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Perceptions of Eastern European migrants in an English village: The role of the rural place image.

Since 2004 significant numbers of post-accession EU migrants have arrived in regional towns and rural areas of England to live and work: places that are unaccustomed to large-scale in-migration. These recent migration patterns mean that new intercultural encounters are taking place in a number of provincial and ‘out of the way’ places (Nayak 2011). This article argues that if we are to fully understand the social interactions and practices of exclusion and inclusion between long-term settled populations and migrants in rural areas that are experiencing new migration flows, it is vital to examine such processes at the local scale. The article draws on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork, including 30 semi-structured qualitative interviews, to explore English village resident’s perceptions of Eastern European migrants who live and work at nearby horticultural nurseries. Village residents’ narratives reveal a discourse of migrants ‘fitting in’ with the collectively held place image of the ‘working village’. However, my findings also reveal that, despite this apparent conviviality, a language of invisibility is used to describe the migrants’ presence. Thus, the place image of the working village serves to mask ambivalent attitudes towards migrants and an unequal power relationship that exists between the two groups.

Keywords: Rural English village; Eastern European migrants; place image; perceptions; invisibility.

Introduction

The vast majority of international migrants and ethnic minorities in the UK reside in urban areas. However, Burdsey (2013, 96) has noted that new patterns of transnational migration combined with shifting labour markets ‘and the geographical mobilities of [some] long-term settled minority ethnic populations mean that issues related to integration, conflict, conviviality and prejudice between different ethnic groups are no longer purely the preserve of towns and cities’. Similarly, White (2011, 1) argues that post-accession EU migration to Britain more specifically, has been novel in its ‘scale,

complexity of types, and geographical diversity'. The geographical distribution of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe breaks with the historical trend of migrant settlement in British cities. Instead, large numbers have migrated to regional towns and rural areas to live and work; places that do not have histories of large-scale immigration. These recent developments in migration patterns and destinations in Britain mean that new intercultural encounters and interactions are taking place in a number of provincial and 'out of the way' places (Nayak 2011) that are both culturally and geographically distant from the metropolis (Burdsey 2016, 85).

In this article I respond to Burdsey's (2013) call for a widening of the sociological lens to consider intercultural interactions – and in this case, interactions between long-term settled English residents and Eastern European migrants – outside of urban spaces. With the exception of Storey's (2013) study, which focuses on the responses of rural media and statutory bodies to 'new' EU migrants, qualitative research into rural English residents' reactions is extremely limited, and very little is known about how Central and Eastern European migrants are perceived in everyday rural contexts. Indeed White (2011) has referred to this as a 'missing' component in the literature on post-accession EU migration to the UK. Therefore, this article provides new insights into long-term settled residents' perceptions of EU migrants in a deeply rural part of the English countryside. In doing so, I contribute to the discussion in several recent qualitative studies published in this journal and elsewhere about the value of exploring issues of place, identity, diversity and belonging at the local scale (see Burdsey 2016; Gudrun Jensen 2016; Karner and Parker 2011) and the importance of socio-historical context for understanding interactions between long-term residents and new migrants (see Schmidt 2016; Millington 2010). I show that English village resident's perceptions of Eastern European migrants are largely based on local, place-

based interactions with, and observations of migrants rather than wider national and media discourses about EU migration. This enables me to address the question raised by Solomos and Back (1994) of how national discourses about migration are manifest at the local level and relate to the particularities of specific social contexts. I argue that there is a disparity between national populist discourse on migration and local attitudes at the village level, and that this disparity can be attributed to the dominant ‘place image’ held by residents about the village in which they live.

Paul Watt (2006) uses the concept of the ‘place image’ to describe how residents of a council housing estate in North London imaginatively and collectively construct an identity for their locality. Watt (2006) illustrates the way in which long-term residents draw upon the place image of the ‘respectable’ council estate to exclude ‘rough’ and undesirable ‘newcomers’. In contrast, I develop the concept in a rural setting to explore how the place image of the ‘working village’ is not only mobilised by English village residents in order to include Eastern European migrants via discourses about ‘fitting in’ in the countryside, but to simultaneously mask the unequal power relations between the two groups. Mackrell and Pemberton (2018) have illustrated that Eastern European migrants themselves engage in processes of imaginatively constructing the English countryside. However, the original focus of this article is on the development of a rural place image by long-term rural residents and its influence on their perceptions of EU migrants in their locality. The findings presented in this article are based on twelve months of residential ethnographic fieldwork in a rural Worcestershire village in the West Midlands of England. I henceforth refer to the village as ‘Mayfield’ in order to preserve my respondents’ anonymity.¹ Since the expansion of the EU in 2004 to include

¹ All place names (except the county of Worcestershire) and given names are pseudonyms.

the Accession 8 countries², Mayfield's horticulture industry has been reliant on the labour of seasonal EU workers – predominantly from Eastern Europe – at every stage of the fruit and vegetable production process. Consequently, Mayfield can be understood as a 'new geography of multicultural' (Neal et al. 2013) where unfamiliar intercultural interactions are taking place.

