

Turning citizens into immigrants: state practices of welfare “cancellations” and document retention among EU nationals living in Glasgow

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Abstract

This article examines the everyday experiences of welfare provision among EU migrants living in Glasgow, demonstrating how the process of restricting the rights of EU citizens has occurred well before Brexit. It is based on 12 months of ethnographic research conducted in 2012 with Czech and Slovak nationals who came to the UK after 2004. Introducing the migrants’ notion of *zkancelovali*, the paper highlights a heightened sense of insecurity in their everyday lives, which arise from the increasingly common experiences of rejections of benefit applications and delays of payments. Various state practices are discussed which call into question the limits of EU citizenship and show how the latter is affected not only through policies and discourses but also in everyday encounters with state officials, where boundaries between “us” and “them” are being redrawn. Drawing on sociological/anthropological perspectives on state, it is argued that the migrants’ experiences of welfare provision can be considered as constitutive of statecraft and nation-building processes, processes which turn (EU) citizens into immigrants.

Key words: EU migration, welfare provision, sanctions, statecraft, racism

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Introduction

During the 2016 EU referendum campaign the welfare rights of EU nationals played a significant part in much of the UK's media and political debates (BBC 2016; Giegold 2016). Measures aimed at restricting the welfare entitlements of (prospective) EU migrants arriving in Britain were a key objective of the UK government's renegotiation with the EU ahead of the referendum vote in June 2016. Dubbed as "emergency brakes", these measures – which, *inter alia*, aimed at prohibiting new migrants from accessing in-work benefits for four years – were considered to be an important means of reducing immigration and diminishing, according to the then British Prime Minister, David Cameron, "the draw that our welfare system can exert across Europe" (Simm 2015). Although the Brexit result rendered this renegotiation process irrelevant, the "deal" secured prior to the referendum took place amidst an already heightened political debate, media coverage, and public concerns around the impact of EU immigration on the country's social welfare. This is well captured in the ongoing preoccupation with the threat of "benefit or welfare tourism" in the country's media and political discourse (Hough and Whitehead 2011; BBC 2013; Beckford 2016). Much of the focus of these debates has been on post-accession migrants or "Eastern Europeans" who have been often targeted as "abusers" of the British welfare system (Doyle 2011; Earlam *et al.* 2016; Gutteridge 2016). Extending well beyond the recent EU referendum, worries about the phenomenon of "benefit tourism" also underpinned the UK government's introduction of transitional measures in 2004 for "A8 migrants",² which included setting up the Worker Registration Scheme not only as a means of monitoring the employment of these migrants but also to limit their access to state welfare (Anderson *et al.* 2006, 2). The expiry of these so-called transitional measures in 2011 corresponded with renewed attempts by the UK

² The term "A8" or "accession 8" refers to the eight countries that acceded the EU in 2004; these were Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia. I use quotation marks for the expressions "A8 migrants" and "A8 migration" to problematise their homogenising and essentialising tendencies with regard to individuals coming from these countries and their movements.

government to tackle the issue of “benefit tourism”, with the latter being declared a key concern in the government policy-making (Hough and Whitehead 2011).

Amidst this continuing preoccupation with the threat of “benefit tourism”, a considerable amount of literature has been responsive to these concerns. Most notably, a series of quantitative studies by Dustmann *et al.* (2008; 2010) have assessed the financial impact of post-accession migration to the UK; as well as drawing attention to the higher employment rates amongst “A8 migrants”, their studies found that these migrants have made a positive contribution to the country’s finances and are noticeably less likely to receive state benefits and live in social housing than their British-born counterparts. This was also confirmed in a later study by Dustmann and Frattini (2014) which examined the fiscal impact of recent EU migrants over an extended period from 1995 to 2011, among which “A8 migrants” were found to be particularly strong contributors.

Yet, what is noticeable in the existing literature on the relationship between migrants and welfare state is the adoption of a perspective that centres on the interests and boundaries of the nation-state (Glick Schiller 2007); the research interests often lie in assessing the impact that migration has on the British welfare system and economy. Such approach – which reminds of what some migration scholars have described as “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002) – prioritises a “host society” perspective which tends to problematise migrants and their contributions to the society, thus viewing them as outsiders and constituting a potential burden to the “host society”. What is more, it also tends to neglect migrants’ own concerns and their experiences. Thus, with regard to issues around welfare provision, the ongoing debate on and preoccupation with (the threat of) “benefit tourism” –

which intensified during the recent EU referendum – has meant that little attention has been paid to migrants’ own perspective on these issues.

