

THE RACIST HISTORY OF THE UK AND THE 2016 EUROPEAN UNION (EU) REFERENDUM

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Ian FITZGERALD (1), Rafał SMO CZYNSKI (2)

(1) University of Northumbria, Newcastle Business School, e-mail: ian.fitzgerald@northumbria.ac.uk

(2) Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, e-mail: rsmoczyn@ifispan.edu.pl

Address correspondence to: Rafał Smoczynski, E-mail: rsmoczyn@ifispan.edu.pl

Abstract.

Objectives. This piece argues that Britain has a long history of racism, much of it emanating from its colonial past. It maintains that this has been not only ingrained in the upper and middle classes but also culturally embedded into the working class. Due to this, trade unions and indeed children's education have consistently not highlighted, or indeed dispelled the myths and lies regarding the 'non-exploitative' nature of colonialism.

Material and methods. As evidence of the above three main studies are detailed. The first two are of North of England Polish migrant data. The first a 2012 study and the second a post EU Referendum study. The third study is a post EU Referendum study involving UK trade union leaders and senior officers is utilised.

Results. Regarding Central and Eastern European (CEE) migration to the UK. There is initial discussion of the negative response of a UK Conservative party followed by a more positive response of UK trade unions and the Labour Government. However, it was also found that both groups were negative at times. As well as there being prominent prior and post Brexit racism. Due to a mainly regulated labour market, 'blame' was attached to UK migrants by politicians and political parties, this grew both during and post Referendum.

Conclusions. As noted, racism exists due to the UK's free market, exploitation, neoliberalism, and the financial crisis which has ignited a long-standing colonialism and empire. Although, there is some positive anti-racist training and work being undertaken by trade unions and other bodies with Show Racism the Red Card central to this work.

Keywords: Racism, Polish migrants, trade unions, UK EU Referendum.

Introduction

An argument can be made that to understand the UK's move away from the EU and some of the Leave campaign arguments, a path needs to be taken starting from the UK's imperial past. Cole (2015), amongst others, has recently detailed the UK's imperial past and the racist consequences for those coming to the UK. He notes the UK's colonial empire was legitimised not only by politicians, but also by scientists and scientific communities. Thus, in 1864, James Hunt (President of the "Royal Anthropological Institute"), addressing a meeting of the Institute stated

that “...*the brain of the Negro had been proved to be smaller than the European...* (p. xv) [concluding amongst other things] ...*that the Negro is inferior, intellectually, to the European*” (p. xvi). His colleagues did not disagree and spoke instead about his “excellent paper” (Hunt, 1864). The point here is that during this period and into the next Century a “framework” was created termed “social imperialism” (see Semmel, 1960). An example was leafleting millions of working-class people and creating pro-empire organisations to make clear the inferiority of those living in British colonies and the superiority of the British race (see Cole, 2015: p.30). Ultimately, this underpinned the racism that met those who came to the UK from these former colonies. Now given time, engagement with ethnic groups and new anti-racist policies, surely the worst racism excesses were likely to fade? However, Sivanandan (2008), for one, recently detailed the intersectionality of the UK’s colonial past, its need for labour, the racism that faced new entrants and indeed the anti-racist resistance shown by some. Moreover, Haydn (2012) confirms the social imperialism framework when he discusses the longevity of non-critical discussion in school curriculum of UK Empire and colonial history, whilst Nayak (1999) provides an important study detailing Northeast of England youth agreeing with the principles of anti-racism but retaining a number of “white” grievances, in relation to anti-racist policies that were seen as elitist and anti-white. He notes evidence of a “white backlash” to existing anti-racist legislation.

Now, turning to the three data sources, it is important to explore the way in which this longevity and grievance relate to Brexit. Flemmen and Savage (2017) argue that “imperial racism” is more likely to be expressed by the “elite” rather than those who are disenfranchised, although of course, the work of Nayak (1999) and indeed El-Enany (2017) identify several academic, news media and politician linkages between Brexit and Empire. The next section seeks to develop this argument by discussing recent racism in the main UK political parties and trade unions and during membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the EU.

