
Anti-Polish Migrant Moral Panic in the UK: Rethinking Employment Insecurities and Moral Regulation*

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Abstract: This article examines British societal reactions to Polish migrant workers using a framework that combines recent developments of the moral panic concept informed by the sociology of moral regulation and risk governance studies. Given the multi-mediated nature of contemporary moral panics and in contrast to conventional analysis focusing on newspaper coverage this article is based on Polish migrants' self-reported experiences. Moral panic claims-making about Polish workers 'taking British jobs' and 'abusing British social benefits' are perceived by the respondents themselves. Our analysis is in line with Sean Hier's conceptualisations of the interplay between individualised risk management and moral panic claims-making, which are manifestations of conflictual sites of the contemporary neo-liberal project of prudentialism. The article argues that the anti-Polish migrant campaign in Britain after 2004, which dramatised Polish migrants as 'stealing the jobs' of the native population, cannot be properly analysed as an irrational ethnic bias or an elite-engineering panic but is rather an expression of the destabilising effects of employment insecurities within Western risk societies.

Keywords: Polish migrants, moral panic, employment insecurities, moral regulations

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Introduction

Following the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in May 2004, the UK experienced a large inflow of migrants from Central and Eastern European countries (known as the Accession 8 countries—A8), the majority of whom were Poles. Over 700 000 Polish migrants registered with the Workers' Registration Scheme (WRS—Home Office 2011) and these figures do not include the self-employed or those who simply did not register. The typical, newly arrived Polish migrant was young (43% of Poles registered with the WRS were under 25) without dependents and employed overwhelmingly in low-skilled jobs, and the largest proportion of them worked for labour agencies (Home Office 2011).¹ There has been growing academic interest in this phenomenon which spans various empirical and conceptual positions: integration patterns among new Polish migrants [Garapich 2008; Brown 2011]; transnational migration practices among Poles [Ryan et al. 2009]; the interplay between class and status differentiation of post-2004 Polish migrants and the role of a migrant's social networks [Eade et al. 2007; Ryan et al. 2008]; the position of Polish migrants in the British labour market [Carby-Hall 2007; Drinkwater et al. 2009; Janta et al. 2011]; the antagonistic relationship between the older generation of Polish migrants and new-comers [Garapich 2007; Galasinska 2010]; the function of Catholic identification for Polish migrants [Gill 2010; Trzebiatowska 2010]; strategies of maintaining cross border family networks [Elrick 2008; Ryan et al. 2009]; and the position of the migration industry in Polish community empowerment strategies [Garapich 2008]. However, what is surprising is that little attention has been paid to the study of the British public's and the government's official reactions to migrants. Given the heightened level of concern over migrants from the new EU member states (A8 and A2 countries—Bulgaria and Romania) that has been present, for instance, in the British media (examples are *The Morning Star*, 26 October 2004; *The Sun*, 23 August 2005; *Daily Telegraph*, 2 November 2005), there are few academic publications that have attempted to systematically analyse this issue.

British society's reactions to Poles have varied (the literature, for instance, offers examples of British trade unions providing assistance to Polish workers; see Fitzgerald [2006]; Hayes [2009]; Fitzgerald and Hardy [2010]; James and Karmowska [2012]), but it seems that the unfriendly or even hostile reactions of the British public triggered by this unprecedented inflow of migrants has played a somewhat insignificant role in the discussion.² Notable exceptions are Carby-Hall [2007], who in a broad study of A8 migration for the Polish Government,

¹ Approved applications to the Worker Registration Scheme May 2004–April 2011, Home Office (UK Border Agency). See the Migration Observatory website: <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/data-and-resources/data-sources-and-limitations/worker-registration-scheme> (last visited 15 June 2015).

² Although this article is exclusively concerned with the reactions of British society to Poles, it is important to note that the 'Polish' label, which has been used in various articu-

details evidence of hate crimes committed against Polish migrants [McIlwaine et al. 2006; Carby-Hall 2007: 259–260; see also Thorp 2008]. In multi-media British society, mass media has played a crucial role in distributing a biased image of the Polish worker. Spigelman [2013] carried out a discursive analysis of the British tabloids and found persistent use of metaphors of natural disasters to frame the ‘otherness’ of migrants, who in particular are blamed for threatening the employment security of the local population. Spigelman, drawing on findings from the Northern Life and Times Survey, also showed that this anti-Polish bias was spread relatively widely in Britain, including Northern Ireland, where respondents identified Polish migrants as the group that faces the most prejudices in Northern Ireland. The Financial Times/Harris Poll indicated that British citizens expressed more concern than citizens of other EU states towards arriving A8 migrants [cited in Carby-Hall 2007]: 47% of British respondents felt that A8 migrants constituted a negative factor for the economy (with only 19% thinking they were a positive factor); 76% of respondents argued that there were too many foreigners in Britain; and 76% of respondents wanted the British authorities to impose new measures to limit economic migrants arriving from the A8 countries [cited in Carby-Hall 2007].

Although many typical moral panic indicators were detected in Spigelman’s study (e.g. the stylisation of the folk devils, concern, hostility), Spigelman has not consistently framed his argument within the perspective of moral panic studies. This has, though, been done by Mawby and Gisby [2009], who explicitly recognised the symptoms of moral panics and cited manufactured news constantly linking Eastern European migration with, for example, crime. Fear of a ‘flood of migrants’, they argued, also affected policy-making responses; in October 2006 the UK government declared that it would restrict labour migration from the A2 countries [Mawby and Gisby 2009]. In late 2013 British Prime Minister David Cameron outlined policy initiatives to limit the access of post-2004 labour migrants from A8 countries to certain types of social benefits. Chan et al. [2013] provided another piece that examined societal reactions to Polish migrants mainly as expressed in the mass media from a moral panic perspective. Drawing on Robinson’s [2010] study of housing policy they show how social housing issues contributed to a moral panic concern, while anti-migrant exponents (e.g. Migration Watch UK, and the British National Party) claimed that migrants were a major reason for the shortage in social housing and were allegedly responsible for the rise in house prices.