The remainder of this article is structured into five main sections. I begin with a discussion of the importance of attending to the specificities of place when attempting to understand interethnic interactions in locations that, historically, have known little ethnic diversity and limited international migration. I also explain why developing the concept of the 'place image' is helpful for understanding long-term settled residents' perceptions of new migrants. In the second section I outline the demographic characteristics of Mayfield, and the third section provides a discussion of the research methods used. Fourth, I examine the ways in which the place image of the 'working village' is constructed and deployed by village residents. Finally, I analyse the ways in which the predominantly seasonal Eastern European migrants are considered to 'fit in' with the image of the working village, but how villagers also employ a language of invisibility when describing the migrants, and a boundary between the two groups is maintained.

The pertinence of place in studies of intercultural encounters

Building on a small but significant interdisciplinary body of literature examining the exclusion of 'racial' and ethnic 'others' from the English countryside (see Chakraborti and Garland 2004; Neal and Agyeman 2006; Neal 2009, Tyler 2012), Neal et al. (2013)

² The A8 countries include Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia.

began to explore ‘new’ geographies of multiculturalism, noting that recent migration trajectories are leading to the formation of newly multicultural spaces across Britain. However, as is the case with the majority of studies into ethnicity, migration and social diversity in Britain, the focus of their research was on urban locations. Research into post-accession EU migrants in Britain has also tended to focus on London (see Garapich 2016; Rabikowska 2010; Eade et al. 2007) and more ‘peripheral’ cities such as Newcastle (Stenning and Dawley 2009) and Liverpool (Burrell 2017). A growing number of studies exist on migration from Central and Eastern Europe to some rural parts of the United Kingdom, for example, Northern Ireland (McAreevey 2012), Scotland (Kay and Trevena 2018; Flynn and Kay 2017; de Lima and Wright 2009) and Wales (Guma and Jones 2019; Jones and Lever 2014; Jackson and Jones 2014). However, with a handful of exceptions, such as Anne White’s (2010) research in the towns of Frome and Trowbridge in the West of England, and Leila Dawney’s (2008) and John Storey’s (2013) explorations of Eastern European migrants in rural Herefordshire, studies in rural England are scarce. Consequently, understanding of the complexity of rural place making and how dynamic the English countryside has become in the context of EU migration is limited.

If we are to fully understand the social interactions and practices of exclusion, inclusion, resistance and conviviality between long-term settled populations and migrants in rural areas that are experiencing new migration flows, it is vital to examine such social processes at the local scale. Rogaly and Qureshi (2013, 423) argue that in-depth studies of single locations can generate productive insights into the ways in which identities and communities are forged and imagined. But such place-based studies have a broader relevance, too. Exploring the local ‘micropolitics of everyday social contact and encounter’ (Amin 2002, 959) in a range of locations has ‘significance beyond the

local, informing theoretical debates on the politics of belonging' (Erel 2011, 2049). For example, previous place-based studies have shed light on the way in which perceptions about asylum seekers are often contingent upon social class (Millington 2010); that the class composition of a neighbourhood influences place-making and the ways in which belonging is performed (Benson and Jackson 2012); and that feelings of belonging 'influence, long-term residents' reactions to the arrival of new groups of immigrants' (Hickman, Crowley, and Mai 2008, 133). Burdsey (2013, 115) also emphasises the 'significance of local encounters in reflecting in microcosm, broader debates about nation, race, and immigration'. Collectively, therefore, place-based studies help to build a fine-grained picture of the intercultural encounters taking place in a diverse range of locations.

As Blokland (2009, 1594) argues, places do not have fixed meanings and place making occurs as a collective social process. Therefore, relations between 'new' and 'old' groups of residents in any given place will be shaped by local structures of belonging (which might operate in relation to social class, ethnicity or nationality, for example) combined with dominant narratives about place identity and place-based histories. That is not to say that places have any pre-given coherence or identity, rather, processes of place making constantly evolve. For example, in her study of continuity, change and sense of place in the English countryside, Wheeler (2017) examines the ways in which local history and nostalgia can 'productively' shape a sense of place in rural England. She suggests that nostalgia need not be a process of preservationism and resistance to change but 'can be a mechanism through which residents are able to accept, or even welcome changes to the social and physical constitution of their village' (2017, 2). Similarly, Mah's (2012) notion of 'living memory' implies that it is futile to separate memories, nostalgia, and dwelling in the past from looking to the future

because, as Schmidt (2016) suggests, local histories are always relevant to the way in which change, difference, diversity and otherness are perceived.

