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Conceptualising the agency of migrant women workers: Resilience, reworking and resistance*

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Abstract

This article examines migrant women tourism workers' understandings of, and diverse responses to, exploitative working conditions by taking account of the constraints posed by oppressive contexts and ideologies. It analyses how their location at the intersection of multiple axes of disadvantage and discrimination on account of gender, ethno-nationality, immigration status and migration history as well as their low-status employment and educational level, shapes both their understandings of particular experiences of exploitation and possible responses to these, and examines the effects of their practices upon the power structures at work. Based on the experiences of eleven women from Central and Eastern European countries working in the UK tourism industry, this article theorises workers' responses to hyperexploitative employment relations by utilising a differentiated conceptualisation of agency as practices of resilience, reworking and resistance. In doing so, it rejects binary categories of victimhood and agency, as well as romanticised accounts of unmitigated resistance.

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Introduction

Often constructed as an 'exploitable source of labor' (Nawyn, 2010: 753), migrant women are disproportionately employed in gendered roles involving cleaning and caring (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; McDowell, 2009; McDowell et al., 2009), and experience high levels of deskilling (Kofman, 2012) due to their location at the intersection of multiple axes of disadvantage and discrimination on account of gender, immigration status and migration history (Rydzik et al., 2017). Following the 2004 accession of eight Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to the EU[i], the UK experienced a new phase of mobility from the EU8 nations. These New Europeans—described as 'white-skinned and […] often single, relatively young and typically much better educated than their competitors for basic entry-level jobs' (McDowell et al., 2009: 20)—found employment in sectors such as agriculture, construction, manufacturing and tourism. Women represent a large proportion of EU8 migrants employed in tourism[ii], often occupying low-status, low-paid gendered and vulnerable positions (ONS, 2016). Though gender and nationality remain 'crucial

discriminators of workplace acceptability in the new economy' (McDowell et al., 2007: 2), little is known about CEE-origin migrant women workers' lived experiences of discriminatory treatment, and their understandings of and responses to exploitative conditions at work, a gap this article addresses. Existing studies on UK-based post-2004 CEE migrant women workers have a predominantly single-nationality focus (e.g. Polish), and tend not to centre on a single sector, with recent studies concerned with workplace interactions (Rzepnikowska, 2017), insecurity post-EU referendum (Duda-Mikulin, 2018) and gender roles (Aziz, 2015).

Tourism workplaces—associated with poor working conditions, exploitative practices, long and irregular hours, flexible contracts and high labour turnover (Janta et al., 2011)—are over-reliant on a migrant workforce, in particular on migrant women. Certain roles in the sector are gendered and feminised. Constituting 95% of housekeepers, 70% of waiting staff, 67% of kitchen assistants, women are disproportionately over-represented in low-skilled, low-paid, low-status occupations (63% in elementary occupations), and under-represented in skilled, senior and managerial positions (Guerrier and Adib, 2000b; People 1st, 2013). For scholars who examine hyperexploitation and labour segregation in the service economy, hotels are considered as 'an ideal site' (McDowell et al., 2007: 2), with high prevalence and under-reporting of harassment and bullying (Bloisi and Hoel, 2008; Ineson, Yap and Whiting, 2013; Wright and Pollert, 2006). Drawing on migrant women's employment experiences, attitudes and diverse responses to unfair treatment at work, this article focuses 'on the microscale politics of work' and is a response to the argument that '[t]oo many studies of economic global change continue to ignore the emotions, feelings, and daily lives of embodied global workers' (McDowell et al., 2007: 21-22). We deploy Katz's (2004) conceptually disaggregated notion of agency as practices of resilience, reworking and

resistance to take account of the constraints posed by oppressive contexts and ideologies in shaping both understandings of exploitation and the diverse responses to it. Acts of resilience build on a limited consciousness of the relations of oppression and are aimed at enabling workers to survive oppressive conditions, while acts of reworking entail strategies that are geared towards altering the conditions of the individual worker's existence and creating more viable everyday lives. Both acts of reworking and resistance draw on and (re)produce a much more critical and oppositional consciousness of the hegemonic powers at work (Katz, 2004, 239-259), but resistive practices are geared towards altering the oppressive structures. Katz's (2004) conceptualisation of agency is drawn upon to avoid imbuing varied practices and understandings with an undifferentiated—often celebratory—label of resistance, and to pay closer attention to the meanings, possibilities as well as limits of interconnected and sometimes overlapping practices deployed by migrant women workers in response to workplace exploitation.

