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Migrant Experiences of Conviviality in the Context of Brexit: Polish Migrant Women in Manchester

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This paper explores how people live together in different places in the context of Brexit. This issue seems more relevant than ever due to the continued attention being paid to immigration, identity and nation and raising questions about conviviality – understood in this paper as a process of living and interacting together in shared spaces. Building on my earlier research in 2012/13 and drawing on qualitative interviews conducted with Polish migrant women after the EU referendum in 2016, this paper explores the complexity of my participants’ everyday interactions with the local population in Manchester in the context of Brexit, viewed by many as a disruptive event impacting on social relations. The paper shows that conviviality is a highly dynamic process influenced by spatio-temporal characteristics, revealing not only tensions but also various forms of conviviality, in some cases sustained over time. It illustrates that, while Brexit poses challenges to conviviality, there are instances of thriving and sustained conviviality that endures despite exclusionary anti-immigration rhetoric. The paper also reflects on the possibilities of maintaining social connections and belonging in the context of Brexit, whereby some migrants become more rooted in their local areas and are likely to be settled on a more permanent basis, contrary to earlier assumptions that post-accession migrants are temporary.

Keywords: Polish migrant women, Brexit, conviviality, racism/xenophobia, belonging

Introduction

The outcome of the European Union (EU) referendum in the UK on 23 June 2016 was strongly linked to views about immigration. An Ipsos MORI (2016) poll showed that immigration was the top issue for British voters. The wave of post-Brexit vote hostility revealed the extent of the racism and xenophobia which affected migrants and minorities (Burnett 2017; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Komaromi and Singh 2016; Rzepnikowska 2018b; Virdee and McGeever 2018). While Manchester had the strongest ‘remain’ vote in the North West, the majority of Greater Manchester’s boroughs were characterised by the majority ‘leave’ vote, linked with an

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enduring frustration over immigration, including concerns about jobs, wages and public services. Many studies have shown that perceived threats to economic resources, particularly in cases of financial hardship and the risk of unemployment, lead to increased negative attitudes to immigration (Storm 2015). Hence, these longstanding frustrations should also be interpreted in the wider context of economic and political change in the UK since the 1960s which affects not only less-affluent Brits but also the ethnic minority population. Furthermore, these frustrations over immigration in the context of Brexit can be understood in terms of a resurgent nationalism and anti-immigrant populist sentiment forming part of the political narrative not only during the Brexit Leave campaign, but over at least the past six decades:

British immigration debates have long been intertwined with public anxieties over race and identity, with public hostility in earlier decades directed at black and South Asian migrants from former imperial territories in the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, who began arriving in large numbers from the 1950s onward. Yet starting in 2004, the focus of anxiety moved to the large new flow of migrants from EU states in Central and Eastern Europe. As a result, anti-immigration voters came to see migration (and the social changes that it brought) as an issue closely bound up with Britain's EU membership (Ford and Goodwin 2018: 21).

EU migration into the UK was a key issue in the EU referendum debates in 2016. The Leave campaign used the anti-immigration discourse to claim that the main cause of all the UK's issues – including housing shortages or the strained National Health Service (NHS) – is uncontrolled mass immigration from other EU member-states. Amber Rudd, in her speech at the Conservative Party conference in October 2017, said that foreign workers should not be 'taking jobs that British people could do' (see Vicol 2016), echoing Gordon Brown's 'British jobs for British workers' remark in 2007. Even though it seems that the responses of some politicians to EU migration have not been racially but, rather, economically motivated, they do produce racialised effects (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012). Furthermore, in the run up to the EU referendum in 2016, mainstream media reporting of immigration more than tripled over the course of the campaign. The coverage of the effects of immigration was overwhelmingly negative, particularly in the *Express*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* (Moore and Ramsay 2017). Amongst those migrants singled out for particularly negative coverage were Poles. Existing research shows a link between the language and behaviour of perpetrators of racist violence after the EU referendum and the rhetoric of some politicians and the media (Burnett 2017). Nevertheless, recent findings show a positive shift in attitudes since the Brexit vote across both the political and the social spectrum (Ford 2018; Ipsos MORI 2017). They show that, while a majority still want immigration levels reduced, people have become more positive about immigration in the last few years. About half of those who said that they have become more optimistic about immigration attribute this to more positive discussion about immigrants and their contribution to the UK, while a quarter said that they personally knew more people who were migrants either at work or socially (Ipsos MORI 2019).

Over the years since the Brexit vote, while some attention has been paid to attitudes towards immigration following the EU referendum, little is known about the complexity of the actual everyday experiences of migrants in their local areas, particularly Polish migrants, who constitute the largest group of non-UK-born nationals in the UK. Both prior to and at the time of the referendum, Polish migrants were subjected to significant levels of hostility and racialisation. This paper explores how people live together in the context of Brexit. The focus seems more relevant than ever due to the continued attention to immigration, identity and nation, which raise questions about conviviality – understood in this paper as a way of living together in shared spaces where diverse groups and individuals coexist. Building on my earlier work and drawing on qualitative interviews

conducted with Polish migrant women after the EU referendum in 2016, I explore here the complexity of my participants' everyday interactions with the local population in Manchester in the context of Brexit.

Brexit can be understood as a transitional event set in a broader context of economic, political and social transformation and impacting on social relations in various ways. Brexit can be viewed in different ways and from diverse positions, depending particularly on class, race, location, gender and age (see Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). As Anderson and Wilson (2018: 292) suggest:

Brexit is many things: the apparently accepted name for a decision that marks an event to come; a state project of disentangling and separating the United Kingdom from the European Union; a proliferating set of impacts and effects felt across multiple dimensions of life; and an end point to be desired, feared or more ambivalently related to.

