Intersectionality, identity work and migrant progression from low-paid work: a critical realist approach

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Abstract

This paper contributes to developing intersectionality theory by deepening understanding of how patriarchy and racism interact with other structural factors to influence low-paid migrants' progression attempts. Using a critical realist approach and analysing interviews of thirty-one female and male migrants employed in five large organisations in Scotland and England, we reveal how major structural factors influence their main forms of identity work and the resources that they draw on in both the workplace and home. The feminist approach undertaken by this study makes significant advances to organisational intersectional theory in three ways. Firstly, it highlights the importance of examining the interaction of the influence of patriarchy within the home with racism and other structuring forces within the workplace. Secondly, it reveals how combinations of constraints and enablements that intersect with gendered and racialised identity work create formidable barriers to progression. Thirdly, it explores migrants' differential access to diverse resources, including financial, social, discursive and psychological resources in both spheres over time. These findings reinforce the need for policy actions that recognise the interaction of structural factors which influence female and male migrant progression and the need for support within and beyond the workplace.

Key words: patriarchy, racism, intersectionality, identity work, migrants, gender, ethnicity, structure, agency, progression, low-paid work

Introduction

Two articles in *Gender, Work and Organization* have persuasively argued the value of incorporating intersectional perspectives into the study of identity work (Atewologun et al, 2016; Carrim and Nkomo, 2016). The resultant analyses illuminate the dynamic interaction between the ways in which patriarchy intersects with multiple identities of social difference and structural factors within organisational contexts while recognising the historical, ideological and political frameworks that continually shape these processes. Both studies engage with the argument for mainstreaming intersectionality and incorporating processes and systems of differentiation and dominance (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Dhamoon, 2011.) Our paper builds on this ground-breaking work by taking a feminist intersectional approach to the study of identity work, which extends it empirically and theoretically in two distinct ways.

First, we focus on female and male employees in low-paid jobs, and explore both the types of actions they take to progress to better paid work (their progression-oriented identity work) and the structural factors they face at the micro, meso and macro-levels (Tatli, 2011). Globally, the proportion of female migrants is increasing, particularly in Europe (United Nations, 2016), while in North America and Western Europe, migrants are over-represented in the low-wage sector (European Commission, 2014; Alba and Foner, 2015). Our focus on this group enables us to increase understanding of the role of agency among individuals who are multiply disadvantaged and whose use of resources in attempting to progress to better paid jobs may be significantly different from managers. While previous research has indicated that increased fluency in the dominant language and participation in social networks play a key role in contributing to better job opportunities (Ryan, 2011; Morosanu, 2016), little is known about the structural contexts which facilitate or hinder progression from low-paid work. Drawing on a critical realist framework, this paper advances understanding of the ways in which structural factors, including patriarchy, racism and power imbalances

across organisational hierarchies interact with each other to influence the progression opportunities of migrants in low-paid work.

Second, we argue that a critical realist approach (based on Archer, 2003, 2007) provides a fuller understanding of the efficacy of progression-oriented identity work and the way in which this is complicated by the compounding effects of different structural factors (Crenshaw, 1989) than constructivist or interpretivist approaches (Gergen and Gergen, 2008), or structuralist accounts, although they concur with these approaches in certain ways. For instance, critical realists share a common interest with constructivists or interpretivists with respect to the centrality of meaning and sense-making in individuals' decision-making processes. Critical realism is also similar to structuralist approaches which have been inspired by Bourdieu (1991) in recognising the significance of the historical and geographical context or *field* in shaping agency. One of the most influential proponents of critical realism, Archer (2012: 55) has also recognised that the Bourdieusian concept of *habitus* (individuals' unconscious dispositions) along with reflexivity, is a key influence on agency.

However, where critical realists depart from these approaches is in their insistence on the *causality* of structural factors, *regardless of the levels of awareness of individuals of their existence* (Bhaskar, 1989). Crucially structure and agency are viewed as distinct since conflation of both deprives each of the *causal efficacy* of the other, risking either voluntarism (where agency is emphasised) or determinism (where structure is emphasised). Critical realist approaches also highlight the *contingency* of single contextual factors on other contextual factors in bringing about certain effects (Sayer, 2000). This interlinking helps explain the gendered struggles of racialized migrants in moving on to better paid work, and helps explain why in some contexts it is possible for a small minority to progress due to the interaction of certain structural factors with their agency and personal, demographic and social support characteristics.

We argue that *clusters* of conditions in the workplace and the home facilitate or constrain the progression-oriented identity work of migrants rather than any single condition. An example of clusters of constraints in the workplace for female migrants may include patriarchal assumptions of appropriate jobs for both sexes, with men more likely to hold power; the lack of promotion opportunities for employees working on a part-time basis (typically women) and racialized stereotypes against minorities which limit progression opportunities. Further, drawing on insights from intersectionality theory, we demonstrate that patriarchy or racism or the intertwining of both in organisational structures, systems and processes (Acker, 2011) can result in unequal progression opportunities, regardless of individuals' awareness of these factors. Consequently, in addition to identifying the main forms of progression-oriented identity work carried out by migrants, the paper is also concerned with revealing the structural contexts of power, privilege and subordination (Rodriguez et al, 2016) within which such work is embedded. This approach enables us to explore the implications for developing policy actions and workplace changes that are more conducive to enabling both female and male migrants to progress beyond low-paid work.

In summary, through a feminist lens, we draw on intersectionality theory and identity work to examine the structuring processes that influence the progression-oriented agency of migrants in low-paid work in both the public sphere of the workplace and the private sphere of the home. This approach is informed by postcolonial theory in recognising the oppression of former subjects of imperialism in the UK, but also acknowledges the distinctive nature of the challenges faced by female and male migrants from post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Olesky, 2011).