Material and methods

British Racism before and during EEC and EU membership

Some racism and discrimination is in many ways linked to the UK’s lost empire and the ongoing tensions between labour market needs and immigration. In 1960 Pitchford (2011) reminds the reader of the “...*confused relationship Britain had with Europe and the USA, both of which were inherently associated with lost Empire...*” (p. 75). He discusses the Conservative party (in office 1979 to 1997) and its association with the extreme right, with Britain’s fading empire and its ongoing racism. Tensions in the party often came from those stating more had to be done regarding immigration, with ex-colonies being a central issue, but also with regard to the growth in the right-wing anti-EEC Monday Club (see Pitchford, 2011), a group which was until recently endorsed by the party. The fascist National Front (NF) and the Monday Club had associations and not surprisingly had an anti-immigration stance. Due to both the growing prominence of this group in the party and the fear of losing members to the NF, the Conservative government policy often moved to the right with an anti-immigration stance. Interesting here were the Monday Club’s earlier links with the infamous Enoch Powell. Powell was an anti-immigration Conservative politician who had stature in both the party and country as whole. In 1968, prior to entry into the EEC, he made his now infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech, where he “...*predicted that violence would explode if the number of immigrants continued rising*”. Powell is cited as noting “*As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding ...: Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber' foaming with much blood*” (Whipple, 2009, p. 717). Although he was dismissed from his Shadow ministerial

position due to this speech, it galvanised a number of trade unionists. For example, both the London dockers and Smithfield Market meat packers marched in his support. Powell's anti-immigration stance had significant public support, see Sandbrook (2018) who discusses this. Also in the case of Saltaire (a Yorkshire village in 1974) when approximately 2,000 people arrived for an Enoch Powell speech (Wellings, 2013). Although, Powell was not a stance supporter of slowing down de-colonisation, much of this anti-immigration debate and the engagement of Conservative politicians involved references to the UK's former empire. However, the UK joined the EEC on the 1st January 1973 under a Conservative government, followed by an EEC Referendum some two years later. Although, this did not mean that there was a more relaxed stance regarding immigration, Pitchford (2011) argues that when Margaret Thatcher led the party, she moved it more to the right. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising to hear that in the 1978 election campaign she commented "*...people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture*" (Thatcher, 1978, as also cited in Pitchford, 2011, p. 226). This type of rhetoric also continued during the Conservative Party election campaign of 2001, when the Conservative leader, William Hague, stated his speech during an election as follows "*...elect a Conservative government and we will give you back your country*" (BBC, 2001: our emphasis).

Turning now to the Labour Party, who aim to politically support workers, it is perhaps surprising to learn that they have a long history of support for the British Empire and indeed many of its racist consequences (see Davis et al., 2003). Indeed, Joshi and Carter (1984, p. 55) make clear that there was **no ongoing policy of decolonisation**, the point being that following the Second World War, labour market shortages were being met by newly arriving black workers and there was little protection for these workers due to the colonial racist framework. It was not uncommon to see landlords display "no Blacks, no dogs, no Irish" signs on their properties when renting, which was perfectly legal. Significant then were the racist incidents and framework that existed whilst a Labour Government was in power. Joshi and Carter (1984) conclude that even though black workers were involved in the labour movement: "*The Labour Party... steeped in traditions of colonialism and its accompanying racism, saw only 'problems' caused by the importation of numbers of 'uncivilised', culturally 'backward' 'coloured Colonials'*" (ibid, p. 69).

In the mid-1960s and 1970s, there was some government recognition of racial discrimination, which meant that in 1965 Labour introduced the first Race Relations Act. However, this did not outlaw many racist issues, including the "no Blacks, no dogs, no Irish" signs (see Runnymede Trust, 2015). Although a new Labour Government in 1976 did pass a "comprehensive" anti-discrimination act (see Davis et al., 2003, p. 13), Cole (2015), argues that twenty-years later Tony Blair's 1997 New Labour government's "*racism... arguably exceeded that of the Thatcher years and laid the foundations for the ConDem government of 2010*" (p. 38). Interestingly, Fielding and Geddes (1998) also discuss issues in the Labour Party regarding the acceptance of new ethnic members. They conclude that some ethnic groups "*...found the channels of the formal political process blocked. This could be construed as evidence of Labour racism...*" (p. 69). On the other side, Gillborn (2008, p. 75) argues that race equality in education under New Labour was more rhetoric than action. Paramount here in New Labour's education policy was an "*...aggressive majoritarian 'common sense' assimilationism – the constant assumption [is] the interests, feelings and fears of White people must always be kept centre stage...*" (ibid., p. 88). Further, Kundnani (2007), whilst discussing anti-Muslim racism, highlights how entering the Central and Eastern European (CEE) May 2004 accession, the politics of cultural diversity had been all but replaced by integration. He argues that this meant "*...individual and institutional racisms, ...the principal barriers to the creation of a genuinely cohesive society, received little*

attention...” (p. 27). Interestingly, Cole (2015, p. 38) argues that the Conservative Party leader Margret Thatcher described “... *‘New Labour’ as her greatest achievement*”. Therefore, prior to the May 2004 CEE accession, both main political parties and their governments had not only displayed racism, but supported policy that maintained a racist UK. However, before turning to the CEE ascension, the position of the UK trade unions will now be considered.

