already these problems with the jobseeker allowance, that you must have lived here for three months, that you have to present all sort of papers. Once it used to be not like that... When I came to England 12 years ago everything was… all this was easier, there was one form, for Brits and for me. Now it is for me a different one, for them a different one ... (Mariusz, came to UK in 2005 aged 35)

Jacek, also working to support EU citizens who are struggling in the city, spoke about how a new era had emerged where it had become easier for people to find themselves in a vulnerable position in terms of welfare and housing:

... how things change. So for instance, now it is very easy to be at a point where you have no recourse to public funding. So then, people for example at the housing options team, their hands are tied. They are not allowed to advise people. So with or without attitude, you can’t do anything because the system changed. So the changes that were brought in by the government definitely have a huge impact.

Jacek's point about the diminished ability of staff to offer help is pertinent. Across the interviews with those affected by these changes, we collected stories of frustrating encounters with Job Centre staff and a lack of staff knowledge generally about what EU nationals are entitled to (O'Brien, 2015; Dwyer et al., 2019; Guma, 2018). According to Lidia, Job Centre staff are moralistic (Humphris, 2019) and 'kind of tell people off, saying “you are not entitled and that’s it” because they don’t understand that people actually have a right to claim benefits here.' Arthur also thought that staff were inefficient, not up-to-date with policy changes, and not sure what to advise him when he presented himself at a job centre as a Polish national with a disability:

No, no one is helping you... I did it, I started searching for work. I found this Remploy, they told me to go to the Job Centre... when I asked a question this counselor, every time the counselor, you know the person who was supposed to advise people with disabilities, every time he had to search the Internet to answer my question and whatever he found out, it did not work. They tried to help me, but they didn’t know anything... especially now there are many changes being made ... many things are being reorganized... these counselors, if they come across non-typical cases, if there is an unusual case, then they will be searching.

The crossover of Job Centre experiences here between migrants and non-migrants is important. As Hall (2019) reveals in her work, Job Centres can be a significant site of micro-aggressions, with staff attitudes having the dangerous potential to underscore deservingness tropes, and push people into internalising these discourses further. Despite separate forms now in use, there is a wider continuum here of conditional citizenship, welfare and coercion which operates across migrant/non-migrant status (Edmiston, 2017; Valentine & Harris, 2014). According to Bartołomiej, “The Job Centre does not support you to find work, it is not there to search work for you, it is there to control whether you are searching for work.” Any welfare bordering which has been going on intersects directly with wider shifts in welfare culture and austerity policies (Edmiston, 2017; Hamnett, 2014), and the deeper, ongoing impacts of the financial crisis on work, family and home (Hall, 2016).

However, there is also more to unpack about the specific 'in-between' situation of being an EU national in this context. Rights are still more generous than other migrant groups, but they have been changing and the situation can be confusing all round, for migrants and staff. As some of these accounts suggest, just as in the past (Gordon, 1986), foreignness, and even white foreignness, can count against people in these kinds of personal interactions. The everyday working of putting policy into practice is liable to be partially shaped through decisions made based on assumptions and value judgments about what foreigners should or can do, rather than through expert knowledge of legal entitlements. Even if staff are willing to help, there still a sense that EU migrants present a 'special' or 'difficult' case, and are still marked out as different. The wider capital accrued through whiteness is shown to be situational then - it has a much more limited value in spaces where face to face interactions leave names, language and accents, and therefore migration heritage, exposed. While Jacek, for example, was explicit about the general 'day to day' advantage of being white and Christian, Lidia and Jadwiga commented that 'Polish people are accepted until they speak, because then you can hear the accent'; being white means 'blending in', but only 'until you have to speak'.

Stanisław's testimony, as someone who had fallen on hard times, becoming unemployed, ill and then homeless after years of working in the UK, encapsulated many of these issues. His experience underlined again the uneven impacts of everyday bordering (Burridge et al., 2017; Jones and Johnson, 2016), and how it is the most vulnerable who are being drawn into the orbit of hostile environment systems, rather than those in more secure work and housing (Drozdowicz, 2018; Guma, 2018). In his case too, as he spoke directly about being singled out by the police for being Polish while sitting on the street, the racialised politics of welfare bordering were on display again - white, but still foreign:

Many times it happens, when the police stop you because you don’t know English! ...I know four, five, six men who were sitting outside Tesco here, Englishmen and Poles, and the police only picked up the Poles. Englishmen are allowed to sit, we are repressed. Before, everybody used to sit together. And now he approaches, 'get up, you are a Pole, you cannot sit here'. And there is an Englishman sitting beside him, the same, they are mates, friends. And now, 'you can always go back to your country', they will tell you this. (Stanisław, came to UK in 2005 aged 27)

Interviews with Jacek and Bartołomiej confirmed that this has been no idle threat - both discussed the growing number of deportations of homeless EU nationals in Liverpool, and the rising fear of the police among homeless Poles. The threat of deportation - this condition of deportability (De Genova, 2002) - as a forced reversal of the original act of migration, whether feared or actualized, acts as the ultimate punishment for any alleged transgression. That this has become something now used to target homeless EU nationals - 5000 in 2017 (Tyler, 2018: 10) - and something talked about so readily in cities such as Liverpool, does indicate the unfolding of a new level of literal policing of EU citizenship, making the previously obscured conditional nature of mobile EU citizenship more visible.

**Dislocating the Hegemonic State and Border**

So far it has been clear that among our group of participants the impact of new bordering initiatives has varied immensely, depending especially on relative social and economic vulnerability. These experiences also tell us something interesting about how the everyday border, and state power more generally, is encountered, made sense of and arguably resisted. The omnipresent border did not feature extensively in our interviews; instead several respondents were engaged in some 'dislocating [of] the hegemonic framing' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 3) of the British state (Miller & Rose, 2008; Gill, 2010) in the telling of their lives. Rather than depicting themselves as at perennial risk of being bordered by an overbearing state, many of the interviews discussed, often in anger or frustration, the times and spaces where the state appears to be incompetent (Guma, 2018), as seen in the Job Centre, or simply absent. Police responses to hate crime were a recurrent example. According to Lidia:

I think there were some issues with hate crime in particular areas and I think the police didn’t do as much as they should. They sometimes work too slow to actually really have any impact on the situation.

Patrick was one of several people to compare different cultures of policing in Poland and the UK, this perspective contrasting markedly with Stanisław's experiences of police harassment:

I have no reason to deal with the police or anything. They don’t stop you on the street, unlike in Poland, where there are some strange controls all the time. There’s no such thing here.(Patrick, came to UK in 2013 aged 26)

Although this is a very specific imagination of the state in the form of the official police force, it highlights the selective nature of state reach that for various reasons - a form of deliberate *inaction* (Davies et al., 2017), incompetence, or simply adhering to a certain set of priorities - leaves certain aspects of everyday life relatively untouched. It also underlines again the subjectivity of understandings of the state (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002), borne of different life experiences and situations. Some everyday border encounters may go unnoticed or unanalysed, or as already discussed, be deemed relatively untroubling, while other facets of state actions and inadequacies are noted and critiqued.

The importance of these differential situations and backstories in shaping state and border encounters also came through in other ways. Power in our respondents' lives was revealed, through the biographical nature of the interviews, to be held in many sites beyond the state, creating complicated intersections with policies surrounding citizenship and migration status. The ubiquity of dealing with a difficult landlord, as suggested earlier, is a good example. Jadwiga's anxieties about securing citizenship for her son were also derived as much from her personal situation and the breakdown of her relationship with her former partner, as hostile environment policies:

For now, what holds me back is that my situation is of course even more complicated, so it wouldn’t be too easy… I made a big mistake a couple of years ago, I allowed my husband to take my son to Poland. After this trip my husband didn’t give back my son's (Polish) passport so I don’t have my son's passport. I can’t go alone to the embassy to get my son a new passport because he has to be with me and give his consent.

While this situation shows how border policies unfold in inherently gendered ways (Alberti, 2017; O'Brien, 2016), in Jadwiga's mind, this stress was ultimately being caused by her former partner rather than the bordering practices themselves. Too much focus on the *extent* of everyday bordering therefore obscures times when different powers are felt to be in force, and how and where they are also manifested.