Carby-Hall [2007], Mawby and Gibbs [2009], Robinson [2010], and Chan et al. [2013] all reveal the moral panic potential of ‘disproportionality’ with regard to anti-Eastern European migrant claims-making and the risks this poses to social

latory strategies employed by moral panic proponents, actually functioned as a ‘floating signifier’ [see Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 112] that relate to a broader Eastern European migrant community.

cohesion. The reality as they argue it is that enlargement did not usher in a flood of crime [Mawby and Gibsy 2009] and allegations about social housing abuses committed by new migrants are similarly not justified [Robinson 2010], whilst Eastern European migrants actually filled labour shortages and have not contributed to the rate of unemployment in the UK [Gilpin et al. 2006; Carby-Hall 2007; Chan et al. 2013].

Mawby and Gibsy's [2009] and Chan et al.'s [2013] papers can be located in the conventional stream of moral panic studies, identifying anti-Polish panic symptoms of dislocation in 'existing structures of control' [Garland 2008: 14]. This fulfils the critical elements for the existence of moral panic: first, there is the presence of moral entrepreneurs who define a given social problem (e.g. mass media, politicians); second, there is a heightened level of social concern (measured in an increased number of articles (on the 'problem') in the press); third, hostility is directed at 'deviants', and there is a consensus among the public confirming that '... the threat is real, serious ...' [Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 34]; fourth, the crucial element of disproportionality is present (the concern is considerably disproportionate to the declared threat, and the nature of the threat has been exaggerated and over-stylised). The only indicator that seemingly has not been substantiated relates to the volatility of panics [Mawby and Gibsy 2009]. Anti-Polish panic has instead remained relatively stable over a long period of time, which confirms existing findings and examples in the literature showing that panics are hybrid.³

This article seeks to broaden this mainstream perspective on anti-Polish migrant labour moral panic following recent revisions that emerged in response to perceived deficiencies in the classic model [e.g. McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Hier 2002a; Rohloff and Wright 2010]. It focuses specifically on the series of interventions elaborated by what is called the 'Canadian turn' in moral panic sociology since the early 2000s [e.g. Hier 2002a, 2008, 2011; Hier et al. 2011a], after the initial British (1970s) [e.g. Young 1971; Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978] and then the American-Israeli (1990s) [Goode and Ben Yehuda 1994] waves. This conceptual approach will be applied to empirical evidence from qualitative interviews undertaken in 2013 with Polish labour migrants in the north of England, which is discussed in more detail below.

³ For instance, Ben-Yehuda [1986] in his paper on the 1982 Israeli panic over drugs, demonstrated how the functionalist moral perspective should be integrated with the interest-group approach in order to better grasp the meaning of panic occurrences. Schinkel [2008] claimed that only a combination of grassroots and interest-group models represented by the media and civil campaigners may shed some light on the phenomenon of panic over senseless violence in the Netherlands. Moreover, Schinkel [2008] argued that the crucial parameters of panic, that is to say, the volatility in his example, were problematic, since that anxiety was institutionalised and the moral panic persisted for several years.

Polish migrant workers and the neo-liberal ‘prudentialist’ approach

In contrast to conceptualising panics as irrational societal reactions to alleged threats [Hier 2011b: 12–13], as an instance of asymmetry between moral entrepreneurs and folk devils [McRobbie 1994], or as an interpretative framework identifying the logic of disproportion in moral entrepreneurs’ claims that bear little relation to the harm attributed to a given deviancy [Rohloff and Wright 2010; Rohloff 2011], more recent approaches seek to link the conventional model (of moral panic) with novel social theories. These are informed by revised conceptual benchmarks from those used for British society in the early 1970s, when Young [1971] and Cohen [1972] coined the term ‘moral panic’ (for a discussion of moral panic ‘revisionists’, see Hier 2011b). We are particularly concerned with the ‘Canadian turn’, an approach that broadens the scope of panic studies’ by incorporating into its social control backbone insights drawn from moral regulation studies [e.g. Hunt 1999, 2003], Foucauldian-inspired social and legal theory [e.g. Valverde 1995, 2008], and risk governance studies [e.g. O’Malley 1996, 1999, 2004]. It was Hier [2002a, 2008] who, drawing, among others, on the work of Corrigan and Soyer [1998], Valverde [1994], and Hunt [1997], first linked the sociology of moral panics to the discursive strategies of moralisation to form subjectivities of modern ‘prudent citizens’ capable of ‘managing risks and avoiding harm’ [Hier 2008: 174] that have been gradually spreading in Western societies.⁴ These moralisation practices, according to Hier, should be understood as articulations of governance that link ‘risk, responsibility and moralization’ [Hier 2008: 181] and involve ‘... myriad discourses, symbols, feelings, actors, and truth-claims that are always rationally “productive” in the sense that they continually generate ways of thinking about oneself and others...’ [Hier 2008: 181]. Consequently, against this backdrop of routine processes, moral panics, as Hier argues [2002a: 329–330], constitute episodes of failure of the long-term moral regulation process, which then demand coercive measures to discipline folk devils perceived as individuals who subvert risk-management strategies and pose a threat to society. In the conceptualisation used by Hier and his associates [2011a] panic is understood in line with the dialectical mechanism of neo-liberal moral regulation discourses of risk-management and harm avoidance—this activates ‘the every-day relation between the self and the others’ [Hier et al. 2011a: 262], which means that:

[M]oralization finds expression through the proxies of risk, harm, and personal responsibility. One common feature of moralization in everyday life is that people are

⁴ The genealogy of moral regulation can usually be traced back to the development of urbanisation processes in the late medieval period, which, according to Hunt [2003: 179], ‘was a response to an increased demand for labour, the drift from country to towns and increased social density; all of which generate pressures towards ‘new modes of life’ that were characterized by great variation in lifestyle, that, in turn, generated a perceived need for more discipline’.

called upon to engage in responsible forms of individual risk management that exist in tension with collective subject positions of 'harmful others'. [Hier et al. 2011a: 263]

Where Hier et al. [2011a] detail the function of 'harmful others' is where the dialectic process of moral panic directed against Polish migrant labour takes place. Our study found that the discourse related to employment insecurities is juxtaposed with the moral panic claims-making denouncing Polish workers, who have allegedly subverted the British labour market and blocked indigenous workers from the very possibility of acting as responsible citizens by managing their own employment insecurities. It is not a coincidence that the surge in anti-Polish migrant moral panic emerged—as will be discussed below—right after the 2008 financial crisis in Britain. While British officials, including Prime Minister David Cameron, have recently been making use of the image of Poles as abusers of the welfare state, it would be incomplete to explain this rhetoric as simply part of an interest group campaign seeking the introduction of legislative measures to constrain the access of new EU migrants to social benefits. We argue that this political upheaval along with British media coverage blaming Poles for posing a range of risks to the indigenous population are rather indicative of broader social processes, which gain particular visibility when conceptualised in the risk-society perspective of structural employment insecurities, which underpin Western labour markets. Scholars inspired by the risk-society approach [e.g. Beck 1992, 2000] and late modernity theory [Giddens 1998; Sennet 1998] have argued that market deregulation, the new global division of labour, individualisation, and the segmentation of labour forces in advanced capitalist economies have produced permanent employment insecurities, represented by short-term contracts, multi-generational unemployment, widespread self-employment practices, and cut-throat labour market competition. When emphasising a risk-society approach, it is important to acknowledge its critical reception, which is also relevant for our study. Namely, there has been a surge in literature demonstrating how employment insecurities are unevenly distributed in the labour market and are mediated by the conditions of specific industrial sectors, the class and gender position of workers, and by their skills and amount of social and cultural capital workers have accumulated [Allen and Henry 1997; Mythen 2005; Cooper 2008]. Our contribution in particular points to the significance of the class dimension as well as the regional specificity of the north of England, which was hard hit by the financial crisis. That influenced the level of employment insecurities, which increased the likelihood of moral panic claims-making against Polish migrants resonating with the public.

Hier's revised understanding of moral panic as an 'immediate form of regulatory intervention' vis-à-vis global prudentialist moralisation strategies [Hier 2002a: 329] is especially visible within O'Malley's [1992, 1996, 1999] risk-governance elaborations [Hier 2008: 181–182]. Employee security has been undermined by destabilising tendencies in labour markets, by the weakening of class-based

political mobilisation in a now individualised workforce [Beck 2001], and by the accelerating processes of transformation from a Keynesian welfare state, which as O'Malley has argued [1996] used to regard the social risks related to, for example, employment as problems that require intervention from the state, into neo-liberal techniques of privatised risk management [see also McCluskey 2002]. O'Malley [1996: 203] argues that Anglo-Saxon societies have undergone a profound shift over the last few decades, which assumes 'a new relation of power, responsibility and antagonism management in the relations between citizens and authorities'. Here the role of the traditional welfare relationship between the citizen and the state, who is perceived as an agent capable of risk management, has been diminishing [O'Malley 1996: 203]. Instead the neo-liberal approach has been inclined to transfer a significant amount of risks onto individuals, who are supposed to manage them '... as a part of their rational and responsible existence ...' [O'Malley 1996: 204]. O'Malley has demonstrated how this new 'prudentialist' attitude has embraced individuals' ways of coping with everyday activities: 'They should be prudent instead of relying on socialized securities. They should cover themselves against the vicissitudes of sickness, unemployment, old age, accidental loss or injury.' [O'Malley 1996: 196]

Against this conceptual background the mechanism of moral regulation related to employment insecurities can be depicted to reveal the strategic interweaving of state apparatuses and mass media. This moral regulation is visible, for instance, in analyses of public social policy strategies and uproars in the media relating to benefit fraud that have emerged over recent years in a number of Anglo-Saxon countries. For instance, Lundstrom [2011] in his report on reactions in the British media to benefit abusers showed that these reactions are linked to 'stereotypical representations of certain groups of people as lazy and undeserving' [ibid.: 315], and through these alarming practices criminalise the image of benefit abusers and 'promote the control of others' [ibid.: 329]. Discursive strategies in the media also implicitly interpellated certain individuals as those responsible and as capable of managing their own employment insecurities. Namely, in line with Hier we can argue that the periodic panics that have been played out on the level of mass media accentuate the moments when the moral regulation procedure fails, but in a reverse dialectical movement mass media pressure interpellates members of the public as those who in contrast to folk devils should act as prudent individuals who try to hold on to their jobs thus protect themselves from falling into deviant behaviour. Media-driven panics most likely contribute to the 'self-governance' modus of moral regulation. However, as Corrigan and Sayer [1985], among others, remind us, the role of the state in the practices of moral regulation cannot be ignored and its role is crucial for potentially shaping 'social forms of life' at the current stage of evolution of late capitalism. In this respect, the contribution of Chunn and Gavigan [2004] comprehensively demonstrates that the logic of welfare moral regulation with regard to benefit fraud cannot be reduced to just the dichotomist logic of the moralising discourse about those who