In his study of social class and council housing estates in Camden, North London, Watt (2006) explores the way in which residents collectively think place into existence, and the consequent role that the imagined identity of place can play in affirming the identities of those who are perceived to belong there, and in shaping relations with ‘others’ who do not. Watt uses the concept of ‘place images’, which can be defined as the ‘various discrete meanings associated with places or regions regardless of their character in reality’ (Shields 1991 cited in Watt 2006, 777). Such images, Watt explains,

can result from stereotyping or from prejudices towards places or their inhabitants, and they are formed by the discursive practices of a range of groups and organisations including the local press, government and employers as well as residents themselves (2006, 777).

Place images are therefore related to processes of distinction and the way that people ascribe identities to ‘others’ as well as themselves in relation to particular places or neighbourhoods (Watt 2006, Benson and Jackson 2012). In Camden, Watt explains how the perceived ‘decline of community’ is linked to the increasing presence of ‘low-status ‘others’’ (784). ‘Rough outsiders’ were seen to threaten the ways of life of the ‘decent locals’, and in doing so, threatened the respectable place image that the residents held of their estates. In contrast to Watt’s urban study, I develop the concept of the place image in a rural village setting to illustrate the way that the imagined identity of a place can also be used by long-term residents to include newcomers, whilst simultaneously limiting their visibility and maintaining distance.

Mayfield: a portrait

Mayfield is a rural village approximately three miles from a small market town in Worcestershire, and is not within easy commuting distance to any major British towns or cities. Mayfield is interesting because of its historical connection with the horticulture and agriculture industries, which have significantly evolved in character over the last century, not least due to the employment of large numbers of predominantly seasonal Eastern European migrant workers since 2004, which has transformed the area's demographic composition. Many of the migrants employ a circular migration strategy and return to Mayfield each year. Evidence from the 2011 Census suggests that small numbers of Central and Eastern European migrants are settling in the village on a longer-term basis.

According to the 2011 Census, approximately 800-1000 people live in Mayfield. Precise details of the village's demographics are unavailable because the Census publishes data at ward rather than at individual village level, and the ward to which Mayfield belongs includes the neighbouring village of Horton. Nonetheless, the ward data is useful for building a sense of the locality within which Mayfield is situated. In 2011, the population of Mayfield and Horton was 95.2% white British. 3.4% of the population classified themselves as 'white other' and all black and minority ethnic groups made up the remaining 1.4% (www.statistics.gov.uk). This represents a small change since the previous 2001 Census when, of the white population, 98% were recorded as white British and 2.2% were 'white other', and all black and minority ethnic groups combined comprised 0.9% of the population (www.statistics.gov.uk). The small increase in the 'white other' group from 2.2% in 2001 to 3.4% in 2011 is likely to indicate an increase in the number of A8 migrants settling in the ward. English was the

main language spoken by 98.2% of the population in 2011 and 95.8% of residents were born in the UK. Lithuanian was the main language of 11 residents, along with six Bulgarian, five Latvian, five Polish, four Italian and two Romanian (www.statistics.gov.uk). However, these figures do not capture the large number of seasonal Eastern European migrants who come to live and work at the village's nurseries on a temporary basis each year.

The largest proportion of Mayfield and Horton residents (17.2%) was employed in what are classified as 'skilled trades occupations', which include skilled agriculture-related trades, skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades, and skilled construction and building trades. The second largest group (14.2%) was employed in 'professional occupations' relating to health, teaching and education, science, research, engineering, technology, business and media (www.statistics.gov.uk). Prior to the Second World War almost all Mayfield families were involved in horticulture or agriculture, either at the level of subsistence farming or working for a local landowner. The village's history of growing fruit, vegetable, and arable crops is visible throughout the village today: from the Tudor thatched cottages which would once have housed farm labourers and the selection of sixteenth to nineteenth century farmhouses in the village (some still functioning as farmhouses, some simply residential), to the 'antique' glasshouses introduced by a family of Dutch migrants in the 1940s and the village maypole which is danced around each May Day to mark the beginning of the growing season. Today the horticultural industry in Mayfield is thriving thanks to the use of cutting-edge technologies. However, the planting, tending, and picking of fruit, vegetables and salad crops continues to be done mainly by hand. In the past, village residents conducted this work, but for reasons including low pay and anti-social working hours, horticultural labour is now considered undesirable by most local people. Consequently horticultural

growers have had to look further afield to meet their labour needs, and today most of their employees are recruited via agencies in Central and Eastern European countries including Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland.

In high season (April through September) approximately 300 seasonal Eastern European migrant workers live and work on the horticultural farms in Mayfield, and an increasing number are settling long-term in the nearby town of 'Elmbridge'. I have written elsewhere (Moore 2013) about the ways in which village residents often ascribe certain characteristics to migrants which situate them as 'other' – namely via classed judgements about housing, working conditions, clothing, and language differences. However, migrants also 'stand out' from village residents due to their age. When I visited nurseries in Mayfield and the surrounding area, I was told that the vast majority of Eastern European seasonal migrants were aged between 18 and 30. In contrast, only 13.3% of Mayfield and Horton's population is aged between 16-29 whereas 53.2% of the population is over 45 (www.statistics.gov.uk).