My article focuses on the impact of Brexit on the everyday lives of migrant women in everyday spaces. The existing literature on geographies of encounter shows how some city spaces are more convivial than other. Amin (2002: 959) emphasised the significance of 'prosaic sites of cultural exchange and transformation' where 'much of the negotiation of difference occurs at the very local level, through everyday experiences and encounters'. He highlighted that 'micropublics', such as the workplace, schools, colleges and youth centres, may serve as sites of inclusion and negotiation. This means that people may step out of their daily environment and into other spaces which bring them together with those from different backgrounds and allow a habitual negotiating of difference. This is explored in more detail in this paper, which shows that conviviality is a highly dynamic process influenced by spatio-temporal characteristics and revealing various forms of interaction in immediate neighbourhoods, family spaces and workplaces. Amin (2008: 7) also reminds us of the erosion of public space, policing and neglect, resulting in the running down of public facilities and the emergence of 'dangerous' streets, causing fear and avoidance. This raises the issue of 'less convivial' spaces in cities marked by socio-economic deprivation, fear and avoidance. This paper pays particular attention to the spatio-temporal and highly contextual dynamics underpinning more and less convivial encounters. Conviviality becomes a useful concept, broadening our understanding of complex and ever-changing social relations in different places and in uncertain times.

I begin by providing some contextual information on Polish migration and outlining my methods. I reflect on the importance of conviviality in exploring migrant experiences. Finally, I discuss empirical findings which draw on the narratives of my female Polish migrant participants, who recounted their experiences of living alongside local residents in Manchester and the wider area of Greater Manchester in the context of Brexit. This illustrates the situatedness of conviviality within the geographical, social and temporal contexts. While my findings show how less-visible minorities can become racialised, they also provide examples of conviviality resisting racism and xenophobia, characterised by habitual interactions between mothers and neighbours, co-operation, trust and acts of care and kindness. This illustrates the possibilities of maintaining social connections and belonging in the era of Brexit, as well as a more resilient form of conviviality which is able to thrive in uncertain times. It also means that some of the participants become more rooted in their local areas and are more likely to settle on a more permanent basis, contrary to earlier assumptions about post-accession migrants being temporary.

Polish migrants in the UK and Manchester

The accession of eight new member-states (A8 – Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary) to the European Union on 1 May 2004 has resulted in significant migration

within Europe in recent years. The UK, as well as Ireland and Sweden, granted A8 nationals free access to the labour market immediately after the enlargement, in a bid to alleviate severe labour-market shortages, mainly in low-waged and low-skilled occupations in construction, hospitality, transport sectors and public services (Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly and Spencer 2006; Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2006). This freedom of movement attracted many Polish people, especially the young, who were affected by high rates of unemployment, low wages and a lack of opportunities in Poland (White 2010). These newly arrived migrants constituted the largest group from an A8 country entering Britain. Between 2003 and 2010, the Polish-born population of the UK increased from 75 000 to 532 000 (ONS 2011b). It was estimated that, in 2015, the most common non-British nationality was Polish, with 916000 residents or 16.5 per cent of the total non-British national population resident in the UK (ONS 2015), although these data do not record the length of stay and there is limited knowledge of how many have left the UK. According to 2011 census data, Polish migrants have the highest birth rate amongst other migrant groups in the UK (ONS 2011c) and the Polish language has become the most commonly spoken non-native language in England and Wales (ONS 2011a).

In the post-2004 period, Manchester has witnessed the arrival of Polish migrants, amongst other A8 nationals, who have contributed to a greater diversity of the city. The official statistics on their number and distribution are limited – according to Manchester City Council (2015: 29) data, Polish migrants constituted 1.2 per cent of Manchester's population and 0.8 per cent of that of Greater Manchester (based on self-descriptions). Polish is the second most-common language spoken in Manchester other than English. Polish residents are dispersed across Manchester and the area of Greater Manchester, although the City Centre ward and Cheetham are described as popular with the Polish community (Manchester City Council 2015). It is a city with a migration-friendly narrative characterised by wide support from local government (Smith 2010).

Polish migrants, as well as many other EU migrants, have been in a position of privilege in terms of the legal, social, cultural and racial capital closely linked to their Europeaness and whiteness (Burrell and Schweyher 2019). Nevertheless, Brexit might mean the removal of these protective privileges – which are linked to their EU citizenship status granted in 2004. Furthermore, despite their assumed whiteness, the Polish presence has become particularly visible across the UK, with Polish shops in most towns and cities, community centres, Polish Saturday schools, as well as visibly distinctive Polish surnames. This visible and audible difference has often been racialised, particularly in the context of Brexit (Rzepnikowska 2018b).

Post-accession migration has initially been considered as 'fluid migration' (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009) with no settlement goal and an undefined time period; it is associated with short-term, temporary and circular migration. Burrell (2010) reviewed previous studies which considered whether post-accession migration marks a new type of movement or whether it is temporary. The answer, however, for Burrell, is not so straightforward, as 'post-accession migrants are a diverse, not entirely predictable, population, all existing within the same economic framework but formulating different strategies of migration and return' (Burrell 2010: 299). Their intentions concerning the length of their stay will change over time (Ryan 2018; Spencer, Ruhs, Anderson and Rogaly 2007). Ruhs (2006) argues that post-2004 flows would not necessarily be as short-term as had been expected. While the impact of Brexit might affect settlement plans due to restricted mobility, the majority of my participants felt that they were settled in the UK and their local areas and were here to stay. Only two of my interviewees left the UK for family reasons. One of them obtained British citizenship, which gave her the unrestricted option of return to the UK in the future. Nevertheless, in most cases, Brexit has introduced a disruption in the continued security of Polish migrants as citizens (Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019).