are 'deserving and undeserving' of social benefits that is framed in the media. In several Anglo-Saxon countries, including Britain, the state apparatuses on the one hand employ tangible regulatory mechanisms that cut assistance payments and through workfare programmes encourage the unemployed to assume a 'responsible individual way of life', and on the other hand increasingly implement surveillance practices targeting benefit abusers to prevent the 'undeserving' from accessing social benefits [Stenson and Watt 1999; Golding and Middleton 1982; Chunn and Gavigan 2004: 231].⁵

Polish migrant workers in the north of England: primary data

This shift in responsibility has produced a 'false consciousness' among certain categories of job-seekers who blame themselves for failures related to the management of employment insecurities, thereby concealing the structural factors that shape the asymmetry between the neo-liberal state and employees [Mythen 2005: 135]. The anti-Polish moral panic campaign demonstrates that this 'false consciousness' may also lead to blame for employment insecurities being placed on labour migrants from Eastern Europe. Here it fulfils a rational function, producing images that reconstruct the coherence of the social symbolic order that has been dislocated by the cyclical forces of employment instabilities. Moral panic's stylisation of Polish folk devils as 'stealing jobs' has acted as an 'anti-subversive' fantasy that both concealed the structural dynamics of late capitalist society and provided a narrative justification of the failure of individual responsibility for managing employment insecurities. Likewise, in Žižek's [1992: 89–90] example of the agency of xenophobic fantasy, the Polish worker image in moral panic claims-making functions as a blind spot (*punctum caecum*) that embodies the antagonism itself, and Poles are responsible for the fact that others cannot be responsible for their employment destiny, and through this fantasy paradoxically restored the rational meaning of social objectivity and guaranteed its uninterrupted coherence during a crisis period. In this sense, not only does the Polish folk devil represent a

⁵ For recent UK government policy, see <http://www.theguardian.com/global/realty-check-with-polly-curtis/2012/feb/22/unemployment-work-programme-welfare>. Of course, the 'prudentialist spirit' of moral regulation procedures that compel individuals to manage their employment insecurities might be observed in other practices governing the labour market, which owing to spatial constraints here cannot be described in more detail. It is enough to mention recent reports on how the deregulation of labour markets, the low level of trade union density, and the general fear of job loss has contributed to the rise of non-compliance of employers with labour standards regulating minimum wages, leave, working hours, and along these lines we have also seen a reduction in health and safety inspections of workplaces and a consequential rise in migrant injuries and deaths in the workplace [CCA 2009]. Non-compliance with or the evasion of labour standards, which occurs, for example, in the situation of forced self-employment of labourers, is another symptom of the structural contradictions of the contemporary British labour market.

conventional concern of moral panic (e.g. stylised in tabloids as a natural disaster affecting Britain), but most importantly moral panic claims-making activity exposed in British tabloids has developed as a response to the failure of moral regulation procedures that call on the British to engage in prudential self-conduct related to labour market risks.

To demonstrate the interplay between anti-Polish panics and discourses related to the structural employment insecurities of the 'prudentialist era', we will draw on data collected in the north of England in early 2013 in our research project. The analysis is based on two sources: interviews and archival materials. The interviews make up the primary data and the archival materials, which are press cuttings, are only a supplementary source of data. Our project did not employ a discursive analysis of media reactions, given that this has already been done in the literature on social reactions to Poles in the UK. The inverted perspective we applied by gathering data mainly based on the interviews with Polish migrants was crucially informed by the recent revisions in moral panic scholarship, acknowledging the profound changes that have taken place in British society since the original concept of moral panic was formulated. The original model, according to the revisionists, was coined in a homogeneous British moral culture, which empirically differs from the much more complex contemporary social fabric, in which the symmetry between folk devils and moral entrepreneurs has been considerably disturbed [McRobbie and Thornton 1995: 560]. According to Ben-Yehuda [2009: 2], this new situation posed a challenge for the sociology of moral panics, which should be focused on '... how different moral ideas and concepts struggle for attention and domination in a social and cultural landscape that allows and tolerates such rivalry'. There is probably no other aspect of moral panic than the position of folk devils that needed redefining, since 'monolithic social reactions' towards them disappeared and folk devils were given a voice [McRobbie 1994]. The old folk devils in the multi-media reality of contemporary panics possess anti-stigmatisation skills, they are no longer passive, and they are capable of fighting back [e.g. Hier 2002b].⁶

In other words, our study measured at the individual level the indirect impact of moral panic campaigns, mainly stirred up by tabloid newspaper forms of media, upon the British public by using an index of Polish migrants' perceptions of hostility or bias from the British indigenous population. It was assumed that the inverted perspective of the folk devils perception might be helpful when considering the fact that Polish migrant labour does not represent a facile symbol of deviancy, such as a paedophile ring or young delinquents would, which are more likely to be associated with the well-known trappings of moral panic that call for regulatory action. In fact there has also been a slight celebration of the

⁶ This is not to deny that social subjects are constrained by structural conditions of dependency that limit the possibility to fight back. There are still categories of relatively powerless folk devils who are confronted with the moral panic bias.