We begin by reviewing identity work, including that of low-paid workers and the influence of structuring forces such as patriarchy and racism on the process. We then consider the contribution of critical realist approaches to the study of identity work, focusing on the concepts developed by Archer (2003, 2007). We explain how this approach can link with intersectionality theory to underpin our analysis. The context and methods of the

empirical study are explained. In the findings section, we report our analysis of the three main forms of progression-oriented identity work undertaken by migrants and consider clusters of factors, including those stemming from the interaction of patriarchy, racism and other power dynamics within organisational systems and processes (Acker, 2011) that either facilitate or hinder advancement. In the discussion section, we explain the value of our approach in exploring the interaction of structuring processes with each other and with identity work, and we outline the policy implications arising from our analysis.

Identity work and intersectionality

In one of the first conceptualisations of 'identity work', Snow and Anderson (1987) describe activities that homeless people undertake to create, present and sustain their personal identities, using their material, social and discursive resources. Since then, the concept has been widely deployed in organizational research – see Ybema et al (2009) and Brown (2015) for overviews - to explore how and why individuals reflect on their own identity and portray it to others. Central to identity work is agency because an assumption is that individuals can influence others, gain acceptance, and achieve social rewards such as promotion. Alongside, there is a narrative that recognises the countervailing influences and pressures – portrayed by Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) as identity regulation – which reflects the familiar tension of agency and structure. Linking this to Rodriguez et al's (2016: 201) work on intersectionality, we view identity work as being embedded within systemic dimensions of power which are 'exercised simultaneously in all spheres of influence,' including the workplace and home, and which may be mediated by clusters of constraints or enablements.

As Rodriguez et al (2016) outline, there are two distinct approaches to the study of intersectionality in organisations. Most studies focus on subjectivities and explore intersections to highlight the consequences of inequalities experienced by groups given their social membership, recognising membership of more than one group. The second approach concentrates on embedding subjectivities within systemic dimensions of power and explores

intersections to highlight these dynamics to make them visible for analysis. This study responds to Rodriguez et al's (2016) call for more attention to be paid to the latter, and is consistent with the emphasis in critical realism in revealing structural processes.

Predominantly, identity work research has been concerned with managers and professionals (for example, Atewologun et al, 2016; Pio and Essers, 2014 Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003; Watson, 2008) so there is a gap in relation to exploring those on the lower rungs of the organisational hierarchy. Some insights into the identity work of individuals in low-paid work can be found in studies that have noted the resources used by concierges (Ghidina, 1992) and assembly-line workers (Thompson, 1983) in forming self-preferred identities and preserving themselves from threats by individuals working in higher status work. Indian call centre workers have been revealed to attempt to mask their nationality wheninteracting with Western clients (Rankin-Rajan, 2017). The identity work of these workers presents a sharp contrast to that of managers whose education and professional affiliation serve as powerful resources for constructing their self-preferred identities.

The pioneering effort of Atewologun et al (2016), Carrim and Nkomo (2016) and Carrim (2018) of bringing intersectionality into identity work provides an important conceptual bridge for our study. It means that intersectional research into the ways female and male migrants negotiate their acceptance within the workplace (for example, Johansson and Śliwa, 2014) should be considered alongside studies that explore the identity work of migrants. For example, Pio and Essers' (2014) study of professional Indian women who migrated to New Zealand reveals how they had to overcome significant power imbalances and processes of 'othering' (including patriarchy, racism and other structural factors) through which 'in' groups construct 'out' groups and stigmatize differences. It uses the term 'Othering' to draw attention to the specific forms of sexist and racialised discrimination they experienced by virtue of skin colour, clothing and accent. Their identity work involved not only resisting processes of othering but creating alternative meanings of themselves within their specific structural contexts.

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Critical realism, intersectionality and identity work in the home and workplace

When applied to researching identity, critical realist approaches are consistent with theories of intersectionality and identity work in their concern with how individuals perceive and experience their social location (Edwards et al, 2014). In line with Rodriguez et al (2016)'s call to embed subjectivities within systemic dimensions of power and make their intersections visible for analysis, we build on Acker (2011) in recognising patterns of inequality that stem from gendered and racialised power dynamics operating through organisational hierarchies and processes. These inequalities are manifested as systematic disparities between groups of employees in control over organisational goals, processes, resources and, significantly for our purposes, opportunities to advance. As Bhaskar (1989: 2) observes: 'we will only be able to understand – and so change – the social world if we identify the structures at work' that generate these inequalities. In our empirical study, we develop this understanding by demonstrating that most female and male migrants in low-paid work experience particular configurations of structural constraints and enablements that, on balance, tend to block their progression from low-paid work.

A key feature which distinguishes our approach from Acker (2011) is the attention we pay to the resources available for progression-oriented identity work within both the household and workplace and the influence of patriarchy and racism on access to resources. Following Walby (1997: 7), we acknowledge 'the transformation from a private to a public form of patriarchy, of a domestic to a more public gender regime'. This means that while we recognise the workplace as a critical site in shaping inequalities (Acker, 2011), we call for more attention to the private sphere of the home in considering employment outcomes, including the role of gender in the household division of labour, community relationships and access to resources. The use of a critical realist approach also represents an opportunity to address the scarcity of longitudinal analyses that capture 'the temporal dimensions of

intersectional dynamics across organisational and geographical boundaries' (Rodriguez et al, 2016: 206). Crucially, this attention to temporality helps explain how organisations and households can be either *reproduced* or *transformed* through clusters of enablements or constraints (Archer, 2007), increasing the explanatory power of intersectionality theory with respect to the intertwining of structuring processes. Further, linking enablements to such theory enables us to respond to Rodriguez et al's call (2016: 204) to move from 'static representations of the dominance of oppression to explicitly include the interplay of advantage and disadvantage' that enable some migrants to gain access to potentially life-changing resources and progress beyond low-paid work.