My interviews before and after the EU referendum revealed that the length of residence in particular places – whether their local area or their workplace – and their relations with the local people both play a crucial role

in influencing the Poles' experiences of the conviviality that develops over time; this, in turn, can affect their sense of belonging, both in their neighbourhood and in the UK as a whole.

Conviviality: conceptual considerations

In recent years, a growing number of scholars have focused on exploring conviviality and discussing ways of living together in urban spaces, where diverse groups and individuals coexist in multicultural cities (Gilroy 2004; Heil 2015; Karner and Parker 2011; Morawska 2014; Neal, Bennett, Cochrane and Mohan 2018; Wessendorf 2014a, b; Wise and Velayutham 2014). As Nowicka and Vertovec (2013: 341) point out, 'conviviality across a number of disciplines now conveys a deeper concern with the human condition and how we think about human modes of togetherness'. However, conviviality should be placed in a wider historical context which influences the complexity of encounters with difference. Gilroy (2004) discusses two concepts: on the one hand, postcolonial melancholia – defining guilt and grief over the lost British Empire – and, on the other, conviviality. Gilroy (2006a: 2) argues that some European nations have been unable to get past their 'loss of global pre-eminence'; this inability then leads to 'all sorts of pathological features in their contemporary encounters with strangers'. Brexit became a symbolic marker of nostalgia for Britain's lost imperial past.¹ Gilroy (2004: xi) considers conviviality as the alternative to postcolonial melancholia – stressing the significance of how ordinary people manage tensions through the practice of living together – and defines it as 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of urban life in Britain's urban areas'. For Gilroy (2006a: 40):

Conviviality is a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity, but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not – as the logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must – add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication.

Thus, racial, linguistic and religious differences are not considered to be an obstruction to convivial experiences and communication between people who interact and live together. These two forces of postcolonial melancholia on the one hand and of convivial living on the other are often at play, and the relationship between the two is paradoxical and defined by ongoing tensions (Back and Sinha 2016). Similarly, Neal *et al.* (2018: 29) consider conviviality as 'a mode of togetherness but one saturated with and defined by ambivalence – tension, conflict, engagement and collaboration'. Hence, conviviality, in this article, is explored as a process of interaction that is not always free from racism and tensions (Gilroy 2004; Karner and Parker 2011; Nayak 2017; Neal *et al.* 2018; Nowicka and Vertovec 2013; Rishbeth and Rogaly 2018; Rzepnikowska 2019; Wise and Velayutham 2014).

While Gilroy focuses mainly on the postcolonial context, convivial encounters can no longer be solely explored in the context of a diversity conventionally characterised by the presence of African-Caribbean and South Asian communities from Commonwealth countries or former colonies but must also be seen through the lens of super-diversity as the result of an increase in migrants of different ethnic origins, with their diverse migration histories and their various characteristics such as gender, age, religion, language, education, legal status and economic background (Vertovec 2007). This includes Polish migrants who constitute a large proportion of ethnic minorities in the UK.

Conviviality can also be better conceptualised by drawing on the meaning of the Spanish word *convivir*, which allows us to understand conviviality as a mode of living together. In Latin, *conviv(ere)* means to live together (*con* 'with' + *vivere* 'to live'). In their analysis of the word *convivencia*, Giménez Romero and Lorés Sánchez (2007: 78) also refer to the Latin origin of the word and stress the Spanish interpretation of it as

'*acción de convivir*' (action of living together) or '*relación entre los que conviven*' (relations between those who live together). Therefore, I use the term 'convivial', as informed by the idea of *convivir*, to describe the relations of living and interacting together in shared spaces. Furthermore, my conceptualisation of conviviality considers geographies of encounter, a body of work focusing on encounters with difference in urban spaces and seeking to document how people negotiate difference in their daily lives (Amin 2002; Rzepnikowska 2018b; Valentine 2008; Wilson 2016). It concentrates on cities as spaces of encounters between people from different backgrounds and highlights the importance of gendered spaces – often overlooked in debates on geographies of encounter. In my previous work (Rzepnikowska 2018a), I used the concept of situated conviviality, which I further develop here, because my research shows that conviviality is highly dynamic, contextual and characterised by spatio-temporal dynamics.

I argue in this paper that conviviality is a useful conceptual tool in the context of Brexit, as it allows us to consider the complexity of migrant experiences and the changing nature of everyday social relations in these times of Brexit uncertainties and tensions. Nevertheless, scant attention has been paid to conviviality in the context of Brexit. My previous work (Rzepnikowska 2019) highlighted the fact that the racist and xenophobic violence experienced by Polish migrants has been particularly notable since the Brexit vote. Furthermore, based on interviews with EU nationals in 2016 and 2017, Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019) explore the various experiences of hostility and violence encountered by these migrants both during and after the referendum campaign. Burnett (2017) and Komaromi and Singh (2016) also focus on how the wave of post-Brexit-vote hostility revealed the extent of the racism and xenophobia which affected migrants and settled ethnic minorities, including British citizens. In the context in which Brexit produces tensions and divisions, other research shows how it also strengthened co-national relations and solidarity with other Poles (Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). This paper, however, shows a greater complexity of migrant experiences, the changing nature of encounters in the context of Brexit and the possibilities of more resilient forms of conviviality, experienced in different places and able to thrive in uncertain times. In addition, it stresses the importance of conviviality in understanding how migrants negotiate belonging and attachment to local people and places and the possible impact it can have on their settlement in the context of Brexit.