Polish work ethic in government publications and in some of the media. Formally, Poles, like any other EU citizens, are eligible for employment in the UK; therefore, imposing the folk devil image on them requires a multi-mediated effort. This produces a symbolic degradation, achieved, for instance, by amplifying their 'otherness', which has been observed by Spigelman [2013], or by associating them with a criminal threat [Mawby and Gibsy 2009]. It was by means of such a 'spiral of signification' [Hall et al. 1978] around the image of job insecurities that it was possible to develop an impression of a major threat undermining the collective well-being. This methodology, although not based on a quantitative sample of the scale of anti-migrant hostility, has proved to be consistently accurate in measuring other clandestine phenomena, such as corruption (Transparency International index), which by definition is difficult to examine directly, since those who engage in corruption are not willing to declare this fact (for a discussion of this method, see Torgler [2011: 52–53]). Thus, in our study we assumed that the perception of anti-migrant bias and hostility towards the Polish migrant community provides a generally reliable qualitative indicator of the impact of moral panic, given that those who produce racist or anti-migrant comments may not be eager to admit this officially, particularly in the UK, where various anti-racist policies exist and those who do not comply with them may be challenged. This was corroborated by our respondents, who usually experienced biased or hostile reactions in unregulated spaces, as noted, for instance, by one respondent in Hull [37]:⁷ 'This [anti-Polish claims-making] can mainly be heard in the streets. They comment that Poles do this or that or that Poles take British jobs or [that] we speak Polish.' Another respondent from Newcastle [1] said: 'Prejudices are expressed anonymously in pubs, restaurants, movies, rarely at work. These are hostile comments, go back where you came from, you take our jobs, we don't want you here, or they spit at us, throw chips and stuff like that.' The space of the workplace is less likely to be used to express explicit anti-Polish comments that would challenge the principle and application of equalities legislation. As a respondent from Newcastle claims [5]: 'In Britain you can think what you wish but you can't say it because it's a crime. You may hate one nation or another, but you can't say it ... Sometimes you can guess that you're an object of hatred or a given individual has a problem with you, but you can't say it.' In fact in one case this actually happened when an English co-worker openly complained about 'Poles taking our jobs' and was subsequently disciplined by the employer and lost their job.

Forty-six qualitative interviews with Polish migrants who arrived in the UK after 2004 were conducted in a period of a worsening economic climate, particularly in the north of England. There the three regions in question, the North East, the North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber had some of the highest

⁷ Numbers in square brackets refer to the sequence of interviews conducted with respondents.

unemployment rates in the UK [ONS 2014]. The sample of respondents was made up of a variety of occupations and social and gender backgrounds reflecting the diversity of new Polish migrant communities in the north of England. Less than 12% of the respondents were recruited through personal networks. Given that the majority of Polish migrants were employed mainly in low-skilled/semi-routine occupations, even though growing numbers have also been entering intermediate-level/skilled occupations [Eade et al. 2007; Drinkwater et al. 2009], the sample included the following respondents: 2 highly skilled professionals (e.g. a doctor), 13 professional workers (e.g. a secondary school teacher, a data analyst, clerks, social workers), 5 directors/owners (e.g. charity, business), 20 non- and semi-skilled workers (e.g. factory line operator, warehouse packer, cleaner, construction worker), 4 students, and 2 unemployed. It is important to note that the professional status of many respondents changed over the course of their migrant history, which on average spanned a period of six years, that is to say, initially they started in low-skilled jobs and then through the accumulation of cultural capital (e.g. additional education, improvement of language skills) lifted themselves into a higher professional rank. The sample also confirms earlier findings on individualised class and status hierarchies among Polish migrants in Britain. Eade et al. claim that migrants perceive class 'in terms of opportunities that lay *ahead* rather than an occupational or economic position held at *present* ... This approach towards class treated current occupation and social position in highly temporal and transient terms' [2007: 10; emphasis in the original]. The final note is that there were slightly more female respondents (24) than males (22).

Data collection and analysis took place in three stages. In the first stage, the interviews were collected and archival materials (e.g. press cuttings spanning the period 2004–2012) were analysed. The respondents were asked if they have experienced any biased or hostile societal reactions (one of the major indexes of moral panic); what was the source of these reactions; and what type of symbolic content the reactions had (that is to say, what type of folk devils' stylisation has emerged as the dominant one in claims-making practices). The analysis revealed that 25 of the respondents had experienced occasional but also extensive, systematic biased reactions from the indigenous population and 21 respondents had not experienced any biased reactions. These biased reactions comprised mainly verbal abuse, property damage, and hostile comments, some of them explicitly racist. In the second stage the interview data were condensed and coded according to their source; this stage provided a 'thick' description of major themes and a chronological description of events and their functions [see Strauss and Corbin 1994]. In the third stage the following problems were identified: (i) the historical field of the emergence of moral panic ideology⁸ that has changed or stabilised the

⁸ The term 'ideology' was not in this case defined in the narrow sense of a political practice, but as a practice of articulation, which establishes a given meaning for certain actors and social relations. Following the discourse theory of the Essex School [e.g. Laclau and Mouffe 1985], which states that language games comprise both linguistic exchanges and

way Polish migrant folk devils are perceived; (ii) the establishment of hegemonic nodal points (particular themes) that have resonated with the public or, in other words, capture the justificatory ideological accounts of actors engaged in moral panic events. As a result it was found: first, that the discursive content of moral panic claims-making was in most cases connected to the wider themes of employment insecurities or social security risks; second, that the emergence of moral panic themes was marked by the 2008 financial crisis.