Trade unions are the other main workers support at a workplace level and given the present discussion, the reader may find it heartening to learn that during the 1960s “...*in Britain, anti-imperial and anti-colonial sentiment was a persistent presence within the trade union and labour movement*” (Breitenbach, 2019, p.238). However, Davis et al. (2003) provide an alternative view, arguing that due to social imperialism the “...*attitude of the mainstream labour movement leadership to the empire was at best silent on the issue and at worst aggressively pro-imperialist*” (p. 6). They discuss the colonial policy of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), including establishing a Colonial Advisory Committee, concluding that it was never anti-imperialist. This is supported by others, for example when de-colonisation begun and Asian and black workers came to the UK “...*the common reaction of white trade unionists to black migrant workers was to see them as a ‘cheap labour’ threat, and potential strike breakers*”(Wrench, 1986, p. 5). Although Wrench does highlight some positive trade union anti-racist initiatives, as with the Labour Party, he notes the “white” exclusion of these workers from trade union membership and engagement. This is also discussed by Sivanandan (2008) who provides a number of examples of both “trade union racism”, but also Asian and black resistance. Davis et al. (2003), though, highlight that finally in the mid and late 1980s two large unions (the National Union of Public Employees [later merged to form Unison] and Transport and General Workers’ Union [later merged to form Unite]) appointed officers “...*responsible for race equality issues...*” (p.108). By the mid 1990s, two-thirds of TUC affiliates had taken some form of positive action to tackle discrimination and black participation in unions (Wrench, 2004, p. 37). However, Wrench (2004, p. 121) concludes that many British activists were “...*rooted in a politicised “race relations” tradition... ...suspicious of a consensual diversity management approach. ... [With a negative approach to] ethnic equality mainstream[ing]*”. Whilst Davis et al. (2003) accept that the trade union movement had moved from racist exclusion, through acceptance of ethnic minority workers, to an active defence of these members’ interests, due to economic, political and media approaches this ‘good’ practice became ever more difficult to implement, including transferring national strategies into local practices. Thus, the argument so far has been that British imperialism has to some extent become ingrained politically and socially. Given this coming into the accession of CEE workers what type of welcome might they expect from government, opposition parties and trade unions?

Results

The 2004 Central and Eastern European Accession: A new dawn for the UK?

The Conservative Party and their general election campaigns provide an initial answer to this question. The 2005 campaign had echoes of the 2001 campaign, as one of its main strategies was billboards and arguments around the theme of “*‘are you thinking what we’re thinking’ it’s time to put a limit on immigration*”. This would seem to confirm that Britain would continue with its colonial racist framework. In addition, the main challenges of CEE free movement were that at an early stage it led to the largest ever single in-migration to the UK, with Poles by far the largest group (Salt and Miller, 2006). However, with the re-election of the Labour Government in May 2005, there was generally a positive response to new CEE workers at national, regional and local

levels. Briefly, the government issued several “positive” migration reports (see Dench et al., 2006; Gilpin et al., 2006; Home Office, 2007), but more importantly, they supported regions and local government with extra resources and funding to support local migration initiatives and distributed good practice guides (see CRC, 2006; I&DeA, 2007). For example, local information delivered packs to new CEE workers and other support for non-government organisations (NGOs) (see Crewe and Nantwich, n.d.; East Riding Council, n.d.) and the creation of local websites with information on local areas and the provision of ‘information’ sessions in local community centres (see Fitzgerald, 2008; Hunt and Wicks, 2008). However, Hunt and Wicks (2008, section 5.4 p. 5.17), amongst others, did note the “urgent need” to work more closely with the indigenous population, as perhaps these ongoing engagements with CEE migrants would re-ignite the types of indigenous ‘grievances’ noted by Nayak (1999), or worse direct hate crime.

Turning to the identification of these more negative responses to CEE migration, trade union approaches to CEE workers should be considered. To begin with, trade unions were positive in their approaches to new CEE migrants (see TUC, 2004; SWTUC, 2005; NTUC, 2006; Carby-Hall, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2008) and not only tried to deal with abusive employers, but also worked in local communities with NGOs, for example. Significantly, organisationally they were inclusive creating migrant and Polish only democratic structures (Fitzgerald and Hardy, 2010):

Among trade union strategists and policy makers in leading positions in the TUC and affiliate unions, there was a recognition of past failures regarding their approaches to migrant workers, which have been replaced by an unequivocal commitment to freedom of movement, anti-discrimination and anti-racism, at the level of rhetoric at least (p. 145).

