**Negotiating class, femininity and career: Latin American migrant women entrepreneurs in Spain**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyses how the gendered and classed positions of migrant women explain the meanings of becoming an entrepreneur and the role of their spouses in their occupational trajectories. Using a translocational positionality approach, the article challenges the claim that women escape patriarchal domination by establishing their own businesses. The narratives of 35 Latin American women entrepreneurs in Spain reveal that becoming an entrepreneur is conditioned by class-based ideas of masculinity and femininity. I argue that middle-class Latin American immigrant women become entrepreneurs to promote their spouse’s career advancement while conforming to class-based norms of femininity. In contrast, lower class Latin American women view the business as a space of autonomy and occupational upward mobility that nevertheless also complies with working-class definitions of femininity. The policy implications of these findings relate to making class aspirations central to the support of labour market integration and empowerment of migrant women.

**Keywords:** class, entrepreneurship, gender, Latin America, Spain.

**Introduction**

This article analyses how the gendered and classed positions of middle-class and working-class migrant women business owners explain divergent meanings of becoming an entrepreneur and the absence of their spouses in running their businesses. By doing so, I compare the experiences of both working and middle-class Latin American migrant entrepreneurs in Spain to determine the extent to which a similar labour market position (i.e., business owner) conceals different interactions between social class and representations of appropriate masculinity and femininity. Previous analyses of migrant women in the ethnic economy have emphasised that ‘gender-blindness’ results in a failure to understand how business and household dynamics are shaped by gender ideologies (Phizacklea, 1988; Morokvasic, 1991). Feminist scholars have identified the use of female labour as a key factor in the formation and sustainability of migrant firms, which suggests that women’s work is largely invisible and that their autonomy is hindered by working in the ethnic economy (Anthias and Mehta, 2003). In contrast, independent migrant women entrepreneurs are portrayed as empowered and autonomous, and businesses serve as a means to facilitate spaces for breaking out from traditional family relations (Morokvasic, 1991; Bhachu, 1991; Apitzsch and Kontos, 2003).

Although feminist and gender analyses have advanced our understanding of the roles of gender and ethnicity in immigrant entrepreneurship, they have overlooked the role of class positions. The present paper addresses the issue of the role of class positions and gender ideologies in the occupational strategies of immigrant women entrepreneurs of various class backgrounds who establish and operate small firms without the involvement of their spouses. The present paper challenges the claim that migrant women escape patriarchal domination by establishing their own businesses and argues that women who independently run their own businesses do not necessarily enjoy upward occupational mobility, empowerment or self-realisation. To unpack the strategies underlying entrepreneurship, the present paper adopts the framework of *translocational positionality* (Anthias, 2008; Anthias, 2013). Because translocational positionality interprets narratives, identities, practices and outcomes by taking into account both the simultaneously experienced complexities of different social hierarchies and the role of multiple locations in time and space (Anthias, 2013), it provides an appropriate framework for understanding the translation of migrant class and gender positions across different spaces (i.e., country of origin and destination) and occupational transitions (i.e., from paid employment to becoming an entrepreneur).

I argue that the choices to become entrepreneurs and the lack of involvement of their spouses are explained by the interaction of class position and gender ideologies. Although both middle-class and working-class women entrepreneurs do not rely on their husband’s support in their businesses, the underlying reasons to do so are different. The findings of the present research indicate that middle-class women, who experience strong downward social mobility due to immigrating to Spain, view the entrepreneurial strategy as a sacrifice that guarantees their spouse’s career advancement. This strategy preserves the husband’s class-based masculinity while conforming to traditional understandings of femininities by sacrificing their own careers. On the other hand, Latin American women entrepreneurs from lower class positions who engaged in domestic/care work prior to establishing a business, regard business activity as the highest rung of the social mobility ladder in Spain and report that the business opens spaces of autonomy. However, their entrepreneurship does not challenge their class-based representation of femininities because they report that becoming an entrepreneur provides them with greater flexibility to reconcile work and care activities.