Migrant workers in tourism: An easily exploitable workforce

Industry reports indicate that 24% of those employed in tourism are migrants, and a high proportion of these are EU migrants, whose employment in this sector increased 46% between 2011 and 2015 (People 1st, 2016). Migrant workers are valued for their positive economic contribution, work ethic and represent a flexible workforce (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009) that is reliable, compliant, has low wage expectations and low levels of absenteeism (Dawson, Veliziotis and Hopkins, 2018). However, their construction as an 'ideal workforce' is shaped as much by their perceived attributes as by employers' awareness that they are hiring those who lack power in labour markets (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009).

Tourism workplaces are noted for 'minimal compliance with the law and transgression beyond legally accepted behaviour' (Baum 2007: 1396), with high risks of violence, while tourism work is regarded as stressful and physically exhausting (Hoel and Einarsen, 2003). Specific workers within tourism—women, part-time workers, young people as well as migrants and ethnic minorities—are considered particularly vulnerable (Hoel and Einarsen, 2003) on account of individual and structural factors such as their immigration status, informal employment, discrimination, lack of knowledge of working rights, language barriers and acceptance of poor working conditions (Wright and Pollert, 2006). Indeed, there exists a 'migrant division of labour' in the service sector economy (Wills et al, 2009), with overqualified and overskilled migrants working in lower paid jobs experiencing worse working conditions and being paid less than British counterparts (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; McDowell et al., 2009). Problems reported by migrants include being paid below the minimum wage or a flat rate regardless of hours worked, denial of leave entitlements and written contracts, delayed wages and restricted promotion opportunities, as well as bullying and racial harassment from co-workers, customers and managers (Wright and Pollert, 2006). While an invisible minority, UK-based CEE migrants are subject to class-based processes of racialisation at work (Moore, 2013; Samaluk, 2014). Examining multiple levels of power imbalances—relational, transnational, historical and emerging—and how whiteness relates to ethnic privilege and disadvantage at work, Samaluk (2014) found that CEE workers benefit from a white ethnic privilege but are also constructed as suited for low-paid roles and therefore more exploitable.

Alongside hyperexploitation, tourism workplaces are also known for low unionisation, with membership in the 'accommodation and food services' category as low as 4% (BIS, 2014:

16). Barriers to unionisation include labour turnover, management resistance as well as a highly stratified, temporary and precarious workforce, which are exacerbated for migrant workers in the industry (Cam, 2014). This has led to calls upon trade unions to respond better to transnationalisation and precarisation of employment (Alberti, 2014; Barnard, 2014). Over the last three decades, the move towards individualisation of workplace disputes through employment tribunals has also not served migrant workers well (Anitha and Pearson, 2018), as these mechanisms are underutilised by migrant workers who fear losing jobs and lack trade union support (Barnard, 2014). While low unionisation, under-reporting of exploitation, violence and sexual harassment is a serious problem in the tourism industry (Hoel and Einarsen, 2003), Wright and Pollert (2006: 2) particularly highlight 'a high degree of acceptance of poor working conditions' among migrant workers.

Victimisation, migrant women's agency and resistance

Based on gendered and racialised constructions of particular bodies as suitable for specific categories of work, migrant women have come to constitute a large proportion of tourism workers, occupying the most physically and emotionally demanding and stigmatised positions (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; McDowell, 2009). While the gendered nature of tourism labour and women's experiences in tourism have received some scholarly attention (Adib and Guerrier, 2003), there has been comparatively less focus on the experiences of migrant women workers in this sector (Guerrier and Adib, 2000b), particularly those from CEE countries post-2004. As McDowell (2009) argues, ethnicity, gender, class and nationality intersect to shape workers' experiences in the industry. As women, they occupy low-status, low-paid positions and perform gendered, embodied and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983); and as migrants, they are disadvantaged due to a lack of familiarity with employment practices, limited social

networks and non-recognised qualifications (Dyer et al., 2010). However, while it is important to reveal the inequalities and challenges that women encounter in labour markets post-migration, it is imperative to recognise that migration can also be empowering for migrants, with experiences of exploitation intersecting with those of empowerment. Equally, workplace identities can be the site of resistance as well as conformity, and a source of 'solid personal relationships, friendships, and pleasure in jobs done well' (McDowell et al., 2007: 21).