Applying critical realism to intersectional dynamics provides an opportunity to consider possible intersections (of processes) *within* different levels of each set of clusters operating within the private sphere of the home or the public sphere of the workplace or both, and *between* sets of clusters operating within each domain. The approach further allows analysis of the intersections between the clusters and identity work – the structure-agency interface. We demonstrate how constraints, arising from structural factors operating in the workplace and home, including patriarchy and racism may interact with each other within organisations (Acker, 2011) as well as how patriarchy within the home may interact with structuring forces in the workplace to hinder progression-oriented agency. We also show how potential enablements in the workplace may be undermined by constraints in the same sphere. Since our study has also revealed that a small minority of workers do progress from better paid work, we also show how enablements within the home and the workplace may intersect with each other to sometimes over-ride constraints.

Having highlighted the potential for both constraints and enablements to intersect with each other in complex ways within the theoretical framework of the study, we now place the progression attempts of migrants in low-paid work within the socio-political and economic context of our study.

Migrants in low-paid work in the UK: the socio-political and economic context

Immigration to the UK rose substantially between 2000 and 2012, with the foreign-born population growing by over 70 percent, from about 3.5 to 6 million (Fratinni, 2017). Recent immigrants are younger and better-educated than locally born individuals from the majority population, but are less likely to be employed and more highly concentrated in unskilled occupations, especially soon after arrival (Fratinni, 2017). The increased presence of migrants in low-paid work, particularly through free movement within the EU, has attracted high-level political and public attention (Migration Advisory Committee, 2014) and figured prominently in the referendum on whether the UK should remain within the EU. Although migrants have become more diverse in terms of their origins, motives and statuses within destination countries (Vertovec, 2007), they continue to be disproportionately represented in low-paid work in many international contexts (European Commission, 2014; Creese and Wiebe, 2012), including the UK.

Bolton and Laaser (2013) have identified several macro-level factors affecting the progression opportunities available for individuals in low-paid employment in the EU. These include the under-utilisation of skills; reduced opportunities for access to training and career progression; a 'risk shift' from employer and the state to workers which has contributed to increased job insecurity; growing polarisation between high and low paid jobs; and a rise in the numbers of the 'working poor'. Austerity measures have contributed to the use of short-term contracts and increased agency and part-time work (MacInnes et al, 2015). Further, the 'outsourcing' services such as cleaning and catering has resulted in a lack of accountability for employees (Wills et al, 2010).

However, countervailing tendencies, including concern expressed by critical players over the erosion of social justice in favour of economic interests and equality policies and legislation indicate that markets will not be left to operate without moral constraint (Bolton

and Laaser, 2013). These tendencies suggest that under certain conditions, it may still be possible for appropriately qualified and skilled low-paid workers, including migrants, to progress. A recurrent theme is that despite advanced industrialised countries, including the UK, having formally extended a wide array of protective measures to migrant workers, these are undermined at the meso-institutional level through discriminatory processes (particularly hiring decisions, performance ratings, salary awards and promotion opportunities) which arise from the 'normal' functioning of institutions (Ossenkop et al, 2015). Within the UK, studies of employers' attitudes towards migrant workers have revealed a mixed picturewith affimations of their work ethic and flexibility, sitting alongside practices of exploitation (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). Having placed the study within its political, economic and social context, we now explain its empirical research design and follow this with an analysis of the ways in which micro-level factors arising from the complex identities of migrants interact with the macro- and meso-level structuring processes discussed above.

Research Design

This study was carried out during 2012 and 2013 as part of a funded project that engaged with the experiences of low-paid workers seeking promotion to better-paid work in nine large organisations (more than 1,000 employees) in the public, private and voluntary sectors in England and Scotland. Large organisations were selected, given the wider possibilities for promotion relative to smaller ones. In this paper, we focus on a sub-sample of migrants employed in five of these organisations in three geographical areas (see Table 1), two of which are urban areas with established and concentrated ethnic minority populations, while the third semi-rural area has only seen an increase in the migrant worker population since EU expansion in 2004. As will be seen, more than three quarters of the migrant worker sample wanted to progress from low-paid work. Workforce data for all participating organisations revealed ethnic minority under-representation at higher levels of their

hierarchies despite the existence of equal opportunities policies and processes in the public and voluntary sector organisations. Further, our sample confirmed the presence of male migrants in work traditionally undertaken by women, such as cleaning and catering, that is consistent with a wider trend of ethnic minority men in such roles (Woodhams et al, 2015).

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Data collection

Interviews were conducted with 31 migrants (21 women and 10 men) in low-paid roles, including five individuals (three women and two men) who had progressed from such work. Migrants are defined as individuals who were born abroad, whose formative experiences were gained outside the UK. The term 'low-paid workers' is used to refer to individuals earning less than £25,000 per annum and whose household income is eligible for subsidy by in-work tax credits (£25,000 was the threshold for households deemed to be below average income during the fieldwork period). Twelve participants were single, fourteen married or cohabiting and five divorced or separated. Nineteen had children, among whom eleven had one or more children under the age of 16. Interviewees' ages ranged from 21 to 55, with UK residency from one year to 33 years. They came from Europe (16), Africa (8), Asia (8), Middle East (1) and South America (1), representing both minorities who were visible by skin colour as well as white minorities, and including some those originating from former colonies as well as others from post-socialist countries. They spoke English with varying levels of proficiency. On arrival in the UK, education levels varied from completion of primary school to postgraduate, with six possessing degrees and eight having completed college level education. They all had permanent employment contracts (nine working part-time, all of whom were women) at the lowest positions in the organisational hierarchy, comprising administrative, cleaning, catering and caring roles. They had worked in these roles from one to nine years.

Semi-structured interviews, averaging one hour in length, were undertaken privately in workplace settings. In accordance with the ethical research principles of informed consent,

interviewee volunteers were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any point Since all participants had acquired a basic level of English proficiency, it was possible to conduct the interviews in this language.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded with Nvivo, using both *a priori* and emergent themes. The former included 'aspirations and progression', 'barriers to career progression', 'strategies for career progression' and 'discriminatory practices.' They were coded by three of the authors and cross-checked for consistency with adjustments made as appropriate. Author 1 developed career history accounts for each participant to obtain a deeper understanding of migrant life trajectories (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993; Iosifides, 2011), and identified emergent themes based around the ways individuals attempted to improve their position, by applying Svenningsson and Alvesson's concept of identity work (2003: 1165).