The present paper is structured as follows: the first section presents a critical review of key discussions of migrant women in the ethnic economy and argues that their involvement has been explained as either conforming to or breaking away from patriarchal relations. The next section then describes how data were collected, the methodology, the analytical framework and context. The following sections present an analysis of the gender and class hierarchies exhibited by Latin American migrant women entrepreneurs, in relation to (i) the meaning of the business for their career trajectories; (ii) the experiences of running their businesses on their own; and (iii) the extent to which the business is central to their negotiations of class-based femininity and masculinity. The concluding section discusses the significance of the study findings and explores the policy implications of the results.

**Women in the ethnic economy: from exploitation to empowerment and the absence of class**

Key accounts of immigrant entrepreneurship (Light, 1984; Waldinger, Ward and Aldrich, 1985; Portes and Zhou, 1992; Kloosterman et al., 1999) fail to sufficiently explore the implications of the patriarchal system for immigrant small firms (Westwood, 1988; Josephides, 1988; Hillman, 1999; Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2016). Despite the ‘gender-blindness’ of research on immigrant businesses, scholars note that family dynamics are embedded in these businesses due to the high contribution of flexible and loyal family support (Villares-Varela, Ram and Jones, 2017; Jones, Ram and Villares-Varela, 2017). Because immigrant entrepreneurship often occurs in market areas where profitability is based on the extensive use of labour force as the basis for competition, recourse to family labour is a general characteristic of immigrant entrepreneurship (Ram, 1994; Ram and Holliday, 1993; Sanders and Nee, 1996; Kloosterman et al., 1999; Ram and Jones, 2001).

However, the solidarity often attributed to working in family businesses generally hides underlying patriarchal relations and conceals the unequal and largely unacknowledged contribution of women to the ethnic economy (Phizacklea, 1988; Westwood, 1988; Josephides, 1988; Ram and Holiday, 1993; Hillman, 1999; Villares-Varela, Ram and Jones, 2017). These accounts show that, although immigrant entrepreneurship might serve to overcome precarious conditions of the labour market for men, women are unable to escape precarious employment (Hillman, 1999) because their husbands, parents and brothers collect these women’s earnings (Westwood, 1988) (for a review of the role of women in the ethnic economy see Villares-Varela, Ram and Jones, 2017).

Alternative views of women’s experiences in the ethnic economy argue that the above accounts run the risk of constructing women as passive victims rather than as social actors capable of change. Other perspectives that examine the extent to which migrant women participate in upward social mobility through entrepreneurship indicate that the limited opportunities in the labour market available to women from minority groups is a factor motivating self-employment. For example, the business might serve as a means of enhancing women’s self-esteem and self-realisation as well as a platform for integration in the labour market (Bhachu, 1991; Apistzch and Kontos, 2003; Pio, 2007; Baycan, 2010; Villares-Varela, Ram and Jones, 2017). Nevertheless, these processes are not necessarily linear. Whether a woman works in the family business or becomes an independent entrepreneur, these strategies involve negotiations and identity work related to the intersection between ethnicity, gender and/or religion. For example, migrant participation in the family business can be a reactive strategy that simultaneously conforms to and resists familial hierarchies and gender ideologies (Katila, 2008; Billore, 2011). Similarly, Essers, Benshop and Doorewarard (2010) argue that women of Muslim background who become entrepreneurs in the Netherlands must negotiate the dichotomous representations between western versus non-western and modern versus traditional values.

Although the considerations discussed above provide a more nuanced context for deconstructing the binary between exploited and empowered migrant women entrepreneurs, the extant research rarely addresses the role of class in migrant women’s career trajectories. The nexus between ethnicity and gender has been regarded as the core of the analysis, and classed trajectories have been not been fully examined (Villares-Varela, 2016). Neglecting the role of class positions has been a crucial omission not only within migrant entrepreneurship research, but also within migration studies in general (van Hear, 2014; Cederberg, 2017). Overlooking class has also afflicted contemporary sociology in general, which has focused on other forms of social division such as gender and ethnicity (Anthias, 2001).