There is a rich body of scholarship that documents migrant domestic workers' experiences of and diverse responses to exploitation (Chin, 1998; Kayoko, 2013; Parreñas, 2001). Research indicates that migrant women employed as live-in domestic workers tend to tolerate employers' disciplinary measures, but simultaneously subvert them by adopting various 'covert, passive and discreet' strategies (Kayoko, 2013: 240), which can include acts of self-depreciation, persistent smiling, jokes, nagging employers and gossiping (Chin, 1998). These studies suggest that everyday forms of resistance take the form of 'individual self-help', avoiding 'any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority' (Scott, 1985: xvi). In contrast to the scrutiny given to the various forms of resistance among mostly live-in migrant domestic workers, there has been limited focus on migrant women in the service sector, mostly living-out, which this article explores.

The interplay between normalisation of exploitation on the one hand, and resistance on the other, is at the core of this article. As Giddens (1982: 197) argues, 'even the most seemingly 'powerless' individuals are able to mobilise resources whereby they carve out 'spaces of control''. This article considers how migrant women carve out spaces of control within tourism work by seeking to address the following questions: when experiencing unfair treatment and exploitation at work, how do migrant women understand, negotiate and/or

resist their working conditions; what responses do they deploy within the structural constraints of their workplaces and power relations; what (if any) effects do their practices have; and, how do their attitudes and practices change over time? In doing so, it takes an actor-centred approach, putting individual agency of migrant women at the centre, while locating their actions in the context of gendered, stratified and racialised tourism employment. It thereby avoids a simplistic characterisation of such workers as vulnerable victims and heeds the call for moving beyond simplistic constructions of agency and celebratory accounts of resistance that are uncoupled from the contexts within, and despite, which they are articulated and enacted (Carswell and De Neve, 2013; Katz, 2004).

Methods

This article draws on unstructured interview data gathered through a participatory study conducted with migrant women employed in tourism (Rydzik et al., 2013). While the study involved other qualitative methods, such as focus groups and arts-based methods, this article draws exclusively on interview data that rely on retrospective accounts rather than an ethnographic approach, which was not possible due to the difficulty of accessing tourism workplaces. It is widely acknowledged that there are both subjective and objective elements to people's narratives about their past experiences. Rather than working out 'what really happened', the task here was also to explicate how social realities and identities are built, following Passerini's (1989: 197) observation that 'all autobiographical memory is true: it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, and for what purpose'.

As the aim was to elicit in-depth understanding of the everyday realities and participants' working lives, the sample was purposively small. Eleven CEE migrant women were recruited through purposive and snowballing sampling: six were from Poland, three

from Latvia and two from Hungary. Ranging from 21-36 years, the participants reflected the dominant age profile of UK tourism's workforce, which is predominantly young (59.5% aged under 40) (ONS, 2016). The participants constituted a diverse group in terms of their education, proficiency in English and time in tourism employment. Five women arrived in the UK with university education and the remaining six with A-levels. All had lived in the UK for at least two years, worked in tourism between one and ten years in a range of roles, including housekeeper, tour representative, receptionist, flight attendant and waitress, either part-time or full-time. Some worked for hotel and restaurant chains and large companies, others for SMEs. Their English language skills varied from basic to fluent, and several combined their work with full-time study.

The in-depth unstructured interviews were focused on their migration experiences, career trajectories and employment experiences in the tourism industry as well as participants' reflections on these experiences. The interviews lasted between 60-120 minutes, were conducted in English, Spanish (preferred language of one participant) and Polish (native language of the first author), transcribed and translated into English. Ethical approval was obtained from the university ethics committee. Participants were offered anonymity. However, all but one participant requested that their given names be used. Thematic data analysis involved manual coding of the data and identifying emergent themes, with a focus on participants' experiences of work and their interpretations of their everyday realities to identify both commonalities as well as divergence in the narratives.

Migrant women's practices of resilience, reworking and resistance

Based on the consciousness that lies behind particular understandings and practices of migrant women workers in response to exploitation at work, we draw upon Katz (2004) to differentiate their agency by utilising the categories of resilience, reworking and resistance.