Research methods

The data on which this article is based was collected as part of an Economic and Social Research Council-funded PhD project, which provided an in-depth analysis of how processes of social inclusion and exclusion operate in a rural village context. Mayfield was chosen as the fieldwork location because of the large number of post-accession Eastern European migrants living and working in the village and its surrounding area, and the potential social implications of this rapid demographic shift for a location that, until recently, was unaccustomed to large-scale inward migration. A twelve-month residential ethnography was conducted between August 2010 and July 2011, which involved participant observation and the collection of detailed field notes, thirty semi-

structured interviews with village residents, three focus groups with a total of nineteen Central and Eastern-European migrants who lived and worked at local horticultural nurseries, and semi-structured interviews with two Polish men who had settled in the local area - one of whom, Patryk, worked at the district council on a project related to migrant integration in the area and acted as a gatekeeper for recruiting focus group participants. The other was chairman of the Polish community association in the nearby town. All of the interviews and focus groups were conducted in English, but Patryk attended the focus groups to provide Polish translation (though not all of the participants were Polish). Information sheets about the study and consent forms were (imperfectly) translated into Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian and Bulgarian using Google Translate. The focus groups were conducted on nurseries where the migrants lived and worked, with the nursery owners' permission.

For the duration of the fieldwork I stayed with a family who had lived in Mayfield for around seven years. My landlady, Kate, runs a hairdressing salon attached to her home, which is an important hub of social activity in the village. Her children attended the village primary school, which also afforded me the opportunity to meet and talk to the parents, grandparents and carers of other school pupils. I employed a snowball sampling technique to recruit interviewees, and many of my initial contacts (both female and male) were made at the salon. During my year in Mayfield I took part in the social life of the village. For example, I joined a book club, the village film club, attended regular coffee mornings, volunteered on the summer ball committee, helped out at Mayfield's summer fête, attended evenings of live music at the village hall, travelled on the public bus service, used the village Post Office and visited the two village pubs. These activities enabled me to observe the rhythms of village life and to recruit interviewees.

In this article I draw specifically on the 30 interviews conducted with the long-term residents of Mayfield to illustrate their perceptions of EU migrants in the village. The Mayfield interviewees were aged between 18 and 80 and comprised 21 women and 9 men. They were diverse in terms of social class background and length of residence in the village. Some belonged to what were referred to as 'old Mayfield' families whose family histories in the village spanned several generations, whilst others had lived in the village for as little as one year. With the exception of one British Asian woman, all of the interviewees were white British.

The interviews were semi-structured and followed a loose interview guide. The topics discussed included how they came to live in the village, personal and family histories in Mayfield, engagement with village social networks and 'community' activities, perceptions of the character of the village, and observations relating to continuity and change in Mayfield, particularly in relation to EU migration to the area. On average interviews lasted for around 1 hour, with the longest at 2 ½ hours. Consent was granted from all interviewees in relation to their involvement in the research. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim with the participants' permission. The interview transcripts, focus group transcripts and field notes were analysed and interpreted by reading and re-reading the material, followed by a process of inductive thematic coding. I developed thematic codes based on the 'scrutiny techniques' recommended by Ryan and Bernard (2003, 88-91) when looking for themes in qualitative data. Specifically, I looked for 'repetitions': topics that occurred again and again in my data; 'indigenous typologies or categories' such as local expressions that were either unfamiliar or were used in a particular way; and 'similarities and differences': exploring how interviewees and focus-group participants discussed topics in comparable or contrasting ways.

Whilst I was closer in age to the Eastern European migrants than most of the long-term settled village residents, I shared other characteristics with the villagers, which are likely to have influenced the opinions they felt comfortable revealing to me. As a white British middle-class young woman, there were certainly instances during the ethnography when village residents made assumptions that I would sympathise with, understand, and share their points of view about EU migration to rural England. In other cases, due to my age and being 'from London' I was perceived to be a stranger, ignorant about rural life. Therefore during my fieldwork, I straddled the 'insider/outsider' binary: my status always contingent upon the precise social and conversational context. Throughout the fieldwork I was honest with village residents about my reasons for moving to Mayfield and the focus of my study. For ethical reasons I explained as often as possible that I was observing the daily life of the village, and in fact discussed many of my observations openly with villagers throughout the research process. I developed a good rapport with many village residents, but as participant observer I frequently reminded them of my status as researcher.