In the field of migrant entrepreneurship and gender, the work of Anthias (1992) and Valdez (2011, 2016) are notable exceptions, since they acknowledge the centrality of class in the analysis of immigrant entrepreneurship. Anthias (1992) investigated the experiences of Cypriot women in co-ethnic businesses in the UK and found that class positions in the workplace outweigh ethnic and gender positions preventing them from joining organisations to improve their working conditions. Valdez’ (2011) analysis of the diverse strategies Latino entrepreneurs in the US examined the interaction of race, gender and class and the recreation of different social positions through entrepreneurship in American society. Both accounts reveal the richness provided by studying the simultaneous interplay of categories such as race, ethnicity, class and gender.

The present paper advances this line of research by focusing on the central role of class in the women’s participation in the ethnic economy to unveil the underlying decisions to become entrepreneurs, and the strategies employed in running their businesses. In contrast to earlier research (Anthias, 1992; Valdez, 2011, 2016), I compare the experiences of both working and middle-class women entrepreneurs to determine the extent to which a similar labour market position (i.e., business owner) conceals different interactions between social class and representations of appropriate masculinity and femininity. This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of migrant women in the ethnic economy because it overcomes the drawbacks of a non-critical approach to the role of entrepreneurship as a means of empowering migrant women and provides a more comprehensive view of immigrant entrepreneurship compared to accounts based solely on ethnicity and gender.

**Data, methods, analytical framework and context**

*Data and methods*

The article draws on narratives obtained from thirty-five women entrepreneurs who operated their businesses independently of men. These interviews were carried out as part of a larger project[[1]](#endnote-1) that focused on gender and intergenerational dynamics for families of migrant entrepreneurs. The sampling criteria needed to fulfil the following characteristics: migrant (defined as those born outside of Spain), entrepreneurs (who own a small firm) and in the service sector. Access was accomplished through a mix of formal and informal contacts. The author initiated formal contacts with several organisations, such as migrant entrepreneur associations, refugee and migrant centres, and council services to businesses, requesting contacts with migrant entrepreneurs who used their services. To obtain a diverse sample, interviewees were also identified through informal contacts, and through fieldwork visits in areas of high density of migrant entrepreneurs. Following initial contacts, chain sampling (Penrod et al., 2003) was employed, in which each interviewee put the interviewer in touch with other migrant entrepreneurs. The interviews were carried out by the author in the region of Galicia (Spain) between 2008 and 2010.

In this article interviews only with women entrepreneurs are analysed. These interviewees arrived in Spain in the period from 1998 to 2006 and were primarily from Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay and, Colombia. They operated small businesses with a simple organisational structure and fewer than 5 employees in the formal service sector of the economy (in particular, catering and retail). Main businesses identified are cafes/restaurants, together with news agents, hairdresser salons, internet cafes, grocery stores, laundrettes, and cleaning/care provision companies (see a summary of the profiles of the interviewees below).

*---- Table 1 about here----*

An interview guide provided a format that structured the conversation. The similar format enables cross-comparison across the different cases but also provided the interviewee with the opportunity to further elaborate on other topics. Some questions included in the guide inquired about their professional career trajectories in the countries of origin and destination (e.g. what have been your main occupations in your country of origin?; what is your level of education?; what was your first employment in Spain; etc.), motivations and constraints to establish the business (e.g. when did you start considering setting up a business in Spain; why were your motivations to start up a business? what were the main barriers you encountered?; where did you find support to set up your business?; etc.); financial resources (e.g. what was the approximate initial investment to open up your business?; how did you acquire the capital to open up the firm; etc.); the knowledge required to operate the business (e.g. what did you need to learn to start up the firm; where did you acquire this knowledge; etc.); family relations such as the involvement of partners and children (e.g. did your partner help you to start up the firm?; in which ways?; does your partner work/help out in your business?; who is in charge of care activities?; do your children work/help out in the business?; etc.); and future aspirations (e.g. how do you see yourself in the next 5-10 years?; would you like to maintain your business active in the forthcoming years?; what are your aspirations in relation to your professional trajectory and/or business trajectory?; etc.).