Importantly, we wanted to explore how common structural factors, including patriarchy and racism or both, surfaced in participants' narratives. Inspired by Archer's work (2003, 2007), we classified the factors as constraints or enablements, and defined them (drawing on Tatli, 2011) as being located at micro level (individual), meso level (organisation or household) or macro level (national). As noted above, analytically we wanted to consider how structural factors interacted with multiple aspects of individuals' identity, such as gender, migrant, low paid worker status, ethnicity, nationality and age to influence the identity work undertaken.

We considered three forms of intersections (i) intersections *within* different levels (Tatli, 2011) of constraints and enablements in the home and workplace; (ii) intersections *between* the constraints and enablements in both spheres (iii) intersections between enabling and constraining structural factors and migrants' agency (the progression-oriented

identity work) in the workplace. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the main structural factors, the types of intersections and a summary of evidence from our analysis of the context and interview data. In the Findings section we trace some of the key intersections and explain their impact in order to deepen understanding of the ways in which patriarchy and racism may act singly or in combination with each other in one or more spheres (as structuring processes) to constrain migrants' progression-oriented agency.

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Findings – Identity work, enabling and constraining structural processes

Our interviewees were in low-skilled and low-paid work with nearly half (14), including women and men, taking on jobs which did not match their qualifications, consistent with other research which has found occupational downgrading among migrants (for example, Creese and Wiebe, 2012; Bachan and Sheenan, 2010. The majority (24) expressed aspirations for progression to better paid work in order to improve their standard of living, develop their skills and experience, or both. The remaining seven were seeking longer hours of employment in their current role or were planning to move to another field of work or return to their country of origin. We structure our analysis according to three forms of identity work undertaken by the migrant workers in our sample: developing fluency in English; acquiring skills; and building and maintaining a reputation for diligence.

Developing fluency in English

Reflecting the super-diversity of the migrant sample, both female and male participants differed considerably in their ability to speak English. The macro- and meso-level prevalence of the language in the public sphere of all workplaces examined meant that efforts to gain fluency in English figured prominently in the identity work undertaken by participants. Oliwia's narrative is typical. Of Polish origin, aged 38, divorced and mother to an adult

daughter, she had previously worked as a shop assistant after completing secondary education. On arrival to the UK, she had first worked in a fish factory where she mainly conversed in Polish and Russian, the languages spoken by her migrant colleagues. When the factory closed down, she found work in a facilities management company which provided cleaning services in a hospital. This represented a change to a new linguistic context in the public sphere:

> 'I am having to use my language (English) with staff, nurse staff. Sometimes patients try to speak to you, so you have to speak.'

Not surprisingly, she considered mastery of English a priority for progressing to better paid work. She was attending classes, but felt that her age was a barrier:

> 'I am not young, it is easier if you learnt the new language as young people…It is much easier, the memory is different, I think.'

Further, outside work, she tended to socialise mainly with Polish people, explaining that this was due not to language barriers but to cultural similarities. While this has the effect of limiting Oliwia's exposure to English and hindering its acquisition, the critical realist approach allows us to identify that she is in a more privileged position than some in the private sphere who were also struggling to speak the language, since she is able to attend classes. Her ability may be traced to the intersection of two enablements in the private sphere: freedom from childcare responsibilities and sufficient financial resources to take time off from work.

While participants who had limited exposure to English in their countries of origin struggled to gain basic fluency, the identity work in this area also extended to those who had previously learnt the language but were not familiar with regional accents. Jagoda, who is Polish, and had worked in a facilities management company, expressed this clearly:

> ‘I’ve studied in Poland, and I even had…business English at university…but it was just the accents here…You have Aberdeen, Perth, Glasgow, everyone has a different accent for me, so it was just difficult to understand.’

The narrative above shows not only awareness of the need for specific varieties of English in the workplace, but also the challenge of understanding diverse accents at the micro-level, reinforcing the complexity of acquiring the language. Jagoda’s growing fluency in English emerged as crucial not only for carrying out her job but also for coping with racialised othering processes triggered by use of the language. The importance of this emerged as Jagoda recalled the anxiety she experienced when her father joined her:

> ‘When my dad came here and he got a job, the only thing I was concerned was that somebody would be nasty to him. Tell him things and he would not understand. Because, if someone says something nasty to me, I can reply or do something about it. But if someone says something nasty to him he might not understand what they are saying and they can even make it worse because ‘I even swear at you and you didn’t say anything, so I can do whatever I want to you, because you will not understand’….it happens.’

Jagoda’s case is revealing in demonstrating not only migrants’ vulnerability to abuse in the early stages of acquiring a destination country language, but also the power and privilege exercised by native speakers (Halliday, 2006). Her experiences are echoed in the narrative of Mei Ling, a former telecommunications engineer from Vietnam who was currently working as a domestic worker in a hospital:

> ‘When we come here, because of the English…to Scottish people, we look like the idiot, you know, they treat us, and they think we are like an idiot. But our mind is okay, it is a lack of communication. So…I never ever think I could get promotion anywhere because the first thing coming will be the Scottish people.’

Mei Ling's experiences reinforce the oppression that is experienced due to the intertwining of structuring processes arising from use of the language by native speakers and racialised attitudes towards non-native speakers in the public sphere of employment. Both narratives also underscore how these micro-level structuring processes interact with the individuals' migrant status, despite their heterogeneity in terms of country of origin, with Jagoda originating from a post-socialist country and Mei Ling a postcolonial one. As speakers gain language proficiency and increased capacity to resist such exclusionary processes, it is possible for such constraints to loosen their influence over time, as Jagoda - who had managed to progress to a coordinating role in the company - revealed.