Polish migrant workers in the north following the 2008 financial crisis

It is significant for the main argument of this article that according to the respondents there was a considerable increase in anti-Polish reactions following the 2008 financial crisis. As a respondent from Newcastle claimed [1]:

The situation has worsened. Six years ago the English were more open towards us, there wasn't this campaign that we are taking their jobs and benefits. Now it is like Britain for Brits not for foreigners... Poles have been respected here for a long time, the English appreciated Polish construction workers, cleaners, mechanics, nurseries. I think the English may have problems with getting a job and they blame everything on foreigners.

Another Newcastle respondent noted [6]: 'The problem started in 2008 when this financial crash came. I even had eggs thrown at my windows, a scratched car, that type of stuff.' A respondent from Washington added [15]: 'The situation occurred when a labour redundancy policy was implemented in the factory. When the crisis came. In the toilets, racist graffiti appeared, some targeting Poles.' A respondent from Leeds [21] noted: 'After 2008, when the crisis came to England, everybody began to be nervous, when you came across Englishmen in the street you heard: this is a Pole, he came to take our job. The attitude towards migrants has drastically changed.' A respondent from Hull [37] said:

I worked in a firm where Poles and the British were quite integrated. All was fine until the tsunami hit Japan and this firm cooperated with Japanese firms and contracts ended and people were dismissed. Then racist comments came, Poles were accused of taking British jobs. Everything started to disintegrate ...

It is important to note that, according to respondents, moral panic claims-making was mainly expressed by representatives of the more disadvantaged

the social actions in which they are embedded, our analysis did not separate ideology from activities carried out by actors [Laclau 1990: 44, 92]. The research focused on the discursive frameworks of actors' performances [Laclau 2005: 13].

segments of the indigenous community, ranging from the lowest paid and low-skilled workers to groups affected by endemic unemployment. As a respondent from Newcastle claimed [40]: 'Here in the North East there are many difficult neighbourhoods. If you leave your car there overnight they'll damage it. These people are hostile not only to foreigners ... The North East is full of unemployed from the closed mines and shipyards. Thatcher closed them all in the 1980s.' Another Newcastle respondent [25] said:

We experienced the worst situation a few years ago here in the place we live. This is a council district, and here we have faced the worst prejudice towards migrants ever. We had different types of damage and the person who did it was persecuted ... We were Poles, new, so they focused on us and started to intimidate us. They all lived on benefits.

Whilst a respondent from Hull presented a similar narrative [38]:

The people who blame us for taking their jobs are quite often those who abuse alcohol and live on benefits. Sometimes these are whole generations living on benefits. So when I hear that, I who have been working here two or three years, and my taxes support these people, I should ask them: when did you have a job, ten years ago, never? So these people blame us, but the truth is that since I started working here I have not seen any benefits, but part of my taxes go to these people.

What is significant is that respondents also point to the indifferent attitude of the middle and upper classes towards them. A respondent from Hull said [39]: 'Racist reactions do not appear at the more professional level because there are not too many Poles working in these positions and we don't threaten better-off British employees.' Another respondent from Hull [38] said: 'The upper class doesn't give a damn whether you are British, Polish or Chinese.' Characteristic examples were provided by a professional Polish respondent from Leeds demonstrating that a higher professional rank and greater integration into British society may conceal a migrant's 'folk devil' origin [22]: '... because my husband is an Englishman and my parents-in-law are English. My father-in-law sometimes watches TV and says these bloody migrants come and take our jobs, then I say I'm a migrant too, and he says: no, you are something else.'

In this context it is appropriate to note that our respondents perceived the linkage between the biased reactions they experienced at an individual level and the agency of the mass media (critical for the existence of moral panic; see Critcher [2003]), particularly the tabloid type, which have fuelled the anti-migrant campaign, as is evidenced in the statement by this respondent from Hull [38]:

A lot of articles have been published in *The Daily Mail* and that type of media, which are explicitly hostile towards Poles, and this created a media paranoia. They pro-

vided statistics out of the blue of how millions of Poles will come and will take absolutely all jobs from the British ... And this has tangible effects on especially the uneducated public. Hull is full of such people ... I see a relationship between a lack of education and racist comments. Those who read *The Sun*, which is the equivalent of the Polish tabloid *Fakt*, have this kind of mind-set: Poles came and took our jobs and benefits. The truth is that many Poles quite often do not have a clue about British law, they do not know that they are entitled to social benefits, they do not speak English, they do not know how to sort (these) things out.

A respondent from Sunderland [37] echoed this:

I work with people who make comments, I would say, implicitly racist. Usually that Poles are coming and taking their jobs. This is a major subject. Or that we take social benefits ... But we pay taxes here. The English also don't want to take the jobs we take for the given salaries. But these people I work with, they don't get the message. They don't read the right press; they don't watch the right documentary programmes. Their life revolves around tabloids ... The people I work with in the factory are programmed by anti-migrant polices.