Generally, then both Labour Government and trade unions were positive towards new CEE migrants, although the Conservative party less so. However, as highlighted, there were tensions at both a union workplace (Fitzgerald, 2007; Mustchin, 2012) and community level (BRO, 2007; Cook et al., 2008). Firstly, Fitzgerald (2007, p. 16) notes that in the northern food sector, wages and conditions had been reduced following the introduction of low-wage CEE workers, causing a number of workplace incidents. Whilst in research undertaken by Mustchin (2012, p. 964) he states that “...numerous interviewees indicated that some union members expressed resentment that resources were being ... directed towards newly recruited migrant workers as opposed to more established members”. At a wider community level an “Expanding Communities” conference had taken place in the West Sussex area. The conference had followed the same positive lines as noted above and its central aim was to identify and help rectify any issues for new Polish and other CEE communities. During the conference a presentation by Lincolnshire Police identified hate crime incidents against CEE workers. They noted that this was often due to the “myths and lies” spread by individuals and political groups (Lincolnshire Police, 2007). Following the conference, a local mainstream newspaper (“The Bognor Regis Observer”) allowed an extreme right wing British National Party parliamentary candidate (Dr Emerson) to write a hate-filled piece. The piece began with strong criticism of the “Expanding Communities” conference asking why the local council had not organised an “*invasion of Eastern Europeans*” conference for indigenous residents. What then followed were the types of myths and lies discussed by the police. These included the supposed economic and social benefits that Poles received compared to local whites (BRO, 2007), as well as the issue of CEE migrants taking local resident’s jobs and lowering their wages overall. In the north of England in Leeds (Yorkshire and the Humber region), Cook et al. (2008) also identified both positive community engagements with new CEE migrants but also, as with Bognor Regis’, resentment that CEE migrants were getting more support. Thus “...Poles are very often put in predominantly white areas... where the white

people are unemployed. [They] see a Pole working hard... buying a house [and] feel jealous” (p.27 – Polish community worker respondent). Hate crime and resentment towards new CEE migrant workers has conceptually begun to be termed xenoracism. Xenoracism has been discussed and developed by Fekete (see 2001, 2009) with regard to refugees and Sivanandan (2001, 2009) who specifies that it impoverished white immigrants. In particular, Sivanandan (2009) argues that “...*East European immigrants...[face] a compelling economics of discrimination, akin to racial discrimination, effectively racism under a different colour, xeno-racism’* (p. viii). Cole (2015) develops this directly linking it to a UK neoliberal environment and the employment abuse that many CEE workers faced due to poor employer practices.

Xenoracism itself has in fact intensified following the banking financial crisis in late 2007 due to a direct link between this crisis and central government austerity measures. Amongst other things, these austerity measures led to an almost sudden withdrawal of all NGO and regional and local government funding for the types of local initiatives described earlier for CEE migrants. This situation occurred because the government transferred £1,162 billion of public money to the baking sector, still owed £22 billion (National Audit Office, 2022). This then meant budget reductions in all UK public services such that by 2018 local councils had lost 60p out of every £1 of government funding (LGA, 2018). Then of course there was a change in government in 2010 who fully implemented austerity and, in many ways, supported a more unwelcoming environment for CEE workers. Evidence of this new unwelcoming environment is provided by Burnett (2016) who details some of the racist comments and actions of the new Conservative Government, in particular its Prime Minister (David Cameron), Foreign Secretary (Phillip Hammond) and Home Secretary (Theresa May). It was of course the Home Secretary who introduced a supposedly “hostile environment” for only so called “illegal” immigrants. However, this “hostile environment” has affected all migrant workers, including CEE migrants (Cole, 2020). Burnett (2016, further argues that “...*if a hostile environment is embedded politically, why should we be surprised when it takes root culturally?*” (p. 4). The worst most public display of this was the Windrush scandal, which led to black UK residents who had lived in the UK all their lives, by either being deported back to the West Indies or threatened with deportation. A later government ‘review’ led to government apologies and compensation offered (UK Government, 2020), however there has been criticism of the slow rate of compensation payments (BBC News, 2021). The overall point here being that government had moved back to an anti-immigration stance. It should also be highlighted though that in 2007 in his Labour Party leader maiden speech the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown had talked about ‘British Jobs for British workers’ (BBC News, 2007). There were also elements of the Labour party, who in many ways followed this line (see for example Sandbrook, 2011). Thus, Labour Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper in 2014 stated that “...*it is not racist to be worried about immigration or to want stronger controls...*” (Travis, 2014: p. 3). Further, Bush (2015) provides the example of a racist Labour Party mug! Overall then xenoracist Government rhetoric and indeed elements of the Labour party opposition, energised an anti-immigrant culture. This was then applied to economically poor CEE communities who in a number of cases were suffering not only abuse at work but also in the community. The next section discusses the situation for local northern Polish respondents and how senior trade union officials responded to immigration pre-EU Referendum.