The 'place image' of the working village

Many people I met in Mayfield describe it as a 'working village', and this conceptualisation of village identity has an important impact upon the way in which they perceive Eastern European horticultural labourers. Village residents mobilise the place image of the working village in two main ways. First, it is used to highlight the village's horticultural past and present; and second, it is used to describe their perception of Mayfield's class identity and status. Horticulture is deeply woven into the village's history and is intimately linked to its geography. Mayfield's location in Worcestershire; nestled in a deep bend in the river Avon, means that its nutrient-rich

soil is ideal for growing fruit and vegetables. The area has become an important exporter of produce to major markets, supermarkets, hotels and the catering industry nationwide. In this respect, according to many of its residents, Mayfield is a ‘working village’. Horticulture and the village’s industriousness are central to their characterization of the place. This image of productivity has broadened and diversified to incorporate new forms of industry that exist in the village. For example, Justin, in his fifties, who had lived in Mayfield for approximately twenty years commented:

There’s quite a lot of small-scale market gardening going on as well as the big growers. I mean, you see the honesty boxes at the end of people’s gardens and that kind of thing. It’s a working village... There are so many of us who have our own little businesses working from Mayfield.

The image of the working village is not only reference to Mayfield’s horticultural past and present, but also to the significant number of small businesses that exist there.

Linda, a self-employed chiropodist in her forties explained: “It’s working types who live in Mayfield really. If you go down the road you can spot plenty of people who are self-employed doing crafts like sign-writing, thatching, carpentry and things, as well as horticulture”. Residents perceive Mayfield as somewhere where people work hard – often in skilled trades using manual labour – and this narrative about the characteristics of village people, both past and present, has become central to the way in which the place is characterised and imagined.

The second way that residents mobilise the place image of the working village is to situate the Mayfield in terms of its perceived class status. Conceptualising the village as ‘working’ reveals a strategy of defining the village and its place identity in relation to the numerous ‘picture-postcard’ villages that have become tourist destinations popular

with second-home owners in the neighbouring Cotswolds. For instance, Mary, in her fifties, described Mayfield as ‘a less expensive village than a lot of others round here because it’s a working village rather than chocolate box pretty kind of place... the polytunnels aren’t very picturesque’. The landscape of Mayfield is not one of bucolic rolling hills and quaint architecture hewn from honey coloured stone. On the contrary, the image of the working village positions Mayfield as the ‘real’ countryside: not populated by urban-to-rural migrants, nor characterized by quintessential romantic vistas, but distinguished by enterprise, hard work, and the growing and farming of crops and the associated (often unpleasant) sights, sounds and smells. When describing Mayfield, the head teacher of the village primary school explained:

It’s really quite a mixed village... in terms of housing and all sorts of things. We do have some children who qualify for free school meals... and it’s a working village. It’s real.

Although, not many of the villagers seem to work on the land much now, but that’s where it’s come from. Things are changing now, but you still feel that it has this real feel to it.

In this respect, the place image of the working village constructs a clear class identity, whereby the aesthetic characteristics of the Mayfield are inextricably bound with its horticultural past and present. This discourse also functions as a way of managing the expectations of village residents and visitors. Mayfield is defined in relation to what it is not: a tourist attraction, or a destination for a chic second home.

It is important to note, however, that the residents of Mayfield are not homogeneous in terms of their socio-economic status, occupation, political standpoint, length of residence in the village, age, or gender. Indeed, numerous rural scholars such as Woods (2018) and Neal (2009) have emphasised that rural spaces are dynamic and their populations increasingly diverse. Mayfield’s residents have varied histories and

ties to the village, and this variety of social locations and stratifications inevitably shape the ways that different residents perceive Eastern European migrants and the village itself. For example, Celia, 80, who moved to the village from London 3 years ago to be near her daughter and granddaughter perceived Mayfield to have ‘no character at all’ and deemed it unlikely that any integration would take place between long-term village residents and recent European migrants because ‘the village isn’t that friendly’. Therefore, I acknowledge the risks associated with ‘flattening’ participants’ responses and collapsing different perspectives into a single or unified ‘village voice’ (Burdsey 2013, 105). Village residents and their place attachments are diverse, and in the remainder of this paper I present a range of varied perspectives elicited in the context of semi-structured interviews and more informal conversations.

Despite their heterogeneity, a theme that clearly emerged in my ethnographic data, and what unites many Mayfield residents is the belief that they live in a working village: a partial but circulating representation of place evident in the numerous exchanges I had with them over 12 months of fieldwork. The narrative of the working village can be interpreted as a discursive process of place making in Mayfield. A well-established argument in studies of place, identity and belonging is that representations of place are actively made and discursively maintained (Blokland 2009, Massey 2005). Therefore, in repeating the narrative of the working village, Mayfield residents are engaged in the making and ‘doing’ of place. In this respect, the idiom of the working village is performative. There is no ‘essential’ identity behind village residents’ narratives of place identity. Rather, to adapt Judith Butler’s (1990; 1993, 2) concept, the identity of Mayfield is performatively constituted via the ‘reiterative power of discourse’ that enacts and reinforces this specific understanding of place.