Our purpose in this article is not to deeply explore the relevance of a class-based perspective in relation to employment risk in that more and more literature on class in the UK has already made this contribution. For instance, Mythen [2005] has demonstrated that the deregulation of contemporary British labour markets did not threaten the upper classes and that the class undifferentiated approach—as for instance in Beck's [2001] elaboration—to job risks is empirically flawed. In fact, as Mythen [2005: 140] has argued, employment insecurities in Britain are distributed unevenly, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that 44% of lone-parent households did not have an employment contract by the end of 2000, and in the mid-2000s young males aged 16–17 years faced the most difficulty in finding a job. In contrast to the hypothesis of universal labour market insecurities, members of higher and better-educated classes exhibit a relatively stable pattern of formal contract employment and it seems that the costs of a risk society are paid mainly by the most excluded and disadvantaged classes in Britain [Mythen 2005: 141]. Our contribution, acknowledging the class-based argument, and from the perspective of recent developments in moral regulation in moral panic studies, indicates that the anti-Polish migrant moral panic image was more likely to resonate with lower classes who were significantly affected by labour market insecurities. We argue, following Hier's conceptualisation, that this image functions as a dialectical moment representing the perceived harm posed by Poles, who are hindering British individual rights to be responsible for managing their employment insecurities. Hier reminds us that the moralisation of advanced liberal democracies functions as a proxy for the 'liberal conception of "the moral" that values individual rights' and 'one central, shared liberal moral value in an age of apparent moral relativism is to ensure one's right to freedom

from harm' [Hier 2011a: 538]. It is this liberal individual right to be responsible for individual employment risks—as moral panic imagery shows—that fell prey to harmful Poles. However, in contrast to Hier et al.'s [2011a] example of 'irresponsible' hooded youth in Britain, Poles were not denounced as 'irresponsible others' who fail to pursue an individual risk management, but rather as another variant of folk devil agency, which blocked the very possibility of being prudential, especially for those British classes who are structurally disadvantaged.

The endemic nature of moral panics and Polish migration

It is not suggested though that the involvement of the media or of government officials in blaming Poles for employment insecurities allows anti-Polish migrant panic to be defined in interest-group or elite-engineering terms as Goode-Ben Yehuda's [1994] model assumes. The underlying social processes, which are fed by the proliferation of print and online media, the ideological pluralism of British society, and institutional dispersion, are far too complex to be open to the instrumental control of social control agents (for a discussion on the constraints on contemporary social control agency see, e.g., McRobbie and Thornton [1995] and Hier [2008]). Of course, interest groups such as Migrant Watch UK, some sections of the media, and selected government officials have been involved in control efforts through which they have tried to change the regulative structures governing the position of Eastern European migrants in British society and have redefined certain aspects of migration policies. However, it would be too simplistic to attribute social control agency exclusively to them. Instead, it is suggested that the development of the analysed moral panic dynamics, in line with some contributions to moral panic scholarship [e.g. Watney 1987; McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Mawby and Gibsy 2009; Hier 2008: 177], needs to be understood as an endemic panic that did not originate from 'centralised points of social control' [McRobbie and Thornton 1995: 564]. In conformity with Thornton and McRobbie [1995], who drew on Watney's [1987] analysis of policing the AIDS problem in the UK during the 1980s, we should instead perceive anti-Polish moral panics as an instance of the escalation of more general anti-migrant resentments that have become embedded in the media and society over a longer period of time. In a similar way, Mawby and Gibsy [2009] argue that in contrast to the original model, which asserts that panics reach a peak of social concern and hostility, after which they fade away, contemporary anti-migrant panics should be regarded as 'open-ended'. In a contemporary risk society, where the folk devils function as the embodied symbols of deeper social anxieties (Ungar 2001), the anti-Polish migrant image should be inscribed in the broader surface of articulations that cover such themes as panics over asylum-seekers, anxieties about crime, and fear of unemployment [see Baker et al. 2008]. This field of correlated panics, which do not subside but rather underpin social antagonisms, constitutes the permanent reservoir of symbolic narratives for new panics to come. Only by relying on such an

extended field of family resemblance have the proponents of anti-Polish migrant moral panic devised a set of path-dependent articulation strategies that resonate with the public, which have led also to tangible effects that can be observed at an individual level. Without trying to imitate the Marxist point elaborated by Althusser [1994: 128–130], but following Hay's [1996] argument and more recently Hier's [2002a: 319–321] discussion of moral panic ideology functioning as a form of interpellation,⁹ it is conceptually appropriate to note that the variety of discourses on anti-Polish migrant moral panic inscribed in a chain of institutions (e.g. the mass media, social control agents, policy makers) acted effectively as 'ideological state apparatuses', which are understood here not as the means by which the dominant classes' power relations are reproduced, but as a discursive means of perpetuating the moral panic ideology that interpellates migrants as deviant subjects [see also Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 14]. As such discursive means, these articulatory practices might partly, though not exclusively, serve as justificatory tools that reinforce the social exclusion of migrants who are not able effectively to defend their employment rights, while, on the other hand, the moral panic discursive strategies bolster or establish the conditions for the potentially abusive practices carried out by employers and gang-masters, particularly at the initial stages of migration. Indeed, the existing literature provides evidence that Polish migrants, particularly those who have had either poor English language skills or a lack of knowledge of their rights [e.g. Fitzgerald 2008], are at a severe disadvantage when it comes to their fear of recriminations from their employer, and have been threatened with losing their jobs and accommodation and have fallen prey to abuses like illegal deductions from wages or incomplete wages [Anderson et al. 2006; Fitzgerald 2006, 2007; Craig et al. 2007; Philimore et al. 2008]. Our interview data also show the longitude effects of these abusive practices, which have grown in particular since the 2008 financial crisis, when employment risks became more visible and labour market competition increased. We also found a link between the perceived anti-Polish image that functions in the media and public and personal intimidation, with some respondents refraining from speaking Polish in the streets in order to avoid being abused [1]: 'When I walk in the street and see that some youngsters are coming I stop talking in Polish'; or another respondent stated [39]: 'It was at a disco, some guys asked me if I am Polish and I said that I am Russian, I thought it would be better because maybe they would be afraid of the Russian mafia and wouldn't hurt me.' The leader of a Polish association in the North East of England noted how she was trying to organise a festival of the Polish flag, but these efforts eventually failed after she received a number of critical comments from members of the Polish community who did not want to show off their ethnic status.