The research

My initial research, conducted in 2012/13, focused on different forms and degrees of conviviality in various city spaces and in the workplace by exploring the narratives of Polish migrant women in Manchester and Barcelona; it included participant observation, focus groups and narrative interviews. The interviews in Manchester included 21 Polish migrant women who were resident there and who entered Britain either just before or just after Poland joined the EU. I maintained contact with 15 of the 21 interviewees and contacted them again in 2017/18 to discover the impact which Brexit was having on their everyday experiences. The non-representative sample is varied, as it included Polish migrant women of different age, class, education level, family status and length of residence. The project received an approval from a relevant academic ethical review committee. The participants were interviewed at the place of their choice after signing the informed consent form which included information on anonymity and confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Initially, my research was not designed as longitudinal. As Ryan, Rodriguez, and Trevena (2016) point out, it would have been difficult to plan a longitudinal study considering the temporariness and uncertainty of Polish migrants' trajectories. This paper draws on the data gathered during both stages of my research, with the qualitative interviews examined through narrative analysis and focusing on how the participants tell their stories and what is important to them. I chose narrative analysis because it allowed me to use a person-

and case-centred approach and to concentrate on how the interviewees interpret and make sense of their experiences of everyday encounters in various parts of the city. Here, I mainly focus on the accounts of Renia, Nikola, Krysia and Oliwia (pseudonyms), illustrating how different local contexts, class dynamics and spatially distinct inequalities may influence migrants' experiences, relations with the local population and sense of safety and belonging.

The interviewees were aware of anti-migrant sentiment in the run-up to and the aftermath of the EU referendum. Several were fearful of the post-Brexit racism and xenophobia which they had heard about in the media or from family and friends. Uncertainty about the future in the light of Brexit has bred further anxiety and distress. Nevertheless, going back to Poland was usually not considered a good option because they felt settled in the UK or felt discouraged by the current situation in their country of origin. Their complex experiences in the context of Brexit have been very much influenced by class and temporal dynamics and by the areas where they live and interact with the local residents. Their narratives show both tension, hostility, racism and various forms of conviviality, all holding up against exclusionary anti-immigration discourses.

Conviviality under threat?

Renia's story

My research participants were aware of anti-migrant sentiment in the run up to and the aftermath of the EU referendum, some experienced post-Brexit racism and xenophobia. This was particularly Renia's experience. Renia, one of the oldest interviewees, in her sixties, experienced both conviviality and racism in her immediate neighbourhood in Ashton, Greater Manchester, both before and after Brexit. In her area, 61.1 per cent voted to leave, with all the wards, including Renia's, having a majority leave vote. As mentioned earlier, the leave vote was associated with a longstanding frustration over immigration in the more deprived parts of Greater Manchester. This can be linked to economic insecurity and the established population's concerns about immigration (Storm 2015), combined with a negative public, media and political rhetoric which developed over the years and marked immigration as one of the top issues for British people at the time of the EU referendum.

Renia's positive relations with her neighbours of a similar age, both before and after the Brexit vote, were overshadowed by xenophobic harassment by white British youth. It happened on different occasions, both long before the EU referendum – as she recounted in her first interview in 2013 – and just after the Brexit vote. This continued for months, until the caretaker intervened six months before our interview in 2018. This ongoing hostility affected Renia's everyday life. Even though the harassment stopped, Renia noticed that her relations with other neighbours were not the same after the Brexit vote in 2016. She noticed that a close neighbour, a white British woman, was no longer as welcoming and friendly as she used to be:

Everything changes. It constantly fluctuates. A neighbour who has been living here for several years, always used to talk to me, you know, she asked 'How are you, how is it going, is everything OK?' and everything was fine. Now, when I see her, she turns her head away and pretends she doesn't see me. I think that there starts to be a tendency of negative sentiment towards migrants because of Brexit. I can't tell you that this is 100 per cent the case, but I have this feeling based on people's attitudes.

This indicates how dynamic conviviality is and how it can be limited by specific events at certain times and in certain places. It illustrates how daily encounters are marked with tensions. As Neal *et al.* (2018: 38) point out, 'conviviality speaks to the unpredictable experiences and responses to urban multicultural'.

Renia does not work because of health issues but she was particularly concerned about and affected by her husband's experiences at his workplace after the Brexit vote in June 2016. As shown in other research, work has constituted a core aspect of living in the UK and the workplace became one of the most hostile environments, particularly for those in lower-paid jobs (Burrell and Schweyher 2019). Renia told me about an incident at her husband's workplace (a meat-processing plant in Greater Manchester) the day after the EU referendum, when several white British workers celebrated the Brexit vote victory and verbally assaulted migrant workers of Central and Eastern European origins. The chants included a racist slur: 'No more Polish vermin' which seems to originate from the racist incident in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. At this incident, laminated cards in English and Polish with the words 'Leave the EU / No more Polish vermin' were left outside primary schools and posted through the letterboxes of Polish people. Even though racism and xenophobia were not new to Renia and her husband, they had not experienced it on such a scale before the Brexit vote. This reflects how the imagined British 'we' during and after Brexit excludes those Polish and other non-UK EU citizens from post-accession countries who were, initially, seen as potentially able to belong to the British 'we' (Rzepnikowska 2019). The Brexit vote contributed to the construction of an imaginary national boundary line. In this example, EU workers are homogenised and considered as non-belonging, even though they still have the right to remain in the UK. This reflects the 'Leave; campaign's implicit discourses on race and migration, on who belongs and has rights and who does not, and is closely linked to the slogan: 'We want our country back' (Bhambra 2017: 91). Anti-migrant sentiment in the context of Brexit illustrates 'a more complicated racial stratification than is sometimes acknowledged (...) Eastern European whiteness in a Western European context carries with it further, emplaced, geopolitical racial connotations' (Burrell and Hopkins 2019: 4).