*Primary data**The Plight of Polish Workers following the Financial Crisis*

The initial Polish community study began in 2012 and involved a Polish language questionnaire (response rate 125) uploaded to five Polish language, Polish administered, community websites in the north of England (Q denotes responses). Then, in 2013, forty-six semi-structured interviews were undertaken with Polish respondents in the north of England (Int. denotes responses). To provide a wider context also relevant are first round pre-EU Referendum interviews with 11 trade union senior officers, assistant general secretaries and general secretaries from the separate research project indicated.

To begin with it is worth stating that Cole (2015) notes the large-scale introduction of CEE workers means that these workers have suffered xenoracism been “...*racialised* [as well as] *exploited, oppressed and vilified*...” (p. 53). This “exploitation” and its link to indigenous workers was directly commented on by our trade union interviewees when asked about accession migration:

...I think exploitation is rife with little regulation and enforcement... [CEE workers] have been used by big employers to cut wages... ...Something has to blow and it pits indigenous against migrants (Yorkshire and the Humber TUC Regional Secretary).

Employers say they can't do without migrant labour but people can't survive on the pitiful levels of pay. So you have this problem of somebody earning four times what they would have in their home country on the minimum wage and ...based in inferior accommodation. (Unite Assistant General Secretary)

There are pockets in our membership that are wary about the EU because the migration issue has been whipped-up by the media. One or two branches in the film industry are moaning that they never get time to do anything because they finish one project and then start another. But then they are also moaning about East Europeans coming over and stealing their jobs. There is a contradiction there. (BECTU Senior Officer and ex-President)

We have a lot of concern and questions about migrant workers taking our jobs... At a shop floor level there are members who have lost their jobs and seen cheaper workers bought in. (USDAW Senior Officer)

Turning now to the 171 questionnaire and semi-structured interviewee Polish respondents 89 (52%) identified some form of ‘racial’ slur. With slurs concerning their nationality taking place in the community, at work and with children being bullied at school. As commented on above comments mainly related to Poles “taking British Jobs” and a need for them to “go home”:

*... Poles do not speak well English but they do understand ‘f*cking Polish’ and it leads sometimes to clashes, conflicts...* (Int.29 – worked in construction – Hull)

Often it happens in poor districts of Manchester ... usually ... ‘you take our jobs’ and ‘you live like rats’. (Q59 – transport worker – Manchester)

The crisis has changed everything and old good time has vanished... [Now it is] ‘go home’, ‘taking our jobs’, ‘we don’t want you here’ (Int.3 – cleaner – Newcastle)

...often racist comments from passengers... we ‘take British jobs’ and we ‘should go home’. (Q46 – public transport worker – Sunderland)

Perhaps not surprisingly also evident were a number of comments related to the types of “myths and lies” noted earlier that have been consistently detailed by media and right-wing political parties (e.g. BRO, 2007):

[Have you suffered British bias/dislike?] *Yes when it comes down to opinions that Poles abuse British tax and benefit system. (Q34 – HMRC civil servant – Middlesbrough)*

They ask when I go back to Poland or ask ‘why you immigrants get council homes’! (Q42 – works in education – Gateshead)

English people mostly concentrated on examples how we abuse their benefits, no one want to hear that many of us have a whole family here [all of whom] ...work here and ... pay taxes. (Q82 – factory worker – Hull)

It seems then that the divisive approach of the state to race, as detailed by Burnett (2016), had indeed taken “root culturally” and in our case was directed at Polish workers. In fact one of our interviewees (Int.37 – Newcastle) who worked for the police as an interpreter noted a number of comments by police officers such as “...*there must be a hardship in Poland and all rats have been eaten...*”. More prevalent though were the many other racial slurs in the community, at work and in schools with a number of respondents also stating that neighbours and others had damaged cars and property. These led to the unfortunate situation of some female and male respondents stating that, due to xeno-racism, they now did not venture out-at-night, as afraid of violent incidents. In fact, in some cases respondents were afraid to reveal their Polish identity. So, when in public they did not speak in Polish and/or concealed ethnic identity in some other way. In response to this a Polish community activist in Newcastle had “campaigned” to organise a “fest of Polish flags”. These would be flown from people’s dwellings, not surprisingly ‘almost nobody agreed’. Poles then were present in not only a “hostile state environment” from 2013 (Cole, 2020) onwards, but also since free movement in May 2004, had entered a loosely regulated UK labour market. Overall then they were very much in a xenoracist framework, which Fekete (2009, p. 20) argues the new Labour Government of 1998 had incorporated for asylum seekers. But as argued this was also applicable to CEE workers as witnessed by respondents (Sivanandan, 2009; Cole, 2015, 2020). In fact of the 171 respondents 68 (40%) had suffered some form of labour market exploitation. Forty-seven of these (69%) had also suffered racial slurs:

I have had forced labour and overtime...[Also] delayed payments...I feel like a second-class human being. (Q77 – warehouse operative – Hull)

[There has been] *delayed payments and leave, you have to fight literally for everything. ...In the workplace Poles are forced to work harder than Englishmen. (Q81 – operative food industry – Hull)*

[There has been] *...not paying for overtime and constant control... [Also] some Englishman complain that we are taking their jobs and abusing benefits... [There is] verbal abuse, pointing a finger at Poles, spitting at us when Englishmen heard Polish language. (Q86 – works in education – Hull)*

[With the employer there has been] *...ill-treatment on grounds of ethnicity [and] forcing longer working. British workers say we are taking British jobs... There is a big bias against us. [Q98 – construction worker – Leeds]*

Permanent blaming for taking British jobs, worse treatment by employees and management team. (Q32 – employed in outsourcing – Newcastle)

A colleague from my firm once said that I should leave the country because other Englishmen cannot get a job (Q4 – maintenance technician – Newcastle)

Overall, when you consider those who have been exploited and others who did not state this but noted racist incidents, we find that 109 respondents (64%) experienced these types of issues. So moving into the EU Referendum sixty-four per cent of our respondents had found the

UK a difficult place to work and live. Therefore, what was the situation likely to be following the Referendum?

Discussions

Polish Workers following the UK 2016 European Union Referendum

The Polish community project following Brexit began in October 2016, with a Polish language questionnaire uploaded to the same Polish language and administered community websites used for our first project (response rate 110). Followed by 35 semi-structured interviews. As before intersecting these are the second round of interviews undertaken with the same trade union senior officers, assistant general secretaries and general secretaries in late 2016 and early 2017. In 2021 the third round of the project started featuring interviews undertaken with Polish labour migrants based in the north of England. The focus was on the self-reported British reactions towards Poles after Brexit.

The EU Referendum campaign had been deeply concerning with regard to immigration. As Levy et al. (2016: p. 4) note “...*Europe was not a particularly salient issue for most voters in the period until 2010 and only became so after it was linked together with immigration*”. They analysed 3,403 press articles that discussed the Referendum. With sovereignty and migration one of the main features, Moore and Ramsay (2017) in fact also identify 4,383 articles that referred to the effects of immigration in an ‘overwhelmingly negative’ way (p.9). They also highlight the leading government figures supporting this negative framing (p.165). Our argument is of course that a xenoracist framework was already in place and the Leave campaign built on it. In fact recent research has indicated how this can be identified in Leave voters narratives (see Patel and Connelly, 2019).

As before concentrating on trade union respondents, not surprisingly, post Referendum all trade unions, including the Leave unions (ASLEF, BFAWU and RMT) were critical of the negative immigration discourse of newsmedia, politicians and political groups. As the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Secretary stated:

...we have a much more unsupervised, unregulated employment market ... Unite and GMB have said openly that the campaigning they did with members in factories they were openly racist... [As the Leave campaign] ...was no more immigrants...

I have no doubt that people's views of migration are nurtured by circumstance, they find themselves in communities where we have had 30 years of austerity... [This has] undermined wage rates and of course the free market has led to a freedom to exploit for unscrupulous employers... They have used migrant labour from Europe and ...flood[ed] the market with cheap labour... [Therefore] in bars, workplaces, cafes, houses, wherever, people were meeting. With terms being [mainly] set by a right-wing media and UKIP... if not fascist groups... Every day we are picking up stories about people being abused... We had a manager walking into a place of work, the day after the Referendum, saying ‘I have a coach outside for yer, who's on yer way?’ (Unite Assistant General Secretary)

We are reacting strongly to the ‘school census’, there is a real worrying turn from the government as there is I guess a flirtation with racism. ... They are now asking schools to ask parents the nationality of their children. This is a new question that was not asked previously, the Department for Education has said they want it to gain statistics so that they can target support. But we know the Home Office is getting that information and we are

worried that schools are being turned into mini-immigration offices checking up on people's immigration papers. (National Union of Teachers General Secretary)