As Benson and Jackson (2012) have argued, it is through such discursive practices of ‘doing’ place that place images are created and sustained. They also suggest that processes of place making may in turn produce the identities and subjectivities of residents, and that ‘the repetitive actions directed at making places of residence simultaneously reconstruct classed identities’ (2012, 794). This is evident in Mayfield, as the discourse of the working village situates the village and also its long-term residents in opposition to the more affluent and picturesque villages in the neighbouring Cotswolds. However, to develop Benson and Jackson’s point, this discursive practice also has implications for the perception of Eastern European migrant ‘others’ in the village. Mayfield and its locality are undergoing a period of significant social and demographic change as a result of EU migration. Therefore, by viewing migrants through the prism of the working village, it can be argued that village residents are attempting to make sense of this change whilst also engaging in a process of place maintenance. Given that the majority of migrants in the Mayfield are engaged in horticultural labour, they are perceived as ‘fitting in’ with the narrative of the working village. This illustrates that local histories and place images are central to the way in which change, diversity and otherness are perceived in rural locations.

Eastern European migrants in the working village

Dawney (2008, 4) argues that a recurring theme in research into the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the English countryside is ‘racism borne out of ignorance rather than familiarity’. In other words, ‘the scarcity of visible ethnic minorities in rural communities means long-term residents’ ideas about ethnic minorities may be based on third party information, from the media and from other people, rather than from contact with ethnic minorities themselves’ (4). Dawney (2008) and Neal (2002) suggest that racism and exclusion in rural areas, which often takes the form of sweeping

generalisations and judgements based on stereotypical assumptions, is articulated through ignorance and lack of contact rather than through direct experience of and interaction with different cultural groups. In the absence of such contact and interaction, stereotypical opinions or the ‘pictures in our heads’ (Blinder and Jeannet 2018) are often informed by populist discourse and tabloid media stories of Britain being ‘flooded’ or ‘full up’ with migrants. However such attitudes did not emerge strongly in Mayfield. Solomos and Back (1994) pose the question of how ideological media and political discourses ‘manifest themselves at the local level within specific communities’ and how national discourses relate to the particularities of a given social context. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which the attitudes of Mayfield’s residents towards ‘outsider’ groups are formed at the local scale, and the extent to which local histories and place identities may shape perceptions of, and interactions between, diverse populations.

Mayfield residents’ perceptions of Eastern European migrants were formed predominantly on the basis of their first-hand experiences and observations of the impact of migration on the local area. This is apparent in villagers’ recognition that migrant labour plays an essential role in keeping the village’s horticultural industry afloat. For example, Brian, 67, who had lived in the village for approximately thirty years explained his view of Eastern European migrants in Mayfield: ‘My impression is that they’re actually keeping alive the horticultural traditions, horticultural heritage even. And without them the land around here would probably go fallow and this area would lose its distinctiveness’. In Brian’s view, the migrants not only fit in with the place image of the working village, but also play an important role in upholding it. They sustain the local economy and are inadvertently engaged in preserving the ‘heritage’ and traditional identity of the village – a process of ‘place maintenance’ (Benson and

Jackson 2012). Similarly, Alice, aged 23, who had recently moved to the village and works in the catering industry explained her view that Eastern Europeans make good, conscientious employees: ‘Migrant workers, especially Polish or European will work a lot harder [than English people]... the Polish will work, work and work’. Alice is drawing on an ethnicised stereotype of the Polish ‘good worker’, yet the perceived characteristics of diligence and hard work dovetail with the idiom of the working village, which is central to village residents’ acceptance of the migrants in the Mayfield.

Evidently, rather than forming perceptions based on populist media discourses and ‘abstract truths’ (Millington 2010), village residents’ narratives about migrants are more contingent upon the local socio-historical context. In Mayfield, the place identity is to a large extent based on the village’s ‘horticultural heritage’, thus it follows that any social or material changes to the village are judged according to how they ‘fit in’ with the dominant narrative of place. Indeed, as Wheeler (2017, 6) observes, ideas about ‘heritage’ allow residents to locate their lives ‘in linear narratives that connect past, present and future’ and that such narratives can in fact offer a means for social development. Therefore, Eastern European migrants have arguably come to embody the next chapter in the narrative of Mayfield’s heritage and are engaged in a process of maintaining the place image of the working village, and securing its future.