Access to language courses - a potential enablement - was often problematic. Where language classes had previously been offered, as in the health service, these had been discontinued, supporting recent research which has revealed the reduced availability of English as a Second Language classes (Bassel et al, 2017) at a meso-level. Classes were available elsewhere but costly for those on low income and could not be taken in working hours, thus shifting this activity to the private sphere. Even when participants were able to access English classes, combining work with study could be physically challenging. Elena, 48, who came to the UK from Lithuania nine years ago to help pay for her daughter's university education and was employed in three part-time cleaning jobs, expressed this difficulty clearly, revealing that the identity work of further developing language skills is not only a cognitive process but influenced by physical toil:

> 'I am working all day, you know…it's not very easy, because you get up early. And when you start to do lessons at 7 o'clock in the evening, you are just tired.'

The constraints of time and fatigue on language-learning emerged particularly strongly among female migrants working part-time who had to travel to different workplaces and do school runs, distinguishing them from the men in our sample. Like Elena, other women recounted how aspirations for their children's education had motivated them to migrate and

take up paid work to supplement the household income. However, women with young children reported difficulty in reconciling expectations relating to caring within the household with paid work and studying. Although a few men were also involved in sharing childcare, the patriarchal assumptions relating to responsibility for caring in the private household sphere meant that they were in the minority. Thus, the intersections within the constraints that can be traced to the compounding of the effects of patriarchy in the private sphere with the racialised lack of language support and understanding in the public sphere were more limiting for women with dependents engaged in language-focused identity work than for men with dependents, or women without dependents or with broader support networks. Further reinforcement of the interdependent nature of these constraints operating at the micro and meso-level can be found in the macro-level lack of affordable childcare (Harding at el, 2017), which further constrained participation in language classes. A temporal dimension is also relevant in the private sphere since constraints of time and financial resources among female migrants with dependent children to invest in language-related identity work may be increasingly loosened as caring responsibilities reduce when children grow older, enabling them to invest more time in language-focused identity work.

Acquiring skills

The route to better jobs frequently depends on acquiring skills and qualifications, so the lack or absence of such opportunities at the bottom of the jobs ladder (Felstead et al, 2012) emerged as a major meso-level structural constraint that can be traced to power imbalances across organisational hierarchies. The importance of access to training featured strongly among the female and male interviewees who wanted to progress. Interviewees emphasised the role of management support in securing developmental opportunities. Two contrasting experiences illustrate this.

Agata had migrated with her parents from Poland, where she had completed college education, and worked in several entry-level positions in the UK before joining the health service. With the support of her line manager and parents (with whom she lived), she undertook a three-year course in administration, working during the holidays to cover her expenses. On completion, she successfully obtained a higher grade administrative job within the organisation. Agatha emphasised her UK-based qualifications as key to enabling her progression. However, consistent with the critical realist approach adopted, we have identified a cluster of enablements in the home and workplace which intersected to overcome the macro-level constraint of the lack of UK policies for recognising overseas qualifications: Agatha's support from her parents, managerial encouragement to pursue further education and willingness to employ her during the holidays, time to undertake further study, freedom from childcare responsibilities and the local availability and affordability of a suitable course. This allows us to explain how favourable structural dynamics in both the private and public spheres enabled Agatha's progression to better paid work, unlike many others within our sample.

In contrast, Sue, who held a UK-based Master's qualification, illustrates the challenges migrants may face in striving to gain support even in organisations with equal opportunities policies. Her employers annually invited employees to submit applications for a bursary to pursue organisationally relevant higher education courses. Sue, who was from a sub-Saharan African country and worked in administration, expressed a strong desire to apply since she had been told that her application for promotion had been turned down because she lacked a qualification that was viewed as essential. However, she was not confident of support from her line manager due to the difficult nature of their relationship:

> 'I'm still trying to think how is my manager going to agree to it…I'm still afraid to ask…I am afraid, because sometimes he can be just rough about it. Yes, he can be rude…I am really hoping maybe next year, I will have the courage to ask.'

While it is not possible to assert that Sue's experience of her white Scottish manager as 'rough' and 'rude' may be directly linked to patriarchal or racialised assumptions about appropriate roles for women or minorities or the intertwining of both in the workplace, her narrative reveals a disturbing lack of institutional support for developmental opportunities. The difficulties Sue faced in getting support from her line manager were compounded by tongoing restructuring of the organisation, which resulted in a blurring of lines of accountability and further limited her access to alternative sources of support:

> 'There are no clear channels in the company…because of the company changing every year…even the assistant director was still getting used to here, so if he doesn't agree and they collude, and they decide 'no', that will be even harder to go through HR… I do want to go (apply) but I don't know how.'

Sue's case emphasises the difficulty of 'complicated and contested configurations of power' (Choo and Ferree, 2010). Constraints in the form of personal relationships with a line manager may intersect with changes in organisational structures and the recruitment of new managers to make it harder to obtain support for valuable developmental opportunities. The emphasis on temporality afforded by the critical realist approach enables us to draw attention to the time needed to gain the support of new managers for progression, especially where lines of accountability are unclear and there is limited contact with them (structural factors). In addition, there is a temporal element involved in building up personal resources, such as the 'courage' that Sue identifies she will need in order to apply for a bursary. It can be argued that scarcity of training opportunities and the need for line manager support affects all low-paid employees. Nevertheless, Sue's particular experiences were reinforced by a perception among our interviewees that opportunities were not effectively communicated to all and racialised attitudes towards migrants appeared to mediate access to information about training and work opportunities.