Taking as a starting point the experiences of welfare provision amongst EU migrants themselves, this paper attends to this gap in the current research. It is based on 12 months of intensive ethnographic research carried out in 2012 with Czech and Slovak nationals living in Glasgow. The paper discusses various instances of welfare “cancellations” experienced by these nationals, demonstrating how these state practices turn the research informants from EU citizens with certain entitlements in the UK to suspect outsiders and immigrants who are made to feel that their privileges could be questioned and withdrawn at any time. I draw on critical approaches to the nexus of state, welfare and migration and anthropological perspectives on statecraft to argue that my research informants’ experiences of “cancellations” amount to state-making and nation-building processes in which boundaries between “us” and “them” are redrawn locally and in the realm of the everyday.

State, welfare, and migration - critical perspectives

Within the context of Western societies, the welfare system has been sometimes conceptualised as a form of control that states employ in order to regulate/limit migrants’ access to state support and, by extension, their participation in the “host society” (Bommes and Geddes 2000; Geddes 2003; Hollifield 2000; Wimmer 2002). More specifically, it has been described as an “internal form” of state control, contrasting it with border checks or external forms of controls regarding immigration (Hollifield 2000). Welfare systems also shape the criteria for membership to the national community, or as Wimmer puts it, they are means through which the states “control the entrance doors to the national home of

solidarity” (2002, 251). In this sense, welfare systems are closely linked to questions of national membership, citizenship, and belonging, or in other words to nation building processes. Control of access to welfare does not only effect the boundary of members and non-members but also constructs who is and who is not deserving of state care, shaping public discourses around deservingness and undeservingness which in turn have implications for issues around social cohesion and solidarity (Geddes 2003).

The degree in which welfare access is allowed for some migrant groups and closed to others varies across countries, depending on the legal, institutional and political contexts that influence these processes (Geddes 2003). This point is, for example, apparent when comparing EU and non-EU migration to the UK. With regard to persons who have come to the UK from outside the EU/EEA countries, legally, many have no recourse to public funds such as support provided by the welfare state. For these people, to use Wimmer’s (2002) metaphor, “the door is shut” and can only be opened by gaining a legal status that allows them access such as through naturalisation. In contrast, due to their EU citizenship EU nationals in the UK enjoy, in theory, the “same rights and obligations” (European Commission 2013, unpaginated) as British citizens, entitlements which “open the entrance doors” for them to the British national community. This does not mean, however, that EU nationals in the UK have unrestricted access to welfare support, as these rights are limited by both EU and UK legislations. For example, EU freedom of movement rules largely privilege the welfare rights of workers and so-called economically active individuals moving to the UK (and other Member States), giving rise to a differentiated and unequal system that offers limited social protection to categories of citizens who fall outside this group such as the unemployed, the disabled, carers, family members (Kilkey 2017; O’ Brien 2015). At the UK level, as noted above, between 2004 and 2011, A8 nationals were subject to welfare

restrictions as part of the transitional measures introduced by the British government. While further restrictions have been introduced since 2004 by the UK authorities (e.g. the Social Security Amendment Regulation 2006 which included measures to limit the welfare rights for EU nationals deemed economically inactive), they have intensified substantially in recent years; in particular, “since 2014 the UK government has instigated significant policy changes to further curtail the rights of EU migrants to social assistance” (Dwyer *et al.* 2018, 7). This includes, e.g., the introduction of the “Genuine Prospect of Work Test” which requires EU citizens to produce a substantial amount of evidence that they are actively looking for work in order to be entitled to unemployment benefits. Moreover, more recent developments following the 2016 EU referendum and the resulting Brexit vote have placed a great deal of uncertainty on the freedom of movement rules and the rights of all EU nationals living in the UK, “closing” further the doors for these nationals to welfare provision and more broadly to their participation in British society .

Notwithstanding these changes and variations relating to the UK, overall there is a consensus among scholars and critics that welfare provision for migrant populations throughout Western societies has become increasingly more restrictive, leading to the exclusion of various groups from accessing social welfare and participating in these societies (Schierup *et al.* 2006, 3; Breidahl 2012; Dwyer *et al.* 2018). This has often been attributed to the significant restructuring and transformation that welfare systems have undergone in past decades, resulting into the gradual withdrawal of the state support and the continued decline in the role of the state in providing care for its (both migrant and non-migrant) population. Several factors have been highlighted as contributing to this deterioration, including the introduction of a neoliberal model of the economy (Harvey 2005), the incorporation of conditionality into the welfare system (Dwyer 2004), the rise of globalisation, the emergence of the “age of

migration” (Schierup *et al.* 2006), changes which are thought to have impacted significantly on the capacity of these states to provide welfare for its citizens. Various researchers have identified the late 1970s and early 1980s as the beginning of a crucial period that marked a significant shift in welfare provision in Western countries with so-called mature or strong social welfare (Korpi and Palme 2003; Starke 2006). Often, this direction of change has been referred to as a “rolling back” of the state, “withdrawal of the state” or a “crisis of the welfare state” (Schierup *et al.* 2006), a trajectory which intensified in the 1990s and has continued to date.