Renia's account also shows how migration, race, class and place are interconnected in the context of Brexit (Burrell and Hopkins 2019). While the so-called white (English) working class has often been labelled as racist and xenophobic, both in the context of Brexit and beyond, it is important to acknowledge that it is often working-class people, including ethnic minorities, who are amongst those the most affected by exclusionary politics such as austerity and anti-immigrant right-wing populism. The racialised and politicised discourse of the 'left behind' associated with the Brexit vote is closely attached to the category of the English white working-class, constructed as neglected in favour of migrants and ethnic minorities, even though deprivation also largely affects these latter communities (Isakjee and Lorne 2019; Khan and Shaheen 2017).² While the poorer sections of British society have been blamed for the Brexit vote, the racism and the xenophobia aimed particularly at post-accession migrants, it must be acknowledged that there was also a large middle-class 'Leave' vote; the lowest two social classes accounted for less than a quarter of the total Brexit vote (Dorling 2016).

Even though Renia's husband's employers responded to the incident by organising a staff meeting and explaining that similar behaviour would not be tolerated, everything changed after the incident. While there have always been some divisions at her husband's workplace, she gives here some examples of conviviality which was later disrupted by hostility in the light of the Brexit vote.

I don't work there but I'm affected by this. (...) They were always told to integrate. There was never such a huge division. My husband was better integrated with the British workers than with the Poles. (...) He preferred working with the Brits and singing with them on a Friday. (...) When Friday was coming, they were so happy at the production line. He preferred to goof around with them. He felt better in their company. (...) Now he feels some discomfort because he feels that he works the way he did before but they [the English co-workers] don't want him anymore. (...) They no longer sit together at the canteen. The relations changed completely. Everything changes.

Renia's narrative illustrates the fragile and temporary nature of workplace conviviality (see Rzepnikowska 2017 for a more detailed discussion), disrupted as it is by social inequality, exclusion and anti-migrant sentiment, all of which significantly increased at the time of the EU referendum. Renia felt that this deeply affected her and her husband and, as a result, they experienced a sense of disconnection to both their neighbourhood and the workplace. This, in turn, strongly influenced their sense of not belonging and added to their uncertainty over Brexit. Renia's account also highlights the emotional impact of Brexit on the changing relations between migrants and the native population, which triggered feelings of being unwanted and rejected. Recent research shows that non-UK EU citizens feel anxious, betrayed, undervalued and disempowered by Brexit and the prolonged negotiation process, and are uncertain about how Brexit will affect their lives, and future, in the UK (Botterill and Burrell 2019; Duda-Mikulin 2019; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2018; Sigona 2018; Trevena 2018). This is echoed in Renia's narrative:

I applied for Permanent Residence, I submitted the online application two months ago. But my children didn't. They think that there is no need, but I feel that I have to. And this is the difference. My daughter and her husband bought a house. My younger daughter bought a flat. But my husband and I live in [social] housing [a my mieszkamy w hauzingu], and we actually don't have anything here and we hardly speak any English. I feel very insecure [zagrożona] and they don't. And here you have a different way of thinking. It depends on the company and the people you work with. My husband comes back very distressed because he has started to feel unwanted for the first time in the last 12 years, as if he were no longer needed, but he is a really good and skilled worker.

This shows the importance of considering economic and cultural capital in understanding the impact of Brexit on migrants and their sense of insecurity. The possession of economic (property ownership) and cultural (speaking English) capital determines people's positions of power in specific fields. These forms of capital and the interplay between them, can be considered important in building a sense of security and belonging. Scarce economic capital can cause feelings of insecurity and powerlessness, of losing the right to live in the UK – therefore permanent residency / settled status is being sought in order to secure that right. This can particularly affect women and older migrants who might not be engaged in the paid labour market (Duda-Mikulin 2019), as is in the case for Renia due to her chronic illness. The process of obtaining permanent residence or settled status excludes a number of people, including female migrants who are homemakers or carers, those who are in unregulated work, and those who are disabled. This puts them in a particularly vulnerable position in the context of Brexit (see also Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019). This vulnerability, linked with the lower social status of migrants like Renia and her husband, contributes to the feeling of being unwanted, which can also affect their relations with their co-workers and neighbours. Hence, conviviality cannot be explored without considering socio-economic inequalities. This is in sharp contrast to the experiences of Renia's daughter and her husband, who own their own property and are highly skilled workers. According to Renia, they do not perceive Brexit as a threat to their socio-economic and legal status. Nor did they experienced xenophobic attitudes at their workplace following the EU referendum. Renia recognised the different class dynamics of workplace interactions following the Brexit vote. As Burrell and Schweyher (2019) point out, it is the most vulnerable who are affected by the hostile environment agenda (and its consequences) forged by the UK government, rather than those in more secure work and housing positions.

Renia's post-Brexit-vote experiences of uncertainty in terms of relations with the local population and her socio-economic situation made her feel like she does not belong. On the other hand, she does not consider returning to Poland as she is disappointed by the current situation in her country following the electoral victory

of the Polish populist Law and Justice Party (PiS) in September 2015, and the country's intensifying xenophobia (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; see also Nowicka 2018). Renia is aware of anti-migrant sentiments in both Poland and the UK and this strongly affects her sense of non-belonging. These dynamics in both sending and receiving countries complicate post-accession mobility in the context of Brexit. Renia's example shows how Brexit may constitute a potential threat to conviviality and a more inclusive society, particularly in the areas marked by tensions and socio-economic inequality. This is where policy intervention is needed to address these inequalities and promote mutual understanding and dialogue.