Managerial support also emerged as an essential resource for the identity work of participating in training or widening organisational experience. However, a recurrent theme in participants' narratives was that a lackof such support. These difficulties might also be faced by UK-born employees engaged in low-paid work, but the impact of lack of guidance will be more pronounced among migrants due to their limited knowledge of organisational systems and processes within the country. This was clearly expressed by Szymon, who had completed college education and worked as a surveyor in Poland before migrating to the UK seven years earlier Szymon, had undertaken a variety of casual jobs within the UK and currently worked as a cleaner while equipping himself with managerial qualifications in order to find a better paid job. In his words,

> 'Nobody encourages you to take a better job here. Like, an example of a good manager for me is that he is coming to me and telling me, ''Listen Szymon, you are a young person. You will have the ability to do a good job…Maybe you need some help.'' Something like that never happened to me…To be honest, what I think is that Scottish people would rather give a job to Scottish people…I don't want to do what I do, I have ambitions, I want to go higher…And of course I never thought I was going to be a cleaner in the future.'

Possibly, the absence of managerial support is due to informal processes of othering and racialized assumptions about the role of migrants in the workforce. Certainly, as this narrative indicates, such experiences left individuals such as Szymon speculating that it may be a factor. Szymon's occupational downgrading to a low-paid role following his move to the UK is further compounded by his take-up of a non-traditional gender role. His case supports a small body of literature which has examined the way in which migration intersects with gender and low-paid work to lead to some men taking up 'women's work' and feeling 'trapped' in such work due to the lack of available alternatives (Hussein and Christensen, 2016). The experiences of six of the 11 men in our sample suggests lack of managerial

support for gaining organisational experience when coupled with racialised processes of othering can prevent male migrants 'escaping' from such work.

Racialised attitudes and gendered assumptions can hinder developmental opportunities within the workplace. Sue, for instance, could not understand why, unlike her two white male peers, she was not assigned tasks that involved more responsibility, and were part of her job profile. An example of such a task involved mediating between service users where disputes had arisen. This prompted her to ask her manager:

> 'Is it because I am black? Or is it because I am female' …Why don't I do it? Because it's my (job) profile…It's either sexism or 'it's racism. It's one of the two.'

While Sue did not get an answer, research by Pio and Essers (2014) suggests that othering processes related to the intertwining of the structuring forces of patriarchy and racism - which may have been triggered, in her case, by skin colour - , rather than a single dimension may hinder her from gaining valuable experience that would help realise her progression aspirations. Sue's case signals that it may be more difficult for female migrants to be allowed to undertake tasks that have been previously undertaken by men than for male migrants to undertake roles formerly associated with women. This illustrates the complex dynamics at play where there is potential for meso-level patriarchal and racialised assumptions to combine and hinder individuals from undertaking the key progression-oriented identity work of acquiring skills.

Faced with lack of managerial support, the psychological effort of independently pursuing progression was considerable, exemplified by Maya's case. Maya, who originated from Ghana, had completed vocational qualifications in tailoring and earned a living as a self-employed seamstress before migrating to the UK. Since there was not a demand for the clothes she used to make, she took up employment as a cleaner in a facilities management company. She wished to undertake a computing course offered by the company to progress from this role. In her words,

> ‘I am trying to push myself…to apply. I know it is only white people who are supposed to get it (access to training), but I am still going to apply…That’s why you push your all…If your skin is black, at times you are scared to go for it…but you need to make up your mind…When I apply, I say, ‘’I can get it.’’’

Maya’s narrative reveals not only her experience of the structuring power of racism as experienced through her organisation’s normalisation of processes of othering, through which ‘white people’ are privileged over others in gaining support for career development, but also a willingness to resist these processes by ‘pushing’ herself and boosting her own confidence. In doing so, she is adopting a form of identity work which might appear to be similar to that identified by Sturdy et al (2006) as an essential resource among individuals seeking promotion to managerial posts and which was termed as ‘self-talk’. However, while Maya, may also be engaged in assuring herself that she is deserving of developmental opportunities, the identity work that she undertakes stands in contrast to theirs in that a significant component arises from her resistance to the power inequalities which she experiences as being underpinned by racism. Significantly, Maya herself does not identify patriarchy as a structural constraint against which she is ‘pushing’, but rather organisational norms which appear to favour whiteness. However, as a single mother with three young children engaged in part-time work, patriarchal assumptions relating to childcare may be operating. She also lacked informal support, due to being away from her family. It appears that a cluster of constraints arising in both her workplace and home intertwine to hinder her progression-oriented agency.

In contrast, the case studies of three participants who had progressed to better-paid work (two men and one woman) revealed how their managers had facilitated their progression by encouraging them to take on more challenging tasks. This is illustrated in the case of Michael, a Ghanaian with qualifications and experience in graphic design, and who now worked as a kitchen porter in the UK:

> ‘I had a chef who always wanted me to get involved in the kitchen, rather than concentrating on the washing up … so little by little … I ended up being breakfast chef…He said to me, ‘See what I told you, you need to get involved in the kitchen, because…everyone can wash up. But you need to get a profession.’’

Such cases demonstrate the enabling role of managers as key actors in contributing to the career advancement of migrants through providing them with informal training opportunities within organisational equal opportunities policies and processes. They illustrate how a small minority of individuals may succeed in being promoted even within contexts where formal developmental opportunities are rare.

Building and maintaining a reputation for diligence

Previous research has noted the prevalence of a view among managers relating to the ‘positive work ethic’ of migrants, particularly in relation to Eastern Europeans (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). This is supported by our study in that an important form of identity work undertaken by interviewees was the performative strategy of maintaining their reputation as cooperative, hard-working employees. For example, Elena had migrated from Lithuania where she worked in a clothing factory and had progressed to a supervisory role:

> ‘First you need to show them that you can…you have to work hard and good. You have to show them that you know your job…you can work with people.’

Similarly, Michael, from Ghana, reported how he did not allow the pain arising from the physical aspects of the work he was involved in to disrupt his attendance at work:

> ’You are tired early, because you are carrying things all the time, so you feel tired always, with your back, your legs and stuff…sometimes I do feel pains but I still have to come to work…I keep it with me, and take it on my back.’