Such interpretation, however, has been questioned by Wacquant (2009) who argues that far from retreating, the state is actually becoming more invasive in people’s lives. For him, what we have seen over the past three decades in many Western countries, especially the US and the UK, is a reconfiguration of the state, increasingly moving away from its social mandate and agenda to a penal one, giving rise to a welfare regime that punishes (rather than cares for) the most vulnerable in the society. Crucially, Wacquant arrives at his conclusion by theoretically drawing on Bourdieu’s (1999) conceptualisation of state as a bureaucratic field. In particular, he employs Bourdieu’s metaphor of “the Left hand” and “the Right hand” of the state in his analysis; the Left hand symbolises the protective and caring side such as provision of health services, housing and welfare, whereas the Right hand is tasked with enforcement of regulations and rules and the disciplining of the population via budget cuts, economic regulations, etc. Although Wacquant does not elaborate on the specific ways in which this reconfiguration of the state has affected migration – in his study he refers to migrants as one of the vulnerable groups affected by the state’ “punitive turn” – his analysis leads us to examine the welfare not only within the confines of what is traditionally understood as social policy but as shaped by and informing processes of state-building.

Wacquant's approach is inspired by a reconceptualisation of the state that emerged in 1990s in the sociological and anthropological literature (Foucault 1991; Gupta 1995; Bourdieu 1999; Ferguson and Gupta 2002). This literature questioned the commonsensical view of the state as a discrete, institutionally and geographically fixed entity, manifest in its policies, laws and institutional system and gave rise to new conceptualisations of the state. States were now considered "powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production that are themselves always culturally represented and understood in particular ways" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 981). In these conceptualisations, the state was not taken for granted as empirically given but seen as a regulating force (Foucault 1991) and bureaucratic field (Bourdieu 1999), a "multi-layered, contradictory and translocal ensemble of institutions, practices and people" (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 6) that (re-)enacts, "stretches" and "translates" itself into the life of people (Gupta 1995; Fuller and Benei 2001), while simultaneously regulating and containing its symbolic power.

This perspective on state moved the attention of scholars beyond formal institutions and opened up new terrains in which the workings and effects of the state could be examined, i.e. how the state comes to be experienced and imagined by ordinary people as being both "above society" and enclosing its population and territory; how the state is making itself felt, how it materialises in everyday life; and how it maintains its aura and secures legitimacy (Gupta 1995; Fuller and Benei 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006). Importantly, next to images of and discourses about the state, the anthropological literature on state drew attention to the mundane, routine practices of state agents and non-state actors and their varied interactions that happen "on the ground" all of which was seen as constitutive of the state. They showed that it is through these kinds of mundane and ordinary practices the state maintains its

monopoly over controlling the movement of people within and across its borders and reproduces its legitimacy (Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

In the following paragraphs, I draw on the above insights and an anthropological understanding of state and statecraft in order to shed new light on the everyday experiences of welfare provision among EU migrants living in Glasgow. Here, instead of approaching the field by assessing the impact of these migrants on the British welfare state – and thus reproducing “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Schiller 2002) – or from a policy analysis perspective that takes the state for granted and treats welfare as social policy, I place migrants’ experiences of welfare provision at the centre of the analysis and examine their encounters with state actors as part of state-making and nation-building processes.

Methodology

This paper is based on 12 months of intensive ethnographic research with Czech and Slovak nationals living in Glasgow in 2012, which explored various insecurities and risks that they experienced in the city and the ways in which they negotiated these issues in their everyday lives. However, instead of treating these EU nationals as separate ethnic and/or national groups, i.e. as Slovaks, Czechs, and, among them, Roma, in my research I focused on a broad language-based category of Slovak- and Czech-speaking migrants. The decision to choose language as the main criterion for selecting the research population aimed at overcoming “methodological nationalism” and the “ethnic lens” which are prevalent in much of the mainstream migration scholarship (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Glick Schiller 2007). It was also informed by the field itself; prior to the research, I conducted two small pilot studies in 2010 in Glasgow which pointed to an array of relationships and interactions between these

migrants on different levels, e.g., services that catered specifically for Czech and Slovak nationals and informal networks that included both Slovak and Czech speakers.

The ethnographic fieldwork involved participant observation at different sites frequented by Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants including support services used by them in Glasgow. This included an information and advice center run by Groundworks,³ a local charity organisation, which offered support to these migrants in relation to their rights and entitlements in the UK as EU citizens. In addition, I followed the everyday lives of a small number (28) of key informants, with whom I met repeatedly in various settings, throughout the fieldwork period, enabling me to be part of their everyday lives and activities. The sample consisted of a diverse group of individuals not only in terms of nationality and ethnicity but also regarding aspects such as employment status, family status, age, class, and gender. Among the key informants ten individuals were in receipt of some form of state welfare support, either due to being unemployed/seeking work or being in low paid work (and thus receiving in-work benefits). Alongside these key participants, in the course of my fieldwork at the Groundworks' information and advice center I came in contact with and learnt about the lives of over 50 migrants who attended the centre to seek help with accessing state welfare support. This paper focuses on this group of individuals/informants and their everyday experiences of state welfare provision. It draws on ethnographic data produced throughout 2012 which involved field notes, memos of observations, ethnographic interviews with service users (in Slovak/Czech and English) as well as semi-structured interviews with migrants, support workers and other relevant stakeholders in the field.