⁹ See also De Young [2004] for an account of creating points of resonance with the 'lived experiences' of the public during a moral panic over ritual abuse.

Conclusion

This article broadens the conventional perspective on anti-Polish migrant labour moral panic following recent revisions, most notably the contribution from Sean Hier, who argues that contemporary moral panics in Western societies constitute episodes of the long-term failure of the moral regulation process. Specifically, we argued, following Hier's conceptualisation, that the moral panic image functions as a dialectical moment which represents Poles as a threat and as hindering the individual rights of British citizens to be responsible for managing their employment insecurities, and this dialectic, as we add, is class-dependent. We claimed that the moral panic ideology largely affects Poles employed in low-skilled jobs. It serves to petrify stereotypical images of Poles in relation to employment risks and consequently contributes to their social marginalisation. This is not to deny, though, that certain segments of the Polish migrant community have been able to 'fight back' and resist social exclusion, which is exemplified by the growing Polish migration industry [Garapich 2008], and by the proliferation of ethnic on-line media that provide comprehensive information on the rights of EU citizens [Fitzgerald et al. 2012], not to mention the upward mobility of a significant number of Polish migrants in the labour market, which clearly limits the effects of moral panic stigmatising. We must remember that Polish migrants may also act as an important resource to be used in any fighting back strategy, in a manner similar to that described by Van Riemsdijk [2010: 121] in her study on the 'privilege of whiteness' of Polish nurses in Norway: 'there are important differences in access to power and resources within racial and ethnic groups'. Also, although the anti-Polish moral panic stereotype is based on an undifferentiated profile of the Polish labour migrant, we should acknowledge that this population is far from homogeneous [see Eade et al. 2007] and, as our interview data found, the probability of being affected by biased reactions was significantly determined by the amount of social and cultural capital the respondents possessed. It seems that those more prone to be stigmatised were less integrated into British society, were low-skilled, had poor English-language skills, and had fewer cultural capital resources. Respondents that were equipped with greater cultural capital resources (language skills, education) were significantly less likely to be interpellated as a 'deviant migrant'; they are also less likely to perceive biased British public social reactions. Polish migrants' strategy of fighting back, which relies on the social resources mentioned above (e.g. race, cultural capital), clearly calls for further research.

Importantly, we demonstrated that blaming Poles for posing a range of risks to the indigenous British population cannot be properly analysed as an irrational ethnic bias or an elite-engineering panic but instead is indicative of structural employment insecurities underpinning the British labour market. This attempt helps to shed light on why previous contributions to the discussion of anti-Eastern European moral panics in the UK (in particular Mawby and Gisby [2009] and Chan et al. [2013]) may benefit from a conceptual development informed by the

'Canadian turn' in the literature. More precisely, the conventional interventions indicate that anti-Eastern European migrant panics that have been analysed to date do not meet the classic criterion of volatility, that is to say, the decline in the panic over crime or job insecurity postulated in the original model does not in this case occur. Instead, as these recent contributions to the discussion have suggested, the panics that have been analysed should be understood as 'permanent'. However, neither Mawby and Gisby [2009] nor other authors have sought to unpack the possible reasons for the endurance or continuation of this state of 'perpetual crisis' in relation to the 'migrant menace'. Only Mawby and Gisby [2009: 48] have hinted in passim that further analysis of the 'slow burn model' would perhaps require 'incorporating the insights of risk-society scholars'. In this sense, the recurring image of the criminal Eastern European migrant that stands at the centre of Mawby and Gisby's [2009] contribution or the 'Polish plumber' threatening the jobs of British nationals in Spigelman's [2013] piece provide implicit insight from the perspective of the dialectics that govern individual risk management against the collective representation of harm as embodied by different categories of folk devils acted upon in the form of social grievances. These dialectics, as Hier reminds us, are cyclical (not a single volatile moment); moreover, the revised model suggests that the subject identified as the cause of a panic is empirically contingent and changes over the course of ongoing eruptions of panic. Consequently, the 'non-volatility' of the analysed panics in contrast to the conventional conceptualisation reveals a social mechanism at work that aims to restore the meta-project of moral regulation (e.g. compelling responsible individuals to manage the risks related to either crime prevention or employment).

Alternatively, perhaps the recent panic over Poles in Britain may also be inscribed within the broader 'culture of fear' [Furedi 1997], in which various fearful reactions distract attention from the inherent structural contradictions of the labour market. It was Critcher [2011: 267] who, drawing on Bauman's work, pointed to the instability of the early 1970s, when British capitalism started to 'breed insecurity' and that triggered a surge in various different panics. The welfare state was dismantled and trade unionism started to shrink, forcing different social groups and individuals to cope with the inchoate sources of insecurities through a variety of compensation mechanisms that were usually based on the 'moralisation of harm' [Critcher 2011: 265]. One mechanism was a moral panic strategy, which found 'substitute targets on which to unload the surplus existential fear that has been barred from its natural outlets' [Bauman 2007: 11 cited in Critcher 2011: 268], and migrants, according to Bauman, were the most common scapegoats on which these fears were projected.

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