Nikola's story

Nikola's case is very different to that of Renia. Nikola, an office worker in her late thirties, is significantly younger than Renia and her socio-economic situation and experiences of conviviality are also very different. She first arrived in the UK as a tourist. She did not want to stay but the friend whom she was visiting found her a temporary job. Nikola then decided to stay for a bit longer in order to learn the language. She attended a language course and planned to return to Poland one year later. She changed jobs several times and lived in various areas of Manchester, sharing accommodation first with other people and, later, with a British boyfriend who is now her husband. She improved her English and pursued further study. As time went by, Nikola's temporary plans turned into a long-term stay and possibly permanent settlement, especially after she married, bought a house with her husband and became pregnant. In our interview in 2012 she recounted a gruesome experience of racist and xenophobic violence which left her traumatised for a long period of time. When I contacted her in 2018 to find out about her experiences in the context of Brexit, she was living with her husband in a house they had bought in a suburban area of Manchester which she described as a bohemian neighbourhood. Nikola emphasised that, even though she was aware of the negative sentiments towards Polish migrants in the context of Brexit, she told me that she thought that the attitudes of people living in her area did not change for the worse. In analysing the impact of Brexit, as seen in Renia's case, the importance of place and class dynamics needs to be taken into consideration. Several participants at both stages of my research noticed the absence of any negative discourse about Polish migrants in the more affluent areas characterised by the absence of competition for jobs. Despite her previous experiences of racism and xenophobia, Nikola felt safe in her local area. Renia's and Nikola's accounts show how different local contexts, class dynamics and spatially distinct inequalities may influence the experiences of migrants, their relations with the local population and their sense of safety and belonging.

Unlike Renia, who lived on a council estate characterised by local tensions and social inequality, Nikola felt that she became more attached to her neighbourhood, especially after buying her own property together with her husband and when their family was about to enlarge. This contributed to an increased sense of security and stability. Because of this, she was also not concerned about her legal status in the light of Brexit. This contrasts with Renia's uncertain situation and shows the importance of economic and cultural capital, life-stage and spatio-temporal characteristics. It is important to point out that stay-at-home migrant mothers, and parents in general, could be the most at risk of falling through the cracks of the new system of applying for legal settlement in the context of Brexit.

Nikola's case highlights the importance of family and social-network formation which can lead to longer or permanent settlement (see also Ryan 2018). Nikola's acquaintances in the local area expanded further after meeting other mothers-to-be through antenatal classes and activities. These social connections in a local community constitute important resources with which to establish anchors (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018). After becoming mothers, women start using their neighbourhood more intensely than before and seek out other

mothers to spend time with (Byrne 2006; Fenster 2005; Ryan 2018; Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara 2009; Rzepnikowska 2018a; Wessendorf 2014b). As discussed in my earlier work (Rzepnikowska 2018a), motherly conviviality highlights a connection between motherly activities, spaces for mothers and conviviality, including nurseries, schools and children's centres where parents and children meet others from different backgrounds. Interaction through school encounters may also permit migrant mothers to develop new forms of social learning. Similarly, based on the study of encounters in the lives of young British Bangladeshi Muslim women, Nayak (2017: 294) claims that 'the school functions as a microcosm for multicultural interaction and lively encounters'. My interviewees established strong links with other mothers from various backgrounds on the basis of their shared experiences of being migrant mothers; indeed, some migrant mothers created opportunities for cross-cultural interaction between those from various backgrounds, thus facilitating conviviality. For Nikola, becoming a mother allowed her to get to know other mothers in her neighbourhood through children's activities and this offered her a greater sense of belonging and attachment which may then contribute to a more permanent settlement. My earlier research (Rzepnikowska 2018a) illustrates the possibility of the multi-sitedness of convivial encounters involving interaction with other mothers at the adult education college, at the school gates and at home. This interaction takes place in different but connected spaces. Motherly conviviality transcends a single place of interaction and reflects the interconnection of several spaces. The proximity of my participants' residential area to the school and the college, and the same spaces being used for similar activities by different individuals, all facilitate this interconnection (Neal *et al.* 2013).

Some migrant mothers can be excluded from the spaces mentioned above due to class dynamics. For instance, existing research shows how Roma mothers may be affected by isolation due to their lower levels of employment and their limited social contact beyond their existing networks, as well as lower levels of spoken English which restrict their engagement with schools (Manzoni and Rolfe 2019). Similarly, in Wilson's (2013) study on parental encounters with difference at a Birmingham primary school, Asian parents were considered by British parents to be refusing to get involved in the running of the school and its extra-curricular activities. However, the reasons behind their 'not contributing' were potential language barriers, socio-economic differences and other forms of exclusion.

Sustained neighbourly conviviality

Krysia's story

Most of my interviewees experienced neighbourly conviviality, which included often underestimated fleeting but regular encounters allowing them to become familiar with their neighbours. Laurier and Philo (2006) argue that low-level sociability should not be underestimated as it represents mutual acknowledgement. Similarly, Boyd (2006) discusses the importance of civility in facilitating fleeting and superficial social interactions between urban dwellers, involving basic mutual respect. In line with Lofland's (1989) argument that fleeting relationships can be transformed into more sociable forms, my research shows that fleeting encounters between neighbours may lead to more meaningful forms of contact and a sense of belonging which develops over time as the residents become more familiar with each other (see also Wilson 2016). This is particularly evident in Krysia's case, discussed in this section.

Krysia is in her mid-50s. She arrived in 2006 and moved into a studio flat in northern Manchester. Then, following the arrival of her son and grandson, they moved to a house in an inner-city area in northern Manchester, which is one of the most ethnically diverse as a result of several waves of immigration to Britain. I met Krysia in 2013 in a Polish shop. She was very keen to share her experiences of living in the area and

invited me to her rented home. Like Renia, Krysia is one of the oldest participants in my sample and is currently unemployed due to ill health. Yet, her experiences in the light of Brexit are very different to Renia's.