³ A pseudonym.

“They cancelled the papers”

Zkancelovali was a word that I came across frequently in my conversations with research informants and which I also heard repeatedly in the context of my fieldwork at Groundworks’ information and advice centre as well as in other sites. This term is intriguing as it exists neither in Slovak nor in Czech. It derives from the English word “to cancel” and is formed in accordance with the Slovak and Czech conjugation of a verb in the 3rd person plural in the past tense. A common expression that I encountered was, for example, *zkancelovali papiere* (“they cancelled the papers”). Although sometimes the word was used in wider contexts, such as when a bank rejected someone’s application for a new account, *zkancelovali* was mainly used with reference to state support. It seemed a blanket term to refer to various kinds of negative responses from authorities, such as when applications were rejected, benefits payments suspended or stopped. That Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants had developed a technical term to talk about rejections or suspensions of their applications or claims and used it widely hinted at the regularity of such experiences. The recurring theme of *zkancelovali* during my fieldwork in 2012 brought to my attention linkages between welfare provision and interactions with state agencies and peoples’ worries and fears about their social benefits claims being rejected or stopped.

The large extent of these “cancellations” became particularly apparent during my participant observation at the Groundworks’ centre when, for example, service users often asked for appointments to enquire about their benefit payments which had been delayed, suspended or stopped. The prevalence of welfare payment suspensions was also confirmed to me by the support workers at Groundworks; referring to their individual monitoring records of regular service users, they pointed out that it was difficult to think of any individuals who had not had their claims rejected or payments stopped at least once. The regularity with which

complex cases involving “cancellations” were referred by Groundworks to the local legal centre further corroborates this.⁴ Given the prevalence of the situations of *zkancelovali*, it was not surprising that informants often talked about “luck” with regard to benefit payments – e.g., when these were reinstated – as if welfare was ruled by a game of chance rather than a legal right owing to their status as EU citizens. The practical implications of *zkancelovali*, such as running up debts, having to invest time and effort in obtaining paperwork, or running a household on reduced incomes for weeks or months, then appeared as a streak of “bad luck”. More importantly, experiencing “the system” as irrational in its administrative requirements and decisions called into question the very security it was meant to provide: not only were insecurities triggered as a result of “cancellations” as stated above, but from the perspective of those relying on state support, insecurity had become an intrinsic part of the entire welfare system.

The experiences of insecurities amongst Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants in Glasgow that I have described here took place amidst ongoing changes and transformations in the UK welfare system, changes which were affecting many British citizens as well as migrants. Most notably, the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act by the UK government in March 2012 was touted as the single most significant reform of the welfare state in sixty years. A far-reaching piece of legislation aimed at simplifying the current system and tackling what it called “welfare dependency” and “worklessness” (Duncan Smith 2014), the Act paved the way for intensification and rapid increase of benefit sanctions and “tougher penalties” for welfare recipients (Oakley 2014). These changes went hand in hand with negative discourses in the British media and amongst politicians around “benefit scroungers” and “skivers”,

⁴ Complex cases included all those that required legal advice which Groundworks staff were unqualified to provide, e.g. for lodging formal appeals, legal representation in courts.

frequently targeting welfare claimants and people relying on state support (Baumberg *et al.* 2012).

My research informants' experiences of "cancellations" that I introduced above can thus be read as more detailed empirical examples of how Wacquant's notion of the punitive state variably materialises in the everyday experiences of Slovak- and Czech-speaking migrants in Glasgow. The ways in which welfare is presented and framed *vis-à-vis* welfare applicants and the general public and the ways in which the state makes itself felt not only through the provision but, perhaps even more so, through the removal or suspension of welfare payments can then be thought of as illustrating how the state reproduces itself. Benefit sanctions or other (sometimes unexplained) measures by the welfare authorities seemed to have become rather "normal", as the prevalence of anxieties around welfare provision and resulting insecurities showed. These experiences point to a strengthened "Right hand" of the state; this is well captured in the term "sanction" deployed in the official discourse of the government and the relevant state authorities, a term which entails an element of wrongdoing and places the blame on the benefit recipient. Sanctioning is underpinned by the principle of conditionality, i.e. "linking welfare rights to 'responsible' behaviour" (WelCond Project, 2013-2018),⁵ which emerged in the UK in the late 1990s with the rise of Third Way welfare policies (Dwyer 2004). Nowadays, this principle has become a central element of the British welfare system and incorporated into a wide range of policy areas, with benefit sanctions having become increasingly widespread and severe and extended to vulnerable groups in society who were previously unaffected by sanctions, e.g. disabled people (Watts *et al.* 2014).