These quotes echo xenoracist research (Cole, 2015; Sivanandan, 2009) and provide a framework to understand our data, which prompts to turning now to Polish respondents to see again how this xenoracist framework affected them. Significantly, the second round of research was conducted some 4-6 months into the Brexit period and then 6 years after the Referendum. With a number of respondents actually stating that the situation was now calmer. Perhaps due to this an overall lower proportion of the 145 questionnaire and interview respondents identified some form of racial slur (61 – 42%). Although, an interviewee did state “...Englishmen who have always been xenophobic got more confident and have become more openly, explicit...” (Int.24 – Newcastle). Others were clear when detailing these racial slurs and again these were mostly regarding Poles needing to “go home” and to stop “taking British jobs”:

[There are] insults like ‘go back to your country’ or ‘if you visit Poland during your holiday, stay there forever’... They say constantly ‘we have regained our country. You will go back to Poland very soon’ (Q26 – fork-lift operator – Hull)

I was in the big mall where one man came to us. He told me I should go back to my country. He said I had no right to chat with my son in English. (Q105 – account – Leeds)

There is so much hate, aggression and intolerance in the same country, which popularises rules about equality, freedom, respect for the law. The Equality Act 2001 is a fiction, a piece of paper... (Q62 – works in HR department – Newcastle)

But also evident were horrific physical assaults such as an awful case identified by an interviewee of ‘...a colleague who works at the store has a daughter, ...she was attacked and her hair set on fire...’ (Int.33 – Newcastle).

Questionnaire respondents and several interviewees also spoke about the “myths and lies” as discussed and that their children were bullied/or suffered racial slurs at school. For example, “...they laugh at him (son) that he is Polish ... I am trying to explain to him that maybe that is because these children have different problems at home...” (Int.7 – Newcastle). Also evident was the “hostile reaction” that respondents now felt, and a belief that Polish workers were now unwanted. The recent research of Teodorowski et al. (2019) investigated the affects of Brexit on Scottish EU citizens, with Poles prominent. They found amongst other things that EU citizens had “...been left feeling unwanted, unwelcome, marked out as different and treated as inferior” (p.4). Our respondents expressed this in the following way:

...there is a very negative attitude to people from Eastern Europe... They do not want us here... (Q17 – packer – Hull)

I see we are not welcome here. (Q110 – driver – Gateshead)

I have a neighbour who welcomed us very warmly until the Referendum then relations deteriorated. Her children began to be very rude to my children, me and my husband. She began to attack us verbally. (Int.14 – Gateshead)

I see that some neighbours have changed their attitude. They looked with envy at our diligence. We are able to work very hard to have what we want. The English aren't. (Q38 – cleaner – Leeds)

Overall then it seems that the policy of “integration”, which had been introduced due to a concern about Muslim ghettos (Kundnani, 2007) is no longer relevant and was being replaced with an unwelcoming xenoracist framework with all its consequences. An element of this framework is of course employment issues, but as with xenoracism overall, the proportion of respondents experiencing issues had gone down. Thus interviewees spoke mainly in broad terms

about issues but nobody identified actual specific issues. Whilst 36 (24%) of our 110 questionnaire respondents noted issues but this again was lower than the proportion in our first project in 2012-2013. Although, this is still nearly a quarter of all respondents and there was a rise in racial slurs (30 – 83%), which overall is simply unacceptable:

[An employer] *deceived me, I lost my money... I was [also] offended on the street because of my Polish roots... The British feel like Lords after Brexit. We are only temporary workers... we should go back to our countries...* (Q19 – Hull)

I had to fight over my money with employers. ...I am also insulted by some people because of my roots... Insults and calls of 'go back to your country'. (Q23 – schoolteacher – Leeds)

Agencies treat people in a terrible way [also] I was insulted by Englishman who don't like foreigners... (Q63 – quality Inspector – Newcastle)

My salary is below average... work[ing] at a school... students often repeat the anti-immigration slogans ... 'immigrants take away jobs', 'there are too many immigrants', 'they will go back to countries of origin'... [Following Brexit] I am afraid of bad social atmosphere... in a pub with my colleague we were insulted by a drunk couple, because we chatted in Polish... (Q72 – substitute teacher – Gateshead)

Overall, those who experienced exploitation and those who did not but noted racist slurs we have 68 respondents (47%) who had issues combined with those who expressed forms of anxiety it is not surprising that Polish activists reported to us that many individuals, families and Polish businesses were seeking to move, and indeed had moved, to over EU countries. This post-Brexit movement out of Britain was particularly noticeable in the third round of research project (2021-2022). The interview data confirm that respondents noted greater numbers of Poles returning to Poland due to post-Brexit circumstances (e.g. deterioration of British economic conditions, the rise of racism), but also family issues and pandemic impacted their decisions.