But despite the discourse of ‘fitting in’, narratives about Eastern Europeans in Mayfield were also peppered with a language of invisibility. Village residents repeatedly told me that the migrants ‘keep themselves to themselves’ and that their presence really had no perceptible impact on the village. When I raised the issue of Eastern European migration to Mayfield, a common response was that: ‘we don’t really notice them’ and ‘they don’t have any impact on village life’. For example, Richard, 55, who has lived in the village since birth, explained:

In terms of the Polish [he is referring to all Eastern European migrants], you know, we really don't [see them]. I see them up and down the street a little bit, but very little... They all seem to be in caravans dotted around the village. I mean I don't know where they all live but it doesn't appear to have had any impact on the housing in the village... it really hasn't bothered us... when my lads were about 15 and 16 it was a bit frustrating that they couldn't get jobs [on the nurseries] in the summer holidays whereas previously it was pretty easy to go and get work as a youngster. But now you find that you go and they've got [migrants living on the farm] so they're going to employ them first, but other than that there's been absolutely no impact at all. I mean, I don't know any [Eastern European] families – are there many living in the village? I don't know.

Similarly, Sharon, also in her fifties, remarked:

Considering we have all these workers I don't see them walking around - but then I never see them working anywhere either! It's really odd. It's like two separate worlds. There's the village, and then there's the big nurseries and it's like 'beam me up Scotty'! They just disappear behind a hedge! [laughs]

The majority of migrants live and work at the nurseries, so at the end of the working day they tend not to leave the site but remain there to eat, relax and socialise with their co-workers. Long working-hours combined with their spatial 'hidden-ness' and lack of access to transport are often interpreted by villagers as a conscious choice by migrants to 'keep to themselves'. Provided migrants stay on the nurseries and do not stray into the village they largely go unnoticed, and the 'two separate worlds', as described by Sharon, can co-exist in a state of relative indifference. This narrative suggests that although the Eastern Europeans are identifiable on the basis of their clothing and

language (see Moore 2013), their presence is not disruptive in Mayfield and, despite being a distinct social group, they manage to ‘blend in’ with the place image of the working village. Although my interviewees did not explicitly say so, this process of ‘blending in’, also noted by Ryan (2010, 368), is likely to be contingent upon the migrants’ whiteness. As Erikson (1993, 5) suggests, ‘groups who ‘look different’ from majorities or dominant groups may be less liable to become assimilated into the majority than others’. Therefore, migrants’ perceived status as ‘white’ (albeit a ‘different shade of white’ (Moore 2013)) is significant in long-term village residents’ narratives of not noticing them. This also indicates that the place image of the working village is racialised. The spatial containment of migrants’ employment and accommodation on the nursery sites combined with their whiteness means that they are an unobtrusive presence.

Village residents’ perceptions of migrants as ‘fitting in’ but also ‘invisible’ indicates an ambivalence towards their presence: simultaneously convivial and exclusionary. A number of recent studies of interethnic relations in a variety of socio-cultural and geographic contexts indicate that it is not uncommon for such apparently contradictory tendencies to coexist (see Gudrun Jensen 2006; Karner and Parker 2011; Neal et al. 2013; Tyler 2004). Whilst the migrants are perceived to fit in with the place image of the working village, it is their status as horticultural labourers that is at the root of this, rather than an openness to migration and rural diversity per se. In fact, many long-term settled village residents consistently referred to the migrants as ‘workers’, placing emphasis on their ‘purpose’ in Mayfield as horticultural labourers. Dawney (2008, 8) demonstrates a comparable finding: a Polish migrant interviewee in Herefordshire ‘spoke of the importance of his employment [on a village farm] as a key factor in his being ‘accepted’ into village life’. Similarly in Mayfield, the migrants’

work justifies their presence, while at the same time limiting it. The migrant ‘they’ are here to conduct labour that the village ‘we’ no longer want to do.

As the earlier quote from Alice illustrates, the perception of Eastern European migrants as people who will ‘work, work and work’ situates them in an inferior, but to some extent valorised position embodying the figure of the ‘good worker’ – ‘a hard-working, ‘cheap’ and exploitable migrant labour force silently included within the British economy’ (Grill 2017, 9). The repetition of the idiom of the good worker also explains why village residents do not generally revert to the populist ‘Britain is full up’ discourse about migration, because the migrants in Mayfield are not competing with village residents for anything that they want or value. Village residents do not want to work long hours for substandard wages on the horticultural nurseries, and they are not competing with migrants for housing. The situation may be very different if village residents were struggling to obtain a place for their children in the village school, or had to wait several days for a GP appointment and attributed such competition for services to the observed presence of more migrants in those settings. For now, however, local services do not appear to be affected by seasonal migrants’ presence and many villagers accept the important role that Eastern European migrants are playing in sustaining the local economy. The place image of the working village facilitates an acceptance or ‘tolerance’ of East European migrants in Mayfield, but as indicated above, this is conditional and has limits. As Valentine reminds us, tolerance is a dangerous concept:

It is often defined as a positive attitude, yet it is not the same thing as mutual respect.