⁵ <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/>.

Yet, the notion of *zkancelovali* I have introduced here highlights a contrast to how my research informants understood these events; their use of the rather neutral term “cancellations” points to the fact that they did not perceive these suspensions or rejections as caused by their own behaviour but, instead, related to a malfunctioning of the British welfare system or the arbitrary actions of individual state agents. It is in this sense that, from the perspective of my research informants, state benefits became associated with a game of chance and, thus, as governed by (bad) luck rather than rules pertaining to welfare entitlements. This indicates that, in some ways, the element of punishment invoked by the term “sanctions” remained unacknowledged by those it was imposed upon, thus resulting in hardship for those affected without actually fulfilling its supposedly “educative” aim. Hence, while insecurities resulting from benefit sanctions are likely to be experienced more widely by benefit claimants in the UK, who find themselves being blamed and shamed for their misfortune, the theme of “cancellations” points to specific ways in which Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants understood and interpreted the wider transformations of the British welfare system.

Documentless citizens

Perhaps the most striking state practice affecting specifically these migrants was the retention of identity documents such as passports, birth certificates and ID cards by the welfare authorities. As well as a completed application form for certain benefits, presenting personal identification documents to the authorities was often a part of the bureaucratic procedure that applicants had to undergo in order to have their entitlement to welfare benefits assessed. As I found during my fieldwork, applications were sometimes “cancelled” based on doubts raised by the relevant welfare authorities about the “genuineness” of documents provided to them.

In these cases, as well as “cancelling” one’s application or payment, authorities often retained the applicant’s documentations on suspicion that they were “not genuine”. This took place also during face-to-face encounters with authorities, for example, when research participants had their ID cards retained by the Job Centre staff when attending a routine appointment. Interestingly, the documentations retained included those issued by the Slovak and Czech authorities as well by the UK officials themselves (e.g., UKBA residence cards), and it was not uncommon for authorities to hold documents for longer periods of time.

The support workers at Groundworks also confirmed that document retention was a rather frequent occurrence and happened to many people who attended the advice service. The extent of these practices was also documented and criticised in a report conducted by a community controlled law centre based in the south of Glasgow (Paterson *et al.* 2011). The report stated that the “retention of passports [was] commonplace” (6) and highlighted the unreasonable amount of time (in some cases up to two years) that the authorities held these documents without any progress in the assessment of individuals’ claims. When documents were returned to the claimants, the report further pointed out, there was “no covering letter or explanation” (16) provided by the authorities as to why this had happened.⁶

The retention of identity documents by the authorities, however, did not only mean the “cancellation” of one’s benefits; it also left affected migrants without personal documents - in some cases for longer periods of time - and thus unable to access other public services or

⁶ Although Paterson *et al.*’s report exclusively focused on Roma migrants, as I found during fieldwork, document retention and more broadly welfare “cancellations” extended also to non-Roma migrants. This does not mean that Roma migrants were treated in the same way as their non-Roma counterparts when dealing with welfare authorities, especially in face-to-face encounters. The law centre’s report as well as a Scotsman article (Briggs 2012) highlighted a pattern of specifically abusive language and discriminatory practices of welfare state agents towards Roma in Glasgow, underpinned by racist and stereotypical assumptions about Roma people, which points to their further stigmatisation. Further research is needed to discern whether and how Roma and non-Roma EU migrants faced significantly different or structurally similar experiences of welfare provision in the city and elsewhere.

travel abroad. Also, being abroad meant for those concerned that obtaining a replacement for their passports or IDs was expensive and not a straightforward matter. UK authorities would forward “suspect” documents to the Slovak or Czech embassy in London, which would then send all documents to the Ministry of the Interior in Slovakia or Czech Republic as a matter of procedure. The support workers at Groundworks routinely enquired about ID replacements with both embassies in London, which were, as one of the workers put it, “inundated with valid IDs and passports” that the UK authorities had doubted. The extent of this practice was briefly covered in the Slovak media. In August 2012, a Slovak TV correspondent reported that the Slovak Embassy in London had received as many as 385 passports and 1005 birth certificates by the UK welfare authorities within a week (*Televízia JOJ* 2012).⁷ In order to retrieve their IDs or passports, affected individuals in Glasgow had to first attend their embassy in London to obtain a temporary travel document, which would then enable them to travel to Slovakia or the Czech Republic and get it back from the relevant authorities there. Some, however, could not afford to travel to London, let alone further to Slovakia or the Czech Republic. In these cases, people were left in limbo, hoping that one day their documents would be returned to them by the British welfare authorities or that they would save enough money to afford the journey to London or further afield.