Experiences of resilience: Normalisation and coping practices

Participants' early employment experiences in the industry were particularly testing. Iza arrived in the UK in her early 30s with A-levels. Having previously worked at a poultry factory and with no knowledge of English, she found a hotel housekeeping job through a friend. She recalled the discriminatory conditions at her first UK employment as the construction of the job changed from women's work to migrant women's work, and the workforce was restructured accordingly. Polish housekeepers, all women, were given more rooms to clean than English housekeepers: 'English people didn't have to do 14 rooms. They normally did eight rooms so with Polish workers the company didn't need to employ so many people because a Polish housekeeper would do 14 or 18 rooms'. Bonuses previously given to English workers for low absenteeism were also phased out as Polish workers were expected to maintain high attendance as a matter of course. Adib and Guerrier (2003: 420) note that housekeeping 'is not constructed merely as women's work, but as work to be undertaken only by certain groups of women'. While gendered constructions of housekeeping determined the largely feminised workforce, assumptions of a docile workforce was a racialised response to the influx of CEE workers and indicates employers' awareness of the constraints that may inhibit these workers' agency. The exploitative conditions at Iza's workplace thus had both a gendered and racialised dimension. Additionally, her personal history pre-migration (working in a poultry factory in a small town for low pay, no experience

of going abroad, no English, no higher education) determined the jobs she could access in the UK and constrained her ability to respond to exploitation.

Iza's experience illustrates how the post-2004 influx of white-skinned migrants from CEE nations to the UK led to a racialisation of CEE migrants (Samaluk, 2014) whereby employers maintained the whiteness of workplaces while lowering working conditions to make cost savings (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). Iza initially normalised this exploitation as part of being a migrant and newcomer. When describing one incident of unfair treatment in her first job as a hotel housekeeper, where she was asked to do additional work by an English supervisor, was under-paid and expected to be docile, Iza reflected: 'I couldn't fight as my English was too weak so I just nodded my head that it's OK'. It was two years before she felt able to leave for a better job.

Iza's account resonated with other participants' narratives, which revealed how newly arrived migrant workers construct existing working conditions as normative, particularly in migrant-dense feminised work such as housekeeping, with few taking action over exploitative or discriminatory treatment (Wright and Pollert, 2006). Despite a consciousness of the exploitation and unfair treatment that conditioned their early experiences in the UK labour market, participants' accounts reaffirm how 'particular landscapes make certain types of knowing (and practice) possible (or not)' (Katz, 2004: 245).

In their everyday work situations, with time, many participants adopted a range of often reactive tactics in response to difficulties encountered at work, which helped them cope with ill-treatment from co-workers, managers and customers. Practices commonly recounted included distancing and treating work instrumentally as a means to achieve non-work related goals. Wiola—who arrived in the UK in her 20s with A-levels, and a lack of proficiency in

English—started as a housekeeper and was eventually promoted to head housekeeper. She worked in a town which had few CEE migrants, with mainly English employees, all women, who initially did not accept her as a supervisor. She recounted how she asserted her authority as a young Polish migrant woman in a supervisory role:

In the beginning, girls did not tolerate what I was saying. They didn't like the fact that I was in charge and I was Polish. […] I asked if they had a problem with me and if so I tried to solve it. For instance, one of the girls ignored me. […] So I had a chat with her and explained what my job was and said that I had to check her work and assess it so that I could provide a feedback to the manager. […] When I explained this to her she felt as though she did something wrong and apologised to me [...] It was a bit difficult for me but now the girls can't imagine working without me. […] They asked me if I wanted to go for a beer with them and I said that I would go because I wanted to see how it would be. I was aware that I should not fraternise with the staff because the manager may not like it. This is because there is a big gap between the manager and the rest of the staff.

Wiola's supervisory role gave her leverage to challenge racialised constructions by her co-workers that cast her as unsuitable for a managerial role over English employees, but she had to strategise to find the most effective way of gaining compliance, as well as respect and acceptance as a co-worker. To deal with unpleasant customers, Kasia—in her 30s, with a postgraduate degree from Poland and ten years' experience in hotel reception and tour operations—also developed her own 'method':

I had an impression that the customer wanted to see your reaction… perhaps to find a reason to have a laugh or to stress you, to show you your place […] because if you ask something and that person recognises you are foreign, you see this person will look at

you differently. […] In the beginning, it was irritating me greatly and I was getting stressed in front of them. But then I decided the more I take it calmly, the better the effects […] I noticed that with time I learnt to just put a sweet smile and say slowly: "Could you repeat that please?". If the person continued to speak quickly then I would say with a sweet voice "Is it B for Bravo or D for David?" and then the person would change their attitude a bit.