Narratives regarding class positions were frequently mentioned when the entrepreneurs described their experiences of work and employment in their countries of origin and in Spain, particularly in relation to the factors motivating them to establish the business, their work experiences, and their future aspirations. For purposes of the analysis, class positions were identified and conceptualised based on a combination of indicators that reflected financial and educational resources (Valdez, 2016; Villares-Varela, 2016) as well as class identity (Bottero, 2004). These four indicators were: (i) the level of education acquired in the country of origin (higher for middle-class, secondary/primary for working-class); (ii) occupation in the country of origin prior to emigrating (skilled/manual); (iii) the level of financial capital mobilised in establishing the business (e.g., years of saving in Spain combined with formal and informal loans or family savings in the country of origin); and (iv) self-reported class position (if any) mentioned during the interview. These categories tended to overlap (i.e. most women with higher education would self-identify as middle class in the country of origin). Given that women entrepreneurs come from countries with different levels of income and social structures, these categories have been used not to pigeonhole migrants into fixed groupings, but to grasp how they re-interpret and enact social mobility according to their class position in origin and destination (Villares-Varela, 2016). The interviewee experiences of upward social mobility or downward social mobility revealed in the narratives tended to be strongly related to their class position in the country of origin and the collective family strategy.

The interviews, which lasted from 60 to 140 minutes, were carried out in Spanish and transcribed in full. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded and then analysed following an interpretive framework (Holt et al., 2009): the transcripts were coded in themes that related to the different areas mentioned in the above description of the interview guide; as well as analysed interpreting how women’s voices related to broader narratives of their occupational trajectories, class (re)positioning and gender ideologies. The fragments included in this article have been translated from Spanish by the author.

*Analytical framework*

The present paper implements a translocational positionality approach (Anthias, 2008, 2013) as the lens examining the effects of the interplay of the variables of class position and gender ideologies on the process and outcomes of becoming an entrepreneur. Positionality builds upon intersectionality (Holvino, 2010) but infusing a dynamic perspective to analyse the impact of different variables in the positions individuals have in a multiplicity of locations (for a discussion on positional approaches in intersectional analysis see Dy et al., 2014). Anthias (2008) notes that ‘to think of translocations opens up not only thinking of relocations but also of the multiplicity of locations involved in time and space, in terms of connections between the past, the present and the future’ (Anthias, 2008:15). Therefore translocational positionality advances an intersectional stand and brings a more dynamic perspective to power and social positioning across time and space. Anthias (2008) conveys that

‘[p]ositionality combines a reference to social position (as a set of effectivities: as outcome) and social positioning (as a set of practices, actions and meanings: as process). That is, positionality is the space at the intersection of structure (social position/social effects) and agency (social positioning/meaning and practice). The notion of ‘location’ recognises the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales […] The term ‘translocational’ references the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialization’ (Anthias 2008: 15-16) –originally underlined-

Therefore, adopting this analytical lens enables us to understand the trajectories that connect class positions and gender ideologies negotiated with reference to multiple spaces. For example, this framework allows us to understand the experiences of transitioning from a high skilled occupation in Latin American to a low pay/low status employment in Spain; or the ways in which gender negotiations have also evolved in time and space. During the course of the interviews, respondents reflected on their experiences of upward social mobility or downward social mobility revealed in the narratives which tended to be strongly related to their class position in the country of origin and destination, as well as on the collective family strategy.

*Context*

This article also advances research on migrant entrepreneurship in Spain, which has not been extensively developed (Beltrán, Ribas and Oso, 2007). The characteristics of Spain as a country of destination for Latin American migrants are conditioned by postcolonial and historical connections as well as the post-1980 rapid economic development in Spain, which required a foreign labour force (King and Zontini, 2000; Ribas-Mateos, 2004). Financial crises and political instability in some Latin American countries (e.g., military governments, financial crises such as the 2001 ‘corralito’ in Argentina, and increasing threats to personal safety for the middle-class in Venezuela) accelerated immigration to Spain. These were conditioned by historical and post-colonial links, US border closures, and domestic Spanish policies that favoured the entry of Latin American migrants over other nationalities (Izquierdo, 2006; Izquierdo and Martínez 2014). The Spanish preference for Latin American migrants is enhanced by their comparative advantage in terms of human capital and the lack of language barriers. Because Latin American migrants in general have higher qualifications than Spaniards (INE Census, 2011), they tend to be underemployed compared to Spanish locals. Latin American migrant women primarily find employment in personal services such as caregiving and domestic work (Parella, 2003) due to the characteristics of the *familistic* Spanish welfare state provision (Martínez, 2010).