These practices and processes through which these migrants are dispossessed of their official identification documents give rise to what I have termed “documentless citizens”. As mentioned earlier, in the UK, Slovak and Czech nationals, on paper, became entitled to the same welfare benefits on a par with UK nationals on the basis of their EU citizenship once

⁷ A brief reference about the numbers of identification documents received by the Slovak embassy in London was included in a short televised news clip titled *Shame for Slovaks - non-existing children were added on passports* (28 August 2012). The programme, however, had racist undertones in that it seemed to imply, through the references to specific regions in the east of the country, that it was Slovakian Roma who were “bringing shame on the nation”.

the temporary restrictions were lifted in 2011. The above experiences of document retention that emerged during my fieldwork in 2012 shine a light on how, in practice and at a relatively early stage after the restrictions expired, these migrants' entitlements to welfare benefits were variously implemented and sometimes, in effect, denied. In this sense, I employ the term of "documentless citizen" to refer to a seemingly paradoxical category of citizens who are dispossessed of their official identification documents and thus become "documentless" with adverse consequences. This notion intentionally contrasts with the term "undocumented migrant" which is often used - largely in the context of non-EU migration but sometimes also within EU migration (see, e.g. Lafleur and Mescoli 2018) - with reference to persons who have no (longer a) legal right to be in a specific country. Differently from the latter, Slovak and Czech nationals living in Glasgow are *de jure* granted privileged access to state provided welfare in Britain but in some cases find these rights being *de facto* nullified or inaccessible for sustained periods of time.

The making of documentless citizens, however, does not only entail the retention of people's documents and, with it, the hindrance of their access to welfare and other state services or the impediment of their movement across national borders, but it can also be read as a practice of statecraft. The important role of identification documents in relation to state formation has been highlighted by the anthropological literature on statecraft which has shown that routine bureaucratic procedures, such as issuing passports or IDs for the (national) population or checking the validity of documents of foreign nationals at the border or within the country at immigration offices, are central to the functioning of the state, and its ability to maintain monopoly over controlling the movement of people across its borders and reproduce its legitimacy (Navaro-Yashin 2007; Sharma & Gupta 2006; Torpey 2000). However, more specifically, with regard to the area of welfare provision I argue that the practice of document

retention that some of my informants experienced is not only a mode of statecraft but also of nation-building. Having one's identification documents taken away for prolonged periods of time, often without any explanation given other than that the validity of the documents was doubted, openly signals that one's membership to the national community is being challenged. Such practices split the "us" projected in the shared notion of EU citizenship into an "us", the British, and a "suspect you", the other, impacting on the migrants' participation, settlement and belonging in British society. In some ways, for Slovak and Czech citizens who enjoy freedom of movement under EU rules, the drama of the passport control at the border has been moved into the seemingly ordinary offices of welfare authorities which are increasingly taking on immigration-related roles (often without the relevant expertise). This reminds of the phenomenon of "everyday bordering" which has become common in the UK following the introduction of new immigration legislations in 2014 and 2016, as part of the government drive to tackle "illegal migration" in Britain and create a so-called hostile environment (Yuval-Davis *et al.* 2017). These changes have led to the extension of immigration controls internally into all aspects of life in Britain, with new legislations giving immigration-related powers to a range of (non-state) actors such as employers, landlords, doctors, school teachers, etc., turning them into border-guards. Yet, in the case discussed here, it is welfare authorities who perform these immigration tasks, i.e. state actors rather than non-state actors, and the examples that I have discussed show that the practices of "everyday bordering" took place before 2014. As much as through national and supranational citizenship rules, integration policy, or public discourses on Britishness, it is in welfare offices that membership criteria were concretely enacted, boundaries redrawn and nation-building took place. Rather than being able to rely on a safety net provided by the state, my informants displayed a general sense of being mistrusted and felt their entitlement as well as their sincerity being questioned by the British welfare authorities (or particular officials).

Often, these feelings were framed as issues of injustice, or one research informant put it, “people not realising that we were entitled to it”.

Degradation ceremonies

Other modes of statecraft affecting specifically Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants were evident during face-to-face encounters between these migrants and state agents. I witnessed some of these first hand when I accompanied one of the informants, Martina,⁸ a 50-year old woman from Slovakia, to her scheduled appointments at her local Job Centre (May/June 2012). I had come to know Martina at Groundworks, which she regularly attended for help, and she was one of those who had repeatedly complained about difficulties when attending the Job Centre. She had only recently arrived in Glasgow (2010) and spoke little English, so Martina was particularly grateful when I offered to interpret for her during her appointments. This time she was waiting outside the building together with her friend, a Slovak woman who looked of a similar age to Martina. Their appointments with the employment adviser were scheduled at the same time, and as they lived in the same area, they often walked together to the Centre. As we entered the building, Martina showed her appointment card to the security guard who asked her to wait in the waiting area until her name was called by an advisor. I explained that I was there to interpret for Martina, as she spoke little English. Approving my request, the security guard asked us to make our way to the waiting area. In the waiting area, Martina kept scanning the various advisers’ desks in the open-plan office and began to quietly “prepare herself”. She tried to anticipate which adviser would be calling her. “That man sitting over there, he is nice (*on je dobry*)”, she observed, hoping that he would “take” her again. “The blonde woman over here”, she continued, “is also nice - she has taken me