The conditionality and hostility of these migration/welfare regimes was also complicated in different ways in the interviews. For instance, there was a very strong narrative of eschewing welfare benefits running through many of the testimonies, acting as a rebuttal to continued welfare bordering attempts. As Kinga explained, her friend, as a single mother, had noticed welfare changes because they were so important for her income, but she distanced her own family from this position: 'We never lived on benefits... She definitely can feel it. We, in our case, we didn’t base ourselves on those benefits, so there, you don’t feel it' (Kinga, came to UK 2008 aged 31). This presented as a strikingly common discourse of rejection of welfare, and an accompanying assertion of worth based on working and paying taxes. To a certain extent, this can be read as a classic and successful ingestion of the values of responsibilisation (Dean, 2010). Not only did people continually stress the deserved nature of their presence in the UK through the narrow confines of their status as workers (Valentine & Harris, 2014: 87; Anderson, 2013), but it was also clear that there was a tendency to withstand as much risk as possible privately rather than 'signing on' (Odden et al., forthcoming).

And yet, what is interesting is that this construction of worthy citizenship does offer something which can be used for the respondents' own purposes - a slither of power to be yielded in an otherwise uncertain situation. Arthur declared that he was not actually afraid of Brexit, as a potential bordering threat, at all:

Did it scare me? No, and it is not scaring me now either. Why? Because I think, if I want to work here and pay taxes, excuse me, but why would a Brit want to get rid of me? ... Because by paying taxes I am adding to their wealth so or so. Who could be afraid of Brexit? When it comes to Polish people those who do not have work and the homeless, they have to fear Brexit**.**

According to Kinga, 'it seems to me that if we’re here, work here, pay taxes, there shouldn’t be any problem'. Sofia admitted that while Brexit did 'terrify her', she was assuming that 'nothing is going to change too much, probably they won’t chase us out, because first they would have to do it with those who have never worked**'** (Sofia, came to UK 2015 aged 27). Patrick had similar views: 'What can they do? If you work, you don’t have any conflict with a police, with the law, then they have no reason to throw you out. You work – you pay taxes, why would they throw you out?' When reflecting on what changes Brexit might bring, Joanna encapsulated this attitude perfectly: 'For sure some things will be limited. Maybe access to those social benefits that I am not actually interested in' (Joanna, came to UK in 2016, aged 27). And while some of these views may appear as indifference rather than resistance, in a context of uncertainty and hostility, indifference in itself can be read as a form of resistance - a refusal to let the fear of Brexit shape everything.

There is, admittedly, very little solidarity in these extracts - in this sense some of the most divisive instincts of a late capitalist system playing out in populist and austere times have already won the day. Some participants went on to perpetuate these threads further, distancing themselves from Bulgarian and Romanian nationals who they described as 'scroungers' and 'only here for the benefits'. But, it is possible to see that this rhetoric about deservingness simultaneously serves another purpose. It is through these kinds of comments that participants are able to challenge the *rationality* (Virdee and McGeever, 2018)or 'episteme' (Dean, 2010: 42) of Brexit as political ideology, discourse and act (Miller and Rose, 2008: 30-2). As something which signals a new bordering regime again, most of those interviewed, many of whom had been working in low paid sectors at some time, could only see the economically illogical positioning of a government wanting to repel foreign low skilled labour. Rather than simply reading these statements *only* as echoes of prevailing messages of responsibilisation, division and conditionality, they can also be understood as a rare means of skewering the authority of Brexit logics.

These points about work have far wider connotations too. In the interviews for this project we tried to focus on different kinds of bordering practices, and on Brexit, and it was clear that these changes and developments have been critical. But they were not elevated in these conversations in the way that work experiences were. While some of the early focus on A8 migrants offered up a rather narrow framing of 'people as workers' (Burrell, 2010), it is undeniable that work has been a core aspect of the experience of living in the UK. In terms of hostile environments, the interviews suggested the workplace was often the most hostile environment of all. Because we reached people who were in lower paid jobs, as well as those who are now more comfortable, the testimonies we collected were full of varied examples of agency and insecure work - people at the sharp end of the 're-commodification' of labour' (Greer, 2016). For instance, participants spoke about being made to work longer hours than contracted for, the devastating longer term impacts of shift work on the body, the uncertainty of having enough work, being fearful of being away from work sick, being subjected to random drugs testing at work, and the gruelling physical demands of packing and factory work. Jadwiga talked about the 'efficiency measures' in use at her company: 'They can always get rid of me.. If there is something they don’t like, they can get rid of you, they laid off many people this way.'