Reflecting the complexity of informal 'othering' processes at work, a recurrent theme in our interviewees' accounts was being treated differently from their co-workers because of their ethnicity. On the one hand, this plays favourably into the narrative of diligence, while on the other, and from the perception of migrants, it means an uneven (and unfair) racialised burden of work allocation, as illustrated by these two quotes, involving a white minority participant and another, visible by skin colour:.

> 'If there is something wrong, and it is a really dirty ward, they are sending Polish people to clean it, it will be done properly, and never get a help…Scottish get the help often and not the Polish ones. Because they know we can manage it, we can do it.' (Gabriela, Domestic assistant, from Poland)

> 'Assuming I was [from the] ethnic majority [group], would that situation [sudden expansion of his workload due to organisational restructuring] have been left like that for so long? I say, ''No, maybe they would have got assistance much earlier and got someone to help them'''. (Anthony, Project manager, from a sub-Saharan country)

While recognising the different and potentially racialised discriminatory treatment, both female and male interviewees reported a reluctance to challenge the allocation of work, and exercised self-restraint by keeping silent, in part to facilitate the goal of career progression. Further, in the words of Mei Ling, who originated from Vietnam and was working as a catering assistant:

> 'If you complain (about discriminatory treatment) …nothing is said…if I report her, I am being bad, not her.'

Mei Ling's experiences indicate that reporting discriminatory treatment is not only futile but, paradoxically, portrays individuals in a negative light. Consistent with other research (Priola et al, 2014), the use of silence emerges as an important resource and a necessary price to pay when confronted with repeated occurrences of unequal treatment to maintain a reputation for being a cooperative, hardworking employee. However, in not challenging such

treatment, Mei Ling and others who remain silent on encountering discriminatory treatment contribute to the institutionalisation of 'othering' processes. The intersection is revealed between the informal recognition of capability or skill through being assigned more burdensome tasks (a potential enablement to progression), and the twin constraints of a lack of formal recognition of capabilities and vulnerability to exploitation.

Consistent with research on being positioned as 'the other' (Ghorasi and Ponzoni, 2014; Ossenkop et al, 2015), ethnicity was not experienced in neutral or positive terms but rather as inferiority and having to adhere to stricter rules (Shore et al, 2011), for instance complying with a dress code. Not surprisingly, unsuccessful promotion processes among both women and men tended to raise concerns as to whether minority status, nationality, ethnicity or skin colour, rather than gender, had influenced the process. Such concerns are compounded where there is an absence of organisational processes such as providing support for promotion applications or feedback following an unsuccessful attempt. This is illustrated by Hanna's case, discussed earlier. She had been unsuccessful in her application for a supervisory role and found this difficult to rationalise since her performance had been positively rated and she had more experience than the person appointed:

> 'I don't know if it's my nationality or my logic of things, we grow up in different ways...it's really hard to get the promotion if you are a foreigner.'

This is also illustrated by Anthony, a project manager from a sub-Saharaan country. He felt that he had been unfairly overlooked despite his experience and competence because the person who had been promoted instead of him had turned to him for advice when dealing with difficult situations:

> 'I don't want to wave the ethnicity card all the time and say, ''because I am ethnic minority, that's why this happened''. I don't want to do that, yet at times that's exactly how I feel.'

Both examples reinforce the ambiguity and opacity of the decisions of managers, leaving our interviewees with a conflicting message that they are valued but not promotable. It seems informal processes of recognition (enablement) are not translated into promotion but intersect with othering processes based on nationality and ethnicity and lead to unsuccessful outcomes. While it is not possible to establish the fairness of promotional processes through these accounts alone, some of the individuals interviewed struggled to recover from damage to self-esteem and disappointment due to successive failed promotion attempts. Repairing identities involved self-talk to boost self-esteem, asserting their own competence or seeking to rationalise why they had been overlooked.

Discussion

This study has contributed to advancing understanding of the under-researched area of identity work involving low-paid female and male migrants and to enriching structural intersectionality theory. Previous research in this area has tended to concentrate on managers (Carrim and Nkomo, 2016). We have identified three main forms of identity work or agency carried out by such migrants and drawn on intersectionality theory to examine how their agency and access to resources may be influenced by the intersection of constraints faced by racialised and gendered migrants in low-paid work in the public organisational sphere of employment, as well as patriarchal assumptions relating to the care of children in the private sphere of the home. In doing so, we extend the work of Acker (2011) who focused on the intersection of patriarchy and racism within the public sphere, treating the workplace as a key site in order to explain inequalities in employment outcomes. While we acknowledge the importance of the workplace, we argue that the private sphere is underplayed and requires more attention in order to explain employment outcomes, including progression. Further, we have demonstrated that although gender, language and in some cases, age, can interact with each other to hinder progression-oriented identity

work, a recurrent theme is the saliency of ethnic identity, nationality or skin colour in undermining potential enablements, such as the recognition of competence or capability within the workplace. Our study also supports a small body of research (for example, Hussein and Christenssen, 2015) which indicates that racialised attitudes towards migrants may combine with gender in complex ways to lead migrant men to take up non-traditional work and to encounter difficulties in exiting from such work.

The critical realist approach adopted in this study has enabled us to respond to the call by Rodriguez et al (2016) to increase understanding of intersectionality theory through exploring intersectional structuring processes. This relies on the identification of constraints and enablements in the workplace and home, their clustering and interdependency. It allows us to suggest we have advanced intersectionality theory in three significant ways. Firstly, it has increased understanding of the ways in which the structuring processes of racism and patriarchy in the public sphere of the workplace and patriarchy in the private sphere of the home as well as the power imbalances that low-paid workers encounter intersect with each other to influence the progression-oriented agency of female and male migrants. Secondly, it has allowed us to move beyond 'static representations of the dominance of oppression' (Rodriguez et al, 2016) and capture processes that construct advantage as well as disadvantage (Dhamoon, 2011) by revealing how it is possible for clusters of enablements within the workplace and the home to interact with each other over time to support a small minority to progress to better paid work. Thirdly, it has highlighted the temporal dimensions of intersectional dynamics across organisational and household boundaries. For instance, it has helped us identify how some constraints that may arise due to gendered assumptions within the home relating to childcare may be loosened over time and diminish the responsibilities of female migrants. It has also revealed the significance of temporality in capturing how individuals gain resources over time. Such resources include finance and time to invest in acquiring English language fluency and recognised educational qualifications;

managerial support and sponsorship; and psychological resources such as self-confidence, courage, determination, self-talk and self-restraint when faced with difficult circumstances.