⁸ A pseudonym.

before”. “That woman to the right,” she said lowering her voice, “she is really bad”. Visibly tensing up, Martina was dreading to see her or any of the other “bad” ones. Luckily for her, on that day it was one of the “nice” advisors who called Martina to his desk. As we both approached the desk I explained to the advisor that I was there to interpret for Martina. The adviser nodded but asked me to sit a few meters back, adding that he would call me if needed. As the session began, the advisor asked Martina for her date of birth and address. But while she was able to give her date of birth in English, she struggled with giving her full address to the advisor. Blushing and with a trembling voice, she turned back to me and asked me in Slovak to explain to the advisor that she could not remember the flat number. At this point, the advisor asked me to join them, which I did. With Martina looking much calmer now, we continued the session with me acting as an interpreter.

On the way out, we went past Martina’s friend who had been sitting with the woman who Martina had referred to as the “bad” advisor. Visibly distressed, her friend noticed us leaving and asked me if I could interpret for her and explain to the advisor why she had changed her address recently. However, as I approached their desk to offer my help, the advisor gestured to me to leave the building and instantly called the security guard who ushered me outside. We waited for Martina’s friend outside and once she came through the doors the three of us walked slowly back towards their homes talking about what had happened inside. As Martina’s friend told us, the advisor had threatened to stop her payment because of a change of address which she allegedly had not reported. She had tried to explain the reason for this change but had found it difficult to do so because her English was limited, which is why she had tried to get me involved. Once we had left the building, the case worker had continued to ask her questions about the change of address in an increasingly annoyed and loud tone and had demanded answers which Martina’s friend could not give in a way the case worker

understood. What felt very much like a hostile interrogation lasted for around 20 minutes. In the end, “luckily”, she said, her benefit payment “had not been cancelled this time”. But Martina’s friend looked exhausted and almost in tears; the appointment which was meant to offer her support and advice to find employment had been a gruelling experience for her.

Such distressing encounters seemed rather commonplace at this local Job Centre - which was located a short walk from the Groundworks service in the south of Glasgow - and had earned it the title “the police”: “*Ideme na policiu*” (“We are going to the police”) was an expression I often heard when people talked about attending the Job Centre for an appointment, not without a pinch of sarcasm. This related to claimants’ experiences of interrogation-style encounters with the Job Centre staff, in which they were made to feel like suspects or at fault, always under pressure to prove themselves “worthy” of state support. As I have discussed in the previous sections, people were, for example, required to produce extensive documentation for all kinds of life events and situations, which can be understood as the increasingly punitive element in the welfare system as the state shadows ever more areas of people’s lives. Here, this is not only signified by the presence of security guards on the premises of a service aimed at supporting the unemployed. We can discern a kind of bureaucratic-logic-as-control at work, to which the claimants are already accustomed, illustrated by the way Martina had brought with her a letter from a local organisation to verify her account. Similarly, in her friend’s case, what seemed like an ordinary occurrence, i.e. her change of address, was treated by the Job Centre worker as a suspicious act, immediately turning the conversation to potentially sanctionable behaviour. Even though these two interactions that day seemed to be contrasting in their tone and intensity, both show how the state materialises itself and exerts its authority through and in such concrete face-to-face encounters with individual state agents. It also shows how, in practice, the state is not a uniform entity but individual state

agents may represent and embody the state differently via their performances (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), as captured in Martina's differentiation between "good" and "bad" adviser.

While the above encounters involving various facets of control and threatened sanctions, anxieties and pressures might resemble what jobseekers (be they migrants and non-migrants) around the country experienced at a time of increasingly neoliberal policies, what is important to note here is that amongst the affected migrants and support staff at the various third sector organisations in Glasgow that I was in contact with there was great bewilderment and indignation about the fact that all too often Job Centre staff seemed to disregard the public sector equality duty to provide language interpreting when a claimant "cannot communicate adequately in English" and he or she "cannot or does not want to provide their own interpreter" (DWP 2011, 4). This led some Slovak- and Czech-speaking migrants with limited English language knowledge to use their children as interpreters whenever possible, as the outcomes of these appointments (continued benefit payments or sanctions) were often crucial for the livelihood of whole families. In the case of Martina's friend, on the other hand, neither did she have a family member to help her nor was I permitted to support her as an interpreter. Even though the case worker she was allocated to that day must have realised early on in their interaction that the claimant had difficulties expressing herself in English, the staff member apparently chose to carry on with her "advice session" regardless, threatening sanctions and increasing the pressure on Martina's friend the longer this situation went on.