Duda shared his experience of agency work in nearby Warrington:

I worked in Warrington, in a big company, I was an order picker, picking up products and packing, this kind of work, not really something to develop mentally. But physically you could. You had to walk some 15 to 20 kilometers per day with these boxes. In the beginning it was simply killing me ... At the end of the day I didn’t know my own name anymore.

These workplace experiences are of course part of a much wider context of ethnicised working precarity (Anderson, 2013). Participants tended to talk about work in relation to racialised workplace hierarchies, and most accounts about foreignness and discrimination were relayed in relation to work and the workplace, and not everyday bordering encounters. Yet difficult working conditions will be further aggravated by these welfare and workfare bordering policies: it becomes more difficult to leave or to speak out when your immigration status is dependent on your working status (Drozdowicz, 2018: 135). And this may be the true impact of recent shifts in welfare bordering and possible post-Brexit settlements; the reverberations of these policies are less likely to (visibly) force reductions in welfare claiming, which was negligible among our participants anyway, and far more likely to (invisibly) trap more people in exploitative work. In terms of perception, however, the Home Office, encountered in its many guises more sporadically, is perhaps low down the list of hostile offenders when it is your boss and working conditions making your life a misery every day.

**Conclusions**

In this research we wanted to find out how stratified these high profile hostile environment and welfare bordering experiences have been, and how far they have already been extending. Our findings are important for the complications they reveal, and for what they tell us about contemporary privileges bound up in EU mobile citizenship. As we have shown, all of these much documented immigration and welfare changes and coercions have been on our respondents' radars. We heard stories of Job Centre microagressions, where the racial capital of whiteness was negated by inscribed undeserving status; of the impossibility of contemplating tortuous and prohibitively expensive citizenship bureaucracies; and of growing deportations of homeless EU migrants in the city. It would be difficult to argue, though, that many of our participants have been directly ensnared in the hostile environment in the way that other populations have. On the one hand, this is not necessarily surprising. Freedom of movement, pre-Brexit, is still working, and people who have been here for a few years have generally been able to establish themselves well enough to withstand these shifts. On the other hand, though, this is interesting because some of these changes, surrounding welfare especially, have been directly targeted at this population, and, at least in our work, they do not seem to have hit as hard as anticipated. It is a truism that everyday bordering does not border everybody, but it raises a crucial point. More attention still needs to be paid to *who* is being bordered, and who is not, not just how, and where, this happens.

It is important too to listen to the narratives here that play down any sense of state omnipresence, that ignore it, challenge it, and use deservingness tropes to turn a development such as Brexit on its head. However concerted the ideology driving them, everyday border and immigration regime intrusions are not only implemented on the ground in variable ways, but they are also perceived and received differently, and even sometimes negated, by those who come up against them. Yes, this ability to withstand and subvert state tropes and aggressions comes from the relatively privileged position of a white, EU population, but this is a reminder that border encounters are felt and processed in very personal ways, telling us something significant about the heterogeneous ways state power is rationalised and minimised. For our respondents, structural privilege and discursive defiance have *both* been working as protections against the hardening of the borders.

This, however, is not to deny that real struggles have been made apparent in our interviews, particularly in terms of the wider confluence of austerity and precarious labour and housing conditions that touch migrants and non-migrants alike. Work has been central to the narrative of Polish migration in many ways, not just building up the trope of the Polish worker, but simultaneously creating an anti-welfare discourse where seeking state help is to be avoided. While this defiantly locates these migrants on the 'right side' of the responsibilisation divide, justifying presence through a continued assertion of economic and moral worth, the flipside is that any vulnerabilities that do arise relating to migration status may instead simply be displaced, experienced in the workplace, or through the body, rather than in any formal job or advice centre.

Notwithstanding the very real emotional insecurity voiced by many of the people we met, this is the real danger that Brexit brings. Barring any further changes to the Settled Status agreement, or an overly eager interpretation of the criminality clause within it, for most Polish nationals, 'staying' in itself *should* be relatively straightforward. The question is the extent to which Brexit will eventually mean the removal of some of those remaining protective privileges afforded to EU migrants through their EU citizenship status, particularly in terms of further exposure to policies surrounding welfare, income tests and work. If our participants have been found at the moment to be on the edge of the hostile environment, sensing it but not fully enmeshed in it, the worry is that Brexit could deliver many more Polish, and other EU migrants, straight into it.

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