For Kasia, gendered expectations and foreignness intersected to construct a differentially docile subject. She tactically used the expectation of docility to deal with differential treatment. Karolina's coping tactics to deal with rude (and sometimes sexual) customer remarks and stereotyped assumptions about her role and nationality, was through masking feelings, pretending that she could not understand intentions behind their behaviour, and not taking it seriously: 'as my English improves, it gets easier and easier for me. […] I have learned and adopted the English way of being more relaxed, one where you don't take everything too seriously, you say sorry, you smile and have a chat and it's all fine'. Dimming her Polishness at work (through adopting the ways of the dominant group) and subordinating her emotional needs to that of the customer (Hochschild, 1983)—a performance that Karolina described as 'the English way'—thus became a coping strategy. Pursuing a degree at a UK university and with aspirations for graduate-level employment, Karolina also tried to deal with the negative perception she had of her low-status job through distancing:

I hated it because it's a job for manual workers, you run with plates and you don't think about what you are doing. […] When you stop thinking that you should be doing something else, you start thinking: "OK you are here because you are doing something

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else outside of work, so it's just a tool for making money". […] And that's it. There is nothing to cry about.

Karolina and other participants used work instrumentally to achieve more meaningful goals, such as earning money for studies or travel. Similarly, Tina—Latvian, in her early 20s, a full-time student working part-time—recounted: 'It's interesting because I use a different surname for my creative purposes and I never mentioned it when I used to work in hospitality. That's me and this is the kind of basic working... It's separate. It's just the main thing to get money'. By deploying different names, Tina managed the sense of dissonance between her perception of herself as a student and an artist coming from a middle-class background from the status associated with waitressing part-time. However, such self-sustaining tactics were less available to workers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who were more likely to have lower levels of education or less likely to pursue higher education once in the UK, for whom there was less dissonance between their experience of low-paid, low-status work prior to migration (e.g. factory for Iza, retail for Wiola) and their subsequent workplace experiences following migration.

Research documents the status dislocation that migrant women experience on account of gendered social networks (which restrict their entry largely to feminised labour markets), deskilling upon migration, and racialised and gendered hierarchies at work (Anitha and Pearson, 2018; Kofman and Raghuram, 2006). Some participants perceived their employment as an opportunity to learn new skills and form new relationships as they strived towards longer-term career goals, and this helped them see beyond the everyday challenges they encountered at work. However, these career goals can remain out of reach, as migrant

workers are often trapped in low-paid jobs which necessitate long hours and leave little time or resources for making longer term changes (Wills et al., 2009).

Datta and co-authors (2007: 409) deem the term 'tactics' more suitable than 'strategies' for migrant workers' responses to exploitation, arguing that in the often hostile labour market 'power relations erode the potential for migrants to develop strategic responses to their new situation' and instead they resort to a range of practices geared towards short-term survival. Such practices aim to mitigate the effects of intersecting forms of class, race, and gender marginalisation rather than seeking to challenge such marginalisation, and are often 'reactive, fragmented and fragile' (Datta et al., 2007: 425). Ad hoc by nature, their impact is individualised and often internal, focusing on recuperation of dignity and self-worth—hence termed 'tactics' rather than 'strategies', which implies the pursuit of longer-term objectives. This echoes de Certeau's (1984) characterisation of tactics as the purview of the powerless to adapt to an environment not of their making. Our findings reiterate this characterisation. While some women constructed their UK working life as a journey from not knowing to a growing understanding of work discrimination, others located the above discussed practices in the context of the gap between their consciousness of oppressive employment relations and the possibility of challenging it. Though Katz (2004: 246) notes that in some oppressive contexts, recuperation and resilience can be considered an achievement, our analysis draws attention to the ways in which everyday acts of survival, such as ignoring ill-treatment by pretending not to comprehend intentions, may sustain women workers but they may also thereby support, or fail to unsettle, the trajectory of power relations that necessitate them in the first place.

Quitting as a reworking strategy

Unlike ephemeral and reactive tactics that are geared towards building resilience and ensuring day-to-day survival in the face of oppressive conditions and relations at work, a second set of responses are driven by explicit recognition of problematic conditions and offer focused, often pragmatic ways to evade and reconfigure one's location within the prevailing hierarchies without seeking to dismantle them.