Conclusions

The Resurgence of a Lost Empire?

Evidence has been provided that racism is a persistent feature of UK political structures and a feature of UK culture. This of course involves empire as the imperial name United Kingdom hints at. Whilst discussing the EU Leave campaign, those who voted Leave and Brexit. Virdee and McGeever (2017) also note the importance of the British Empire and racism:

The relationship between race and nation in England is intimately bound up with Empire. The colonization of a quarter of the world fostered a long lasting, expansionist worldview among the ruling elites in Britain. This had its own "blowback" at home through the consolidation of a colonial racism that came to define British politics. Crucially, this racism was further secured through working class incorporation into the imperial nation through the representative structures of the British state, including the Labour Party (p. 1809).

Central to this are the free market, exploitation, neoliberalism, and the financial crisis. These are also elements of a xenoracism that includes not only CEE workers but also refugees. All of whom were evident in the Leave campaign. Importantly just four weeks after the EU Referendum the National Police Chiefs' Council stated that 6,000 hate crimes were reported

(NPCC, 2016). Importantly, though these included crimes against long established ethnic communities, as well as newer CEE migrants. Central to these crimes were the two main themes ('go home' and 'taking our jobs') identified by our respondents. What should also be made clear is it was not working-class people, those who have really felt the pain of austerity, but the middle class who were the main Leave voters. As Dorling (2016, p. 1) notes two thirds of the Leave vote was middle class. Perhaps to some extent supporting Flemmen and Savage (2017) who argue that the "elite" are more likely to express "imperial racism". This though highlights two important points. The first is the ongoing link between British colonialism and education. As noted, Haydn (2012) highlights a lack of critical discussion in children's education to this past. Whilst Dorling and Tomlinson (2019: pp. 306-307) state:

Primary and secondary education... needs to incorporate more truths about imperialism... We cannot continue teaching the story of industrialisation as if it involved no African slaves, no destruction of the Indian textile industry.

Although not stated earlier it is worth highlighting that recently it has been well publicised that the UK police and in particular the London metropolitan police are 'institutionally racist' (see for example the Evening Standard, 2022; Guardian, 2022; Metro, 2022; The Times, 2022). This has also been noted academically for many years (Akram, 2022; Wight, 2003; Waddington, 1999). This then leads one to considering how those affected by race hate crimes are supported. In fact, Inquest, a charity, investigated this in depth arguing that Black people who died at the hands of the police had no accountability (Inquest, 2023). Their report involved interviews with human rights lawyers. It argues that between 2011 – 2021 52 black people died '*...in or following police custody and contact...*'. Concluding that Black people were '*...four times more likely to die...*'. Harris et al. (2022) also note that during the pandemic in the UK Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BME) were likely to be more harshly treated.

There is of course also the research of Nayak (1999) who amongst other things discusses post-imperialism and white "grievances" in the Northeast of England. As detailed a number of our respondents noted children being bullied or racially abused. Perhaps then an extension of "grievances" to include the newer CEE communities that have begun to settle in the north of England. This then brings the discussion to the second main point concerning the collected data. The two Polish data sources are not of course directly comparable as even though access to respondents was gained through the same websites and activists these were not the same respondents. But what emerges is that a higher proportion of Poles in the north in 2013 had experienced racial slurs than those following the EU Referendum. There was also a lower proportion that had experienced employment issues post EU Referendum. Although, when you consider racial slurs as well this was still in 2013 109 of our 171 respondents (64%) and following the EU Referendum 68 of our 145 respondents (47%). This is entirely unacceptable and is a strong indication of ongoing xenoracism and the UK's racist culture.

But closing on a more positive note, as stated many UK trade unions have started Brexit anti-racism campaigns. With the USDAW respondent noting that native British members were asking for anti-racist resources and in fact drove their campaign. Also important is a recent north of England based initiative co-ordinated mainly by the Northern TUC but it has also involved Unison. This initiative involves Show Racism the Red Card training workplace anti-racist ambassadors (see SRtRC, 2019). These ambassadors are workplace activists who will then engage with members and their communities to dispel immigration myths and lies. So let us hope these are early signs of a move to an acceptance and understanding of multi-cultural Britain. Nayak (1999), though, is right that there is a need to include white students but also as he details there is

a need to recognise the ever-changing ethnic geography of the UK. A UK that has not been constructed by an imperial “elite” but instead by a multi-ethnic mainly working-class population.

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