Clearly, the advice worker in this case seemed not to care very much about developing an understanding of her client's circumstances or needs; rather, I argue, the encounter can be

read as a “degradation ceremony”⁹ (Garfinkel 1956, 420) in which the claimant was made to look like a fool, “exposed” as deficient and lacking English language skills, as the one not understanding and possibly breaking the (bureaucratic) rules. The transformation of Martina’s friend’s public identity took place in a quasi-public way; the staffed desks were positioned in the open plan office in close proximity to each other and without any separating structures, so her interactions at the desks were audible and visible for everyone in the open plan office, leaving her feeling humiliated and shaken. More specifically, since in this process of status degradation the spotlight was put on her lack of English language skills and related “deficiencies”, she was marked out not only as a “failed citizen” (Anderson 2013, 4) but, additionally, as “different”, as “the other”. It showed her up as not belonging and thus undeserving of care, which is a central part of nation-building processes in which boundaries are drawn between citizen and non-citizen/immigrant. In this way, her (abstract) entitlement to welfare support was transformed into some kind of “favour”, graciously bestowed upon her by the case worker. Martina’s friend’s interpretation that she had been “lucky this time” not to have her benefits stopped reflects such degradation effects of her encounters with the British welfare authorities. Her experience can also be read as a manifestation of institutional racism, which is defined as “the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin” (as quoted in Banton 2015, 81-82). Institutional racism can be discerned here in the everyday procedures, attitudes and behaviour of (some) state agents, such as disregard for the public sector equality duty, arrogance, suspicion, harassment and thoughtlessness towards Martina’s friend and other migrant claimants, leading to the discrimination and marginalisation of these migrants.

⁹ Garfinkel defines degradation ceremonies as the following: “Any communicative work between persons, whereby the public identity of an actor is transformed into something looked on as lower in the local scheme of social types” (1956, 420).

Conclusion

This paper has focused on state support provided to Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants in Glasgow. Based on my ethnographic data I introduced the term “*zkancelovali*” as signifying a particular set of experiences among my research informants related to the refusal, suspension or termination of state provided welfare. My interest in the semiotics of “*zkancelovali*” resulted in the intermediate finding that the research participants seemed to understand the British welfare system as a “game of chance”, unpredictable and highly dependent on “good or bad luck”. I discussed how their experiences with major (national) welfare providers were marked by both material consequences and resulting hardships as well as a strong sense of insecurity and anxiety pertaining to their everyday lives. I considered these experiences as more widely shared across the UK population at the time, and thus as not only affecting Slovak- and Czech-speaking migrants, by discussing the wider changes and transformations of the British welfare state in the context of contemporary neoliberal currents. Wacquant’s conceptualisation of the relation between state and welfare combined with anthropological perspectives on the everyday workings of the state were considered useful here to grasp my informants’ experiences more fully as part of state-making processes. At the same time, this led me to the question of what was specific to my research participants’ experiences with the British welfare state; to that end, I discussed two different modes in which the welfare state materialised itself, namely bureaucratic practices that gave rise to “documentless citizens”, and the role of English language interpretation in face-to-face encounters between welfare claimants and state agents, more specifically at a local Job Centre.

These various aspects, I argue here, amount to processes in which Slovak- and Czech-speaking migrants encountering the welfare state in Glasgow were transformed from citizens to immigrants, or to be more precise, from EU citizens with certain entitlements in the UK to suspect outsiders who were made to feel that their privileges could be questioned and withdrawn at any time. In other words, in and through the practices of retaining identity documents and in and through degradation ceremonies their membership-through-citizenship could practically be invalidated and subjected to *zkancelovanie*. As I argued, these modes of statecraft entail nation-building processes in which boundaries between “us” and “them” were redrawn locally and in the realm of the everyday. They also demonstrate how restricting the rights of EU citizens has been ongoing and was already at play prior to major policy changes targeting migrants introduced by the UK government in 2014 (cf. Dwyer *et al.* 2018) and pre-dated recent debates around Brexit. The experiences of structural racism highlighted here lend further weight to the argument put forward by various critics that Brexit is underpinned by racism, xenophobia, and colonialism (Virdee and McGeever 2017), and how these modes of oppression and exclusion have increasingly “become tied into the [British] state itself” (Sivanandan 2017, 2).

From a vantage point of the specific and concrete settings and encounters with the welfare state, my informants’ experiences can then be understood as calling into question or highlighting the limits of EU citizenship in Glasgow (and perhaps elsewhere). While the continuing, highly controversial public and political debate about EU citizens’ rights to welfare in the UK already reminds us of the fragile nature of such political promises of belonging, this paper has moved beyond the level of policy or regulation and examined the actual workings of the state as it takes place in the myriad of welfare offices around the

country and through the various interactions with state agents at different levels in everyday settings.

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