***Entrepreneurial strategies: women’s career trajectories***

This section presents the ways in which opening up a firm is situated within the occupational trajectories of migrant women. Most of the Latin American women from working-class backgrounds who managed to establish their own business after transitioning from sectors such as domestic and care work were educated at the secondary level and reported working-class status in their countries of origin. The working-class Latin American women perceived their business as a platform for autonomy as well as the last stage of a long climb to upward social mobility in Spain. Interviewee perceptions of success and independence were magnified due to their past experiences in sectors such as domestic and care work, which are occupations with low prestige in which women are generally subjected to the strong power relations of their employers (typically other women). For example, Lola (Argentine), who held several jobs in Spain in care work and catering and opened a care provision company, reported that she feels much better off now that she runs her own business and controls her time and everyday tasks:

I cannot say this is my dream come true, but I can say it is much better than my previous jobs in Spain *[as domestic worker, cleaner and cook*]. That was tough and did not pay well. [You were] always under different bosses, how they want to run things. They might pay you on time, or they might not pay you on time or at all. Here it has its disadvantages, but I am on my own, I organise my own tasks and I get to decide how I want to run my business (Lola, Argentine managing a care provision company).

Susana, a Uruguayan hairdresser, also reported that her job in the Spanish labour market was poorly paid. Now that she owned a small salon, she could see the ‘exploitative’ practices in the Spanish labour market:

After working as a hairdresser for others here, you see how poorly paid it is and how much money they make. . . . The products are cheap, so what you pay for is basically the service. And I was making around €700, working Saturdays and sometimes even doing the hair of my former boss’ family members outside of working hours! Outrageous . . . and it was not included in your salary as overtime pay. Maybe they would give you €20 extra or so. So now I am much happier. I like being my own boss. As soon as I could get the self-employment permit, I put the money together. For a hairdresser salon the investment is not high and the rents are okay. (Susana, Uruguayan with a hair salon).

On the contrary, middle-class Latin American women entrepreneurs did not generally report experiences of paid employment in Spain that involved transitioning through a long succession of occupations. In contrast to the accounts of lower class women, middle-class Latin American women opened businesses without having experienced low status employment and so they do not to fall into menial jobs. Hence, some of them already harboured ambitions of establishing a business prior to leaving their home countries and sought information about the limited chances of securing a satisfactory job in the Spanish labour market. This was the case for Lucía and Sonia, who reported that the period between arriving and opening the business was minimal and that the business was established in response to limited opportunities in the labour market:

When I arrived in 2003, I already knew that I if you didn’t have the right networks it would be difficult to get a job in your field. Offers of work in caring for the elderly or cleaning were the only jobs available. But these are very poorly paid and, to be honest, I don’t think I would be able to do them. So before arriving, I contacted a lawyer and accountant in Spain and started looking for a place to establish a small café. When we arrived, things were halfway finished (Lucía, Venezuelan with a café).

Sonia narrates that the options available in self-employment are not the first entry jobs she has had in mind:

I didn’t want to work as a domestic worker, and there is not much more available here. If my children’s food depends on this, I will do it, but not if I have other options. So I thought of having this stationary and newspaper shop. We saw it online and started discussions beforehand in Argentina. It seemed like a business that was functioning, and the owners were retiring. I came first, started to establish it, and rented an apartment. A month later, my husband and the kids came (Sonia, Argentine with a stationary shop).

Consequently, the migration and occupational trajectories were conditioned by the class positions of these migrant entrepreneurs in their country of origin and the transition involved in migrating to Spain. Migrants with greater financial resources established businesses to avoid domestic and care work, thus cushioning the loss of social status entailed by these niches. Their experiences contrasted with those of the lower class Latin American women, who had to transition through different work experiences to accumulate the resources to establish their own businesses and who viewed their businesses as a means toward upward social mobility.