Karolina, who outlined a range of tactics to sustain herself in the face of exploitation (see above), also recounted a somewhat different response to constraints in her very first UK job. She arrived just before Poland's EU accession and first worked legally as an au pair and then illegally in a restaurant. Located at the intersection of several forms of disadvantage posed by her insecure immigration status, gender, young age and isolation, she was particularly vulnerable to exploitation:

I started working there because he [the manager] paid me £5/hour. Then, my hourly rate went down to £3.50 just because he could say it to me because I was there illegally and legally I had no rights to do anything, I couldn't say anything and because I was 19. Another rule was that if somebody works in this restaurant then they have to live above this restaurant. So he was paying us but really he was deducting money for accommodation. So I would finish a week of work with really little money in my pocket [...] we were really poor. Also, there were parties. During one of the parties one of my friends was raped. He also threw himself on me and I had to beat him so that he left me alone [...] it was simply a horror. It was horrible. I forgot there was another world apart from this restaurant. He simply locked us in that building. After I came back from a visit to Poland, I decided that it was not normal that I cannot live like this. I told him and everyone there that I'm leaving, that I'm moving out. I was left with no money. I just

took my bag and left [...] He was threatening me [...] He said that I won't find another job, that I'll die in the street that he knows everyone in the town, all restaurant owners, and that it'll be tough for me.

Due to her insecure immigration status, Karolina felt unable to report the employer for servitude, sexual assault and hyperexploitation but instead quit her job to end the abuse. Slavery and sexual violence lie at the extreme end of a continuum of abusive and exploitative conditions experienced by migrant women, in particular those with insecure immigration status or those housed within their workplaces (Fudge and Strauss, 2017). Gender intersects with immigration status to shape workplace power relations such that the abuse and bullying common to some hospitality work environments take specific forms for women migrants, as immigration controls contribute to constructing vulnerability as documented in the case of migrant domestic workers (Anderson, 2000).

Defying constructions of new migrants as docile and accepting of poor work, Karolina and several other participants managed to reject exploitative and abusive work in their very first jobs by quitting. For Szilvia—in her 30s, with a degree and employment experience from Hungary and Spain—her first UK employment experience was shaped by her gender and Hungarian nationality in an all-Polish housekeeping department supervised by Polish men: 'I didn't stay in that place long, only for 2 weeks [...] One guy even spoke to me very badly and this was the moment when I said that I don't need that and I am not going to stay there and take this'. These early decisions to quit were shaped by a sense of mismatch between expectations and reality, between their constructions of themselves as capable, skilled and educated, and the reality of their employers' construction of them as docile and 'cheap labour'. When time and experience in the UK labour market did not necessarily result in linear

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progression towards greater rights, participants altered their response to the continuing constraints in a gendered and racialised labour market by devising a range of reactive tactics to get by in the face of exploitative work rather than leave in the hope of finding better work, or in some cases, by resisting.

Participants' narratives reveal that the three differing responses to exploitation—resilience, reworking and resistance—are not linear and separate. Women's accounts often indicate the interplay and the overlapping nature of these responses which are shaped as much by workers' own personal histories, socio-economic background, immediate circumstances and more tangential factors as they are by the nature of the broader labour market and particular employment relations. The narratives do not indicate a simple trajectory of progression towards greater rights, though some of the individual contexts which exacerbate exploitation—such as lack of proficiency in English—are indeed shaped by length of stay and participation in the labour market.

Several participants changed employment frequently as a way of escaping exploitative environments. Analysing migrant workers' experiences in London hotels, Alberti (2014: 6) argues that mobility can constitute 'a crucial terrain of agency and resistance', and such practices defy employers' assumptions about migrants' availability and willingness to work under poor conditions (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). However, quitting was often considered by the participants as the only way of fleeing exploitation and incidents would go unreported. Hence, we argue that quitting is a project of reworking, as it is enfolded into hegemonic social relations. Rather than attempt to undo these relations or call them into question, it seeks to 'undermine its inequities on the very grounds on which they are cast' (Katz, 2004: 247); in this case by taking the worker out of the ambit of one set of inequitable power relations and by

seeking to enter another similarly structured though hopefully more tolerable set of employment relations. Although commonly informed by a consciousness of exploitation at work, where it is a silent individual act unaccompanied by any intention or effect of altering the broader power relations in that workplace, we would argue that this does not quite constitute an act of resistance but more a practice of reworking.