Krysia's narrative from 2013 demonstrated how convivial interaction in her immediate neighbourhood developed, over time, from adaptation practices – which involved observing and following certain norms – into instances of cooperation, interdependence, gift-giving and exchange, which are more meaningful forms of contact (Rzepnikowska 2019). Her narrative is also an example of the transformative potential of convivial encounters (see also Nayak 2017) as, initially, Krysia did not feel welcomed by her neighbours. When I contacted Krysia in 2018, she was still living in the same place. Her relations with her neighbours had not been negatively affected by the Brexit vote, although she had been aware of anti-Polish sentiment at the time of the EU referendum in 2016. In fact, she felt that these neighbourly relations had become even stronger in recent years, with an emphasis on the length of time spent living in the same area:

Nothing much changed in our neighbourhood. God, I would wish everyone to have neighbours like ours. We are closer than before, and I can count on them. (...) They aren't happy with Brexit, at least not those who live next to us. They don't approve of it. They voted against it. We have been living here for nearly 12 years, so we can talk about everything. We like each other. They like us. (...) We saw stuff about Poles on the Internet, in the newspapers; we heard about it [anti-Polish sentiment]. We were saying all the time with my [Polish] friend [living with Krysia], 'Jesus, thanks God we live in this neighbourhood which is different to what you hear', it's a neighbour-friendly area. Even a bit further away in the shops [people are friendly]. We don't feel discriminated [against]. We didn't experience it at the time when anti-Polish sentiment was more intense.

Conviviality in Krysia's example is socially, spatially and temporally constituted. It illustrates a stronger sense of belonging in the context of Brexit. Everyday convivial relations between Krysia and her neighbours play a crucial role in building this sense of belonging, which can be understood as 'a dynamic emotional attachment that relates people to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience. It is about feeling "at home" and "secure", but it is equally about being recognised and understood' (Wood and Waite 2011: 201). Building connections and trust across ethnic lines plays an important role in Krysia's growing sense of rootedness and attachment in her local area despite the Brexit uncertainties.

As in her first interview, in 2013, Krysia explained how her neighbourhood had become a space of co-operation, inter-dependence, care and trust, where the residents not only come together to make their area safer but also support each other:

It's important that I can count on my neighbours; that they keep an eye on my house and I keep an eye on theirs when they are away. There is this, you know, neighbourly trust. This is very important. It is a different kind of conviviality [współżycie] between us and the English neighbours. (...) We go out to the garden, greet each other, ask if everything is fine, about health, I make a cake... Our neighbour's wife died about three years ago so when I make some food, I share it with him. When his daughter comes with the children, he brings us some cake (...) if any help is needed, we help one another. (...) When an ambulance arrived to take Mirek [Krysia's friend and housemate] to the hospital when he was ill, I couldn't speak [English] properly because of nerves (...) so both neighbours came to help.

These practices demonstrate that the neighbourhood can become a space of co-operation, care and trust. As Bridge (2002: 25) has suggested 'the neighbourhood provides the realm of practical relations involving the exchange of small services as well as convivial relations that might contribute to a diffuse feeling of security

and well-being'. Krysia's narrative is a good example of a thriving neighbourly conviviality which develops over time and endures despite exclusionary anti-immigration rhetoric. In fact, it is possible that, paradoxically, these exclusionary discourses strengthen the existing conviviality. In this example, stronger bonds are formed in response to the challenges of Brexit.

Oliwia's story

The sense of safety was particularly important for my interviewees in the context of their local areas after the Brexit vote, as seen above. This was particularly visible in Oliwia's narrative. As other participants discussed in this paper, Oliwia (in her late thirties), who had lived with her husband in an inner-city area of southern part of Manchester since 2010, was aware of anti-immigrant sentiment in the run up to and after the EU referendum and this triggered a sense of fear and uncertainty about the future, feelings shared by several other interviewees:

When the results were announced I was a bit afraid and I started to feel uncertain. (...) I started to think what would change and how quickly changes would happen. For the first few days I had to get used to this new and uncertain situation. I was wondering if the welcoming England would change for the worse.

Oliwia's case raises question about how difference is perceived in and through place. In contrast to Renia's experiences, Oliwia did not experience racism or xenophobia in her ethnically mixed neighbourhood. She told me how surprised she was when her acquaintances apologised for the referendum results and reassured her that Britain was still her home and she was welcome to stay. It was important for her to hear this in the context of increasing hostility towards Polish people after the referendum. This act of solidarity was reassuring and made Oliwia feel less unwelcome. She assumed that she did not experience anti-Polish sentiment possibly because she thought she did not 'look Polish'. She pointed out that, because of her darker complexion, she has often been perceived as Spanish or South-East Asian. She felt that she blended in well in her ethnically mixed area. This, again, shows how different localities may influence the experiences of migrants and their relations with the local population. Oliwia's case adds some complexity to the debates on racialisation and the misrecognition of East Europeans (see Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012; Hopkins, Botterill, Sanghera and Arshad 2017), and shows how convivial living in multicultural cities is eminently possible.

Oliwia thought that it was much safer for her to stay in the UK than to go back to Poland because of the growing hostility to ethno-national and religious minorities in her country of origin (ECRI 2015; Kornak, Tatar and Pankowski 2016) and because of her darker complexion. Even though some of my participants thought of going back to Poland or, like Oliwia, moving to another country, they said that a move was not as straightforward as that because some of their children were born and had grown up in the UK, and attend school there. Hence, some mothers did not want to disrupt these attachments. Despite these local connections, developed over the years, and the granting of British citizenship, Oliwia moved to another EU country after her husband was offered a job there. Nevertheless, Oliwia told me that, thanks to her British citizenship, she would be able to return to the UK in the future despite Brexit uncertainties. The new legal status and higher socio-economic position of Oliwia and her husband in comparison to Renia's puts them in a more privileged position and allows them more freedom in keeping the different options open.