The critical realist approach adopted also helps us to explain why female migrants with low levels of proficiency in English, dependent children, and little support in the home or the workplace may face a particularly challenging time in progressing from low-paid work. The disadvantaged position that arises from their personal, household and social support characteristics is further compounded by a vulnerability to othering processes due to their gendered, racialized identities. Conversely, the critical realist approach also helps us explain why female migrants who have high levels of proficiency in English, no dependent children and who are supported by their families and managers may be more likely to fulfil their progression aspirations. It is this more nuanced picture of the situation of migrants in the labour market that distinguishes the study from others which have documented the tendency for discriminatory processes to arise within institutional settings (Ossenkop et al, 2015)).

The use of the concepts of enablements and constraints increases understanding of how identity work at the lower levels of organisational hierarchies can be either supported or hindered. Identification of enablements highlights factors which need to be encouraged to support the progression of both female and male migrants while identification of constraints indicates barriers which need to be overcome. At the meso-organisational level, these findings have clear implications in revealing how the identity work carried out by migrants may be facilitated through managers who implement equal opportunities policies and support individuals in developing themselves. Significantly, the study has extended the literature on discriminatory processes (for example, Ossenkop et al, 2015) by identifying specific issues relating to progression from low-paid work, that is, low tolerance of limited proficiency in English, lack of equal access to developmental opportunities and under-recognition of potential. The study also suggests that diversity training which has so far mainly focused on cultural, racial, generational or gender differences (Bezrukova et al, 2012)

should also include awareness-raising of the potential for individuals to face discrimination due to the intersectionality of multiple dimensions of their identity as well as their level of proficiency in the dominant language. As other studies have shown (for example, Author 4 et al., 2013), the agency of managers is central to the career support provided to female and male migrants. Managers who utilise their own agency to support migrants and provide equitable opportunities to their workforce can counterbalance some of the detrimental effects of other managers who, through their own prejudice and stereotypical perceptions of migrants, hinder promotion opportunities for this group. Wider initiatives to support the progression of women in the workforce which relate to more family-friendly policies and flexible working arrangements will also apply to migrants in low-paid work (Lewis, 2001).

Apart from the small number of households where men are involved in caring, the continuing gendered division of caring responsibilities and engagement in part-time work evidenced in this study signals the need for greater public awareness of the roles played by increasing numbers of female migrants as well as male migrants engaged in non-traditional work at the low-paid worker level in delivering key services. Linked to this, organisational scholarship can be used to contribute to public debates on the role of migrants in the labour market by highlighting the social justice case for enabling their progression from such work alongside the economic arguments. On a more practical note, there is also a need for macro-level attention to affordable child care and adequate English language class provision as part of a wider package of measures to ensure the implementation of equal opportunities policies which enable female migrants particularly, to navigate their way to better paid work.

Our study has focused on migrant workers in the UK employed in large organisations and examined the complexity of the environments in which they attempt to progress to better paid work and yielded rich insights. We used intersectional analysis of structuring processes to incorporate organisational and household processes. We revealed how structuring processes such as patriarchy and racism can be considered in relation to their intersecting dynamics – in our case the enablements and constraints illustrated in figure

1. We demonstrated that these can include intersections both within and between structuring processes to influence the identity work or agency of migrants. From this exploratory starting point, it might be possible to map constellations of intersections and design a larger study to investigate similarities and differences between female and male migrants in different structural contexts to account for heterogeneity in terms of progression from low-paid work. It would also be interesting to examine whether skin colour plays a role in the experiences and opportunities for migrant groups.

Conclusions

The feminist lens that we have adopted in applying intersectional theory has enabled us to advance the theory in three ways. Firstly, we have highlighted the complex mechanisms through which the interaction of patriarchy with other dimensions of identity in the workplace intersects with the way in which it interacts with other dimensions of identity within the home. In doing so, we encourage scholarship on organisational intersectionality theory which has tended to focus mainly on the dynamics of structuring forces and its outcomes for individuals within the workplace to consider power dynamics within the home and how this interacts with that of the workplace.

Secondly, our scrutiny of constraints and enablements in both spheres helps us to more fully articulate the particular challenges that contribute to female migrants' being trapped in low-paid work, as well as why it is possible for a small minority to progress. Within the context of increasing and more diverse migratory flows and the rising proportion of female migrants, this approach is particularly helpful in exploring the relationship between various manifestations of patriarchy within the home that may be traced to different countries of origin and the workplace in the destination country, as well as the structuring forces of racism that they encounter in their new contexts. In addition to contributing to greater

understanding of the interaction between current gender and racial inequalities within the labour market and their outcomes on especially female migrants within the workplace, feminist intersectional approaches also help to illuminate the extent to which clusters of enablements in both spheres may enable individuals to overcome the influence of patriarchal forces, racism and other structuring forces in the workplace over time and space.

Thirdly, we highlight the need to build up the financial, social, discursive and psychological resources required for progression and the relationship of these resources to each other. Greater attention to this area helps explain why the identity work that individuals undertake, particularly female migrants in low-paid work with caring responsibilities and limited access to family support in their new migratory contexts, may be extended over a considerable length of time. This helps with not only explaining the structural factors that need to be mitigated in order to enable female and male migrants to progress beyond low-paid work but calls attention to the diverse resources needed in order to do so, and the role of gender and its intersection with other structuring forces in the acquisition of these resources.

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