Strategies of resistance: Understanding and confronting exploitation

With time and greater experience, some participants' attitudes and responses to exploitation changed. Iza reflected on how her attitude changed from 'just work and keep quiet' to realising that she also had rights she could enforce. She individualised and trivialised her earlier responses to exploitative conditions, while concurrently negating and minimising structural constraints: 'I was quite silly and naive'. This rhetorical device helped Iza separate her current self-conception as an agentic worker who defends her rights from her earlier self. Iza's experience also indicates how information asymmetries sustain power hierarchies within migrant-dense workplaces:

> [The supervisor] tried to convince us we had no rights there and that we couldn't ask for anything. So we were keeping quiet thinking she was right. Today I know she wasn't. I know we have rights here and that we should have asked for many things […] Maybe my mistake was that I ended up in such an environment where everyone was saying "You are here, you've got a job so earn money and keep quiet". There was nobody to make me aware of how things worked […] I started to understand that it's not like that […]. The language school helped me a lot and I realised that I don't have to be this housekeeper squashed by the rest but even if I am this housekeeper I deserve something better.

Wiola left her first job due to exploitative conditions for migrant workers without filing a complaint but in her second workplace fought hard for her rights. She recounted how she was bullied, accused of doing her work improperly and given a disciplinary warning by her manager, behaviour she felt was motivated by her manager's attitude to her nationality. Her experiences illustrate the emotional and psychological toll that both harassment and resistance to it can take, as documented elsewhere (Bloisi and Hoel, 2008; Ineson et al., 2013) as well as the importance of partner support in sustaining resistance:

> When she gave it to me [written disciplinary warning] I felt a deep resentment and tried to defend myself as much as I could […] I realised that I could lose the job so I began to talk openly and write down what was happening. I sent this to her, to the other manager and the area manager […] I cried many days and nights and spoke to my boyfriend about changing my job, finding a better one for me. We agreed that we would fight for my rights and justice […] What is really happening is people resigning and looking for different jobs because they don't want to hassle themselves with fighting for their rights. They simply want to avoid problems. I fight for my rights therefore I am still at the same place.

In general, tourism workplaces have low levels of reporting on discrimination and harassment (Bloisi and Hoel, 2008; Hoel and Einarsen, 2003) and traditional forms of resistance 'such as strikes or slowdowns, have limited purchase in many contemporary work sites, especially in the service sector' (McDowell et al., 2007: 21). When harassment is reported, cases are not always handled properly (Wright and Pollert, 2006), as in the case of Iza who was particularly vulnerable as the only female chef in an all-male kitchen and felt she

was targeted in part as she was a woman (physically weaker), migrant (more likely to tolerate harassment) and lower in the kitchen hierarchy (less important):

> I had a problem with bullying at work. It was a Slovak guy who became a team leader. He wanted to show off but because his English was very bad he wouldn't dare to harass English people. He is a huge guy—two meters tall and about 120 kilos. Compared to him I was like a little mouse [...] According to him, there was always something wrong, always something he didn't like [with my work]. It's a weird situation because for example I get an 'Oscar for the best employee' but he depresses me so much that I feel like rubbish. I made a complaint twice but there was no result. Once, it happened that it was just me and him in the kitchen because everyone was on break and after only two minutes he shouted at me so much that I threw the knife on the table and said that I was not going to go back there. There was a big scandal. The floor manager was begging me to stay because they didn't have enough staff and so on. I said that I cannot work there anymore. Next day I came to work and said I wanted to write another complaint letter. My [English] head chef approached me and asked me not to do it because it would reflect badly on him as I already complained twice and it didn't improve. […] My head chef didn't know how to sort it out properly.

In her first job (housekeeper), Iza did not report discrimination but later on, with improved English, she challenged unfair treatment in a masculine kitchen culture. Iza's response—shaped by gendered, racialised and occupational hierarchies in the kitchen—was to threaten to quit. Smith (2006) draws attention to the implicit potential for conflict in workers' quitting strategies and the destabilising impact on labour processes of workers'

'mobility power' as they explicitly make the use of mobility threats to create strategic rewards (Smith, 2006: 391; also see Alberti, 2014).

Unlike silent quitting practices that we previously characterised as reworking strategies, we argue that both in its intention and effect which was to challenge and bring about changes in employment relations, Wiola and Iza's actions are better characterised as resistance. Time in the UK labour market, increasing confidence, language proficiency, support from partner and colleagues, and knowledge of rights were factors which enabled some workers to mount a challenge to exploitative employers. As Katz (2004: 251) argues, 'practices of resistance draw on and produce a critical consciousness to confront and redress historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression and exploitation at various scales'. However, Wiola, Iza and other workers who utilised such strategies also found that the outcome was mixed and the process emotionally taxing. The nature of tourism work made it more difficult to discern resistance—and particularly effective resistance—compared to resilience and reworking. This throws into sharp relief the structural inequalities that make the project of resistance fraught in conditions of entrenched exploitation.