Conclusions

The concept of conviviality has opened up a new understanding of living with difference which emerges from interaction between different groups and individuals in multicultural societies. The growing interest in the

concept across various disciplines in recent years indicates that conviviality emerges in many societies and reflects the importance of studying this mode of living together. Nevertheless, the tendency to focus on problematic relations obscures current debates. By the same token, idealising urban encounters disguises hierarchies of power and inequality. This paper contributes to the field of studies on the conviviality experienced by post-accession migrants by adding more empirical depth to this concept. My findings illustrate various forms of conviviality – at times fragile and situated in particular times and places – and provide examples of the practices that underpin it. They highlight the role of shared spaces, including the immediate neighbourhood, spaces for mothers and their children, and the workplace in bringing diverse populations together.

The aim of this article was to apply the concept of conviviality in understanding the impact of Brexit on the changing social relations between Polish migrant women and the local population in Manchester. This approach provides an opportunity to capture the complexity of living together in uncertain times, a complexity influenced by spatio-temporal, class dynamics and discourses on immigration and socio-economic inequality. Brexit, a macro-level political phenomenon, has inevitably influenced everyday social relations at both individual and local levels. Brexit was present in the lived experiences of migrants as they talked about their daily encounters, sense of safety/uncertainty, belonging / not belonging and connection with / disconnection from their local community.

Even though there are some similarities in the experiences of my participants in the context of Brexit, there are important differences. Renia's narrative illustrated the co-existence of conviviality, tensions and racism in her immediate neighbourhood in Greater Manchester and in her husband's workplace, an area characterised by a significant leave vote. As discussed earlier in this paper, conviviality is a dynamic and ongoing process without any guarantees. The current crisis in Brexit Britain has been marked by racism and insular nationalism (Virdee and McGeever 2018), posing a significant challenge to conviviality. Brexit has revealed and (re)produced divisions (Anderson and Wilson 2018; Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). These were particularly discussed in the context of specific places, mainly in deprived neighbourhoods (Rzepnikowska 2018b) and workplaces offering low-paid manual jobs, where new racialised hierarchies in the post-referendum era are present. Renia's case highlighted how less-visible minorities can become racialised and experience racism and xenophobia in both the neighbourhood and the workplace. Such an experience can contribute to feelings of rejection and a sense of not belonging and detachment, which were also intensified by uncertainty and anxiety around their future rights and status, earlier afforded by EU citizenship. This highlights the importance of place, race, ethnicity and class in discussions on conviviality and Brexit and raises issues of inequality and hierarchies.

In contrast, other accounts in this paper show various examples of conviviality, from fleeting encounters to more meaningful and sustained forms of living together, promoting a sense of safety, trust, belonging and attachment. This adds some complexity to earlier debates on disconnection, rejection and alienation in wider neighbourhood communities in the context of Brexit (see Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). These various forms of conviviality are characterised by varying degrees of engagement with difference. The very diverse migrant experiences explored in this paper show different forms of the lived experience and this reminds us that, alongside racism, conflict and practices of classed and ethnicised avoidance, there is clear evidence of often-overlooked conviviality. Krysia's narrative shows a great example of a sustained neighbourly conviviality resisting racism and xenophobia and characterised by habitual interactions between neighbours, trust and acts of care and kindness. Her account shows the possibility of maintaining social connections and a sense of rootedness and belonging in the context of Brexit. This challenges divisive public and political discourses in the Brexit era linked with the racialised politics of English nationalism (Virdee and McGeever 2018) which hinder a constructive engagement with difference (Heil 2015) – and reveals a more resilient form of conviviality which is able to thrive in uncertain times.

The interviewees' experiences discussed here show the situatedness of conviviality within geographical, social and temporal contexts. Situated conviviality is 'local and specific', 'not something that can be replicated in a programmatic way' (Wise and Velayutham 2014: 425). This paper has illustrated conviviality as a spatially bounded concept occurring in particular sites, including immediate neighbourhoods and spaces for mothers such as nurseries, schools and children's centres. Motherly conviviality transcends a single place of interaction and reflects the interconnection of different spaces (Neal *et al.* 2013). Hence, this paper contributes to the existing literature on conviviality and migrant experiences by recognising the spatiality of convivial relations, closely linked with the dynamics of race, ethnicity, gender and class, keeping in mind that some migrants might be excluded from certain spaces. Conviviality evolves as time goes by, showing the possibility of building up resilience to everyday racism and anti-migrant discourse in the context of Brexit and of everyday boundary-crossings, which have the potential to break through racialised discourses at the local level. Sustained conviviality developed over time may contribute to a growing sense of rootedness and the attachment of migrants in their local area despite uncertainties over Brexit. This means that they are likely to be settled on a more permanent basis, contrary to earlier assumptions about post-accession migrants being in the UK on a temporary basis. This, however, requires further longitudinal research.

Finally, while there are some commonalities in the experiences of A8 migrants in terms of their response to Brexit (feelings of insecurity about the future and experiences of racism and xenophobia following the EU referendum), the diverse migrant experiences and trajectories explored in this paper through the lens of conviviality suggest the need to unpack and differentiate both between and within EU migrant groups. Their complex and diverse experiences, various socio-economic and legal statuses, age and gender indicate that they should not be treated as homogenous groups and more attention should be paid to these different categories, their personal biographies, spatio-temporal dynamics and spatially distinct inequalities.

Notes

¹ The Leave campaign during the EU referendum in June 2016 is a good example of the prevalence of imperial and colonial nostalgia in British politics. The memories of the Empire informed how UKIP and Conservative Brexiters imagined Britain's future out of the EU, with an end to uncontrolled EU immigration and strengthened ties with Commonwealth states in the aftermath of the Brexit vote (see Ashe 2016). This strategy is known as 'Empire 2.0'.

² As in Renia's case, migrants and ethnic minorities in the UK also constitute the category of working class, even though this is often unacknowledged.


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