Rather, tolerance conceals an implicit set of power relations. It is a courtesy that a dominant or privileged group has the power to extend to, or withhold from, others (2008 329).

Everyday encounters between long-term settled village residents and migrants in public and associational spaces such as the Post Office, the supermarket, the bus service, and the local town centre are civil, and village resident's perceptions of migrant workers are generally favourable. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is the villagers who are in a position to 'accept' and 'tolerate' and that a structure of unequal power relations thus characterises relations between the two groups.

It should also be noted that village residents' perceptions of EU migrants and their narrative of place may have shifted in light of 'Brexit'. In the local government district where Mayfield is situated 58% of voters voted to leave the EU and 42% voted to remain, compared with 52% leave and 48% remain nationally. Research suggests that more rural areas, especially those with older populations, were more likely to vote to leave (Harris and Charlton 2016). However, like the national result, Mayfield's local result suggests that opinion on the matter is divided and attitudes towards migration in the area will inevitably remain complex.

There is an emerging body of research into EU migrants' experiences of hostility in the Brexit context, and findings indicate a multifaceted picture of simultaneous racism, xenophobia and conviviality in different geographical locations. For example, Mackrell and Pemberton's (2018) migrant respondents in North West England felt that they had experienced 'more overt instances of racism and discrimination' since the EU referendum. However, alongside similar levels of hostility in rural Wales, Guma & Jones (2019) also report 'little acts of solidarity' with 'local residents offering messages of support' to migrants and condemning aggression. Similarly, in her examination of racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in Manchester before and after the EU referendum, one of Rzepnikowska's (2019, 71) respondents explained her surprise when a British acquaintance 'apologized for the

referendum results and reassured her that Britain was still her home'. Crucially, Rzepnikowska (2019) argues that racism and hostility towards EU migrants is not new, and therefore it is unclear what the long-term effects of Brexit will be in this respect. She, and also Jackson & Jones (2014) highlight that local context must be taken into account when exploring relations between recent EU migrants and long-term settled residents. For instance, prior to the EU referendum, Jackson & Jones' (2014, 15-16) migrant respondents in rural Wales perceived a sense of hostility in national discourses about immigration, but felt hospitality in their local neighbourhood. Collectively, this research into migration in the context of Brexit shows that the British population is divided and diverse in its views on immigration, and it is conceivable that similar cleavages may also be apparent in Mayfield.

Conclusion

This article has provided new insights into long-term settled resident's perceptions of EU migrants in a deeply rural location in England, a perspective that until now has been relatively unexplored. It has also emphasised the value of examining processes of place making and issues of identity, diversity and belonging at the local scale, as well as the importance of taking socio-historical context into account when unravelling interactions between long-term residents and new migrants in rural areas that are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic.

Rural areas across Britain are experiencing significant demographic, economic, social and cultural change as a consequence of 'new' patterns of migration from Central and Eastern Europe. Contrary to popular constructions of the English countryside as stubbornly static, idyllic and mono-cultural, this article has illustrated that rural England is, in fact, a dynamic space. Furthermore, the critical argument that emerges from this article is that rural communities are not necessarily opposed to this change. In the case

of Mayfield, village residents' perceptions of Eastern European migrants are not straightforwardly informed by discourses found in the national right-wing media about England being 'full up'. Rather, their opinions appear to be more profoundly shaped by local observations of, and interactions with migrants that are informed by collectively produced ideas about place identity. As Hickman, Crowley and Mai (2008, 133) have argued, 'local experiences of living and belonging in a specific place are influenced by, and in turn influence long-term residents' reactions to the arrival of new groups of immigrants'. Rural locations across Britain are not homogeneous, however, the findings illustrated in this article suggest that local histories and collectively held place images (albeit constructed and partial) are central to the way in which change, diversity and difference are perceived. Therefore, attending to the specificities of place is crucial for developing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how processes of social inclusion and exclusion operate in relation to EU migrants in rural areas.

In the context of Mayfield, pride in the area's horticultural heritage and the associated classed construction of the village as 'working' means that migrants are accommodated in a way that might not be the case in other rural locations. Many residents construct the place image of the working village on the basis of perceptions about the village's history, its class identity, and the desire for the horticulture industry to be maintained in the future. Significant demographic change is taking place in the village, however, the concept of the working village is used as a mechanism through which village residents are able to accept Eastern European migrants and incorporate them into their narrative of place. Rather than social friction characterizing relations between the two groups there is nuanced, if somewhat ambivalent accommodation. Yet, this is an empowered practice (Millington 2010, 377), and while migrants' employment, accommodation and social lives are, to a large degree, contained on the nursery sites,

their presence in the village is not always perceptible. The acceptance of Eastern European migrants in Mayfield is conditional and fragile, contingent upon their status as horticultural workers and as white Europeans; they are accepted on the villagers' terms.

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