Conclusion

This article provides insight into the realities of tourism employment as experienced by migrant women from EU8 countries. In doing so, it adds to the body of scholarship that highlights the exploitative and discriminatory nature of tourism workplaces (Guerrier and Adib, 2000a; Hoel and Einarsen, 2003; Wright and Pollert, 2006). Participants' narratives indicate that tourism workplaces are sites of conformity and docility as well as of resistance, as documented elsewhere (McDowell et al., 2007: 6), and this article identifies the micro-mechanisms through which agency is exercised in oppressive contexts. On the one hand,

migrant women may seem to internalise employers' stereotyped assumptions around their capacity for 'hard work', docility and construct exploitative working conditions as normative. However, they also actively engage in carving out 'spaces of control' (Giddens, 1982: 197), showing a consciousness of and various degrees of responses to power structures, albeit at an individual level with little collective action and without support of trade unions, which were entirely absent in women's narratives of struggle and need to better address issues posed by new forms of precarious work in globalised labour markets. Tourism workplaces become spaces where power is asserted but also confronted, where power structures are normalised but also challenged and recalibrated. Through a focus on migrant women workers' voices, the article unpacks the ways in which the many disadvantages at the intersection of gender, ethno-nationality, age, low-status jobs, class and migrant status shape the exercise of their agency.

While acknowledging marginalisation and power asymmetries, the research participants saw themselves as active agents with long-term goals rather than passive powerless victims of exploitation. In the context of dominant narratives of victimhood in relation to migrant women's working lives and experiences, this article provides insight into how migrant women workers understand and navigate structures of power that condition their oppressive employment relations and render their lives precarious. For some women, initial rejection of exploitative work through quitting brought into sharp relief the limited nature of their labour market opportunities. For most women, however, time, experience and improved English helped shape increasingly assertive responses to exploitation and discrimination. On the whole, despite a consciousness of the power relations at work, the most common form of responses to exploitation were limited tactics geared towards day-to-

day survival and resilience to deal with employers, co-workers and customers as well as with negative self-perceptions some women held about their low-status occupations. Participants perceived their work instrumentally, as a way of achieving non-work related ambitions such as gaining qualifications or traveling. At the other end of the spectrum of responses were acts of resistance through reporting unfair treatment and asserting rights that drew upon and (re)produced a much more critical and oppositional consciousness of the hegemonic powers at work (Katz, 2004), though with limited success. Conceptually positioned between these two kinds of responses laid reworking strategies that were deployed to escape exploitative workplaces, including quitting. The findings support Katz's (2004) observations that acts of out-and-out resistance are rare. More commonly, people engage in acts of reworking and are sustained through acts of resilience that enable 'material and spiritual survival' and 'the recuperation of dignity' (Katz, 2004: 246). Katz (2004) suggests that resistance, reworking and resilience are mutually reinforcing; and that all of these acts may support social transformation. However, drawing upon Diprose (2015), it is important to strike a cautionary note about the limits to social transformation if resilience is the primary response to exploitation. Indeed, endeavours aimed at simply surviving ultimately reaffirm existing power relations: 'resilience is a way of encouraging people to live with insecurity because the status quo is deemed insurmountable' (Diprose, 2015: 49).

By examining the meanings and limits of workers' understandings and practices, our analysis draws attention to the overlapping and interconnected categories of resilience, reworking and resistance in a manner that recognises both the intention and effect of workers' practices, as well as its limits. It thereby offers a more differentiated account of agency that resists both binary constructions of victimhood and agency as well as simplistic

celebrations of unmitigated resistance. It also makes visible the continuums between reinforcing and oppositional practices, between practices that re-inscribe existing hierarchies and those that seek to recalibrate power relations.

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[i] EU8 or Accession 8 (A8) is the official name given to the eight Central and Eastern European countries (CEE)—Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – that joined the European Union on the 1st of May 2004. In the 2011 Census, Polish-born residents were the second largest non-UK born group.

[ii] Tourism employment is a broad term that includes accommodation, food and beverage, transport, travel agencies and also events (ONS, 2016)