***Entrepreneurial strategies: women-only entrepreneurs***

Neither the lower or middle-class Latin American women entrepreneurs interviewed relied on the support of their partners as actual or potential resources in their business strategy. This did not preclude a certain level of involvement on the part of their male partners in discussing the initial idea, contributing family savings or facilitating contacts with suppliers. However, women owned and ran their businesses alone on a day-to-day basis and rarely relied on their partners’ help. This finding confirms the strategy previously described by other researchers (Anthias and Mehta, 2003), who found that migrant women entrepreneurs typically did not rely on their husbands’ help, in contrast to migrant men, who frequently employed their wives’ labour. However, the mechanisms behind the non-reliance on male counterparts were not uniform and were not necessarily related to a search for autonomy. Other factors – in particular, class position – must be taken into account, and it is crucial to understand how these elements intersect with ideologies of masculinity and femininity (Pyke, 1996).

The working-class Latin American women who had engaged in paid employment prior to opening their own business reported advantages, such as a search for independence and the ability to manage their own time and resources. These narratives emerge as a result of not including their husbands in the business venture, as previously discussed in the literature. For example, for Teresa, her business represented independence from ‘men’ and the experience of ‘being in charge’:

 I feel free. . . . I also enjoy the fact that I make my own money, and I decide how to use it, save it or invest it in the business. . . . I’ve learned you should not depend on a man, particularly if you are a migrant and don’t have anyone besides your husband. I have friends who divorced and then had nothing. . . Now I know that I can maintain my children on my own. . . . My husband is welcome to come here, but he knows this is my business, I designed it and worked very hard for it. Of course, he gives me ideas or advice, but I am the one in charge (Teresa, Colombian with a hairdresser salon).

María (Uruguayan) emphasised how the business space provided the opportunity to break away from her reproductive identity and ‘being a mum’ 24/7.

I like being on my own. At home, I am a mum and a wife, constantly taking care of my boys and my husband, who sometimes requires more attention than the boys (*laugh*), so here it is my place, my business, my rules, my norms. Of course it has not been easy, but after a great deal of stress I have managed to establish this. I am very proud of myself (María, Uruguayan with a bakery).

In contrast, middle-class Latin American immigrant entrepreneurs described substantially different motivations for not relying on their husbands’ support. Their reasons for establishing an independent business did not reflect the yearning for independence and self-realisation reported by the working-class group. On the contrary, leaving their partners out of the business followed the strategy of supporting paid employment for their spouses in jobs that corresponded to their partners’ academic qualifications. In their accounts, they postponed their professional career trajectories for the sake of their husbands’, becoming owners of small firms, activities for which they were over-qualified. The male partners of middle-class Latin American women entrepreneurs invested family resources in obtaining validation of their degrees or even in unpaid internships, while women sustained the family through the income from their businesses. The aforementioned strategy is explained as their individual decision to restore the collective family social status. Although women express yearning for a past where they would hold occupations in their right field of speciality, they do not narrate these decisions as imposed on them. This strategy reflects the preponderance of their husband’s career in sustaining the weight of the collective family middle-class social status. Elena (Argentine) and Fina (Venezuelan) provide the following examples:

My husband wants to find a job in his field *[her husband is an architect*]. He has a great deal of experience and has worked in his field for a long time. The idea was to have something to make some money so we opened this [the business]. During the morning, he works on validating his degree. He needs to obtain a few university credits and pass some exams. That takes time, and the jobs available without credentials are not very good. . . . I am trying to see the positive side to this, and we decided that he should be the one trying to get a good job first. That is the idea (Elena, Argentine with a clothing shop).

Well, the business is in my name. He [*her husband*] comes sometimes but very rarely. Maybe if I need to run an urgent errand or go to the GP . . . but no, he does not work here every day. The idea is that he will find something in his field *(he has worked in interior design)*. He is trying to get that kind of job, so he spends the day attending networking events, attending some courses, getting to know the Spanish market. He is even trying for an unpaid internship now. So far, we are living off this business (Fina, Venezuelan with a grocery store).

Elena and Fina’s narratives reflect gender ideologies in which women’s professional success is viewed as secondary to male success. Although both members of the couple held higher education degrees and worked in professional occupations in their country of origin, the disadvantages experienced in the labour market in Spain positioned them differently in deciding how to organise their working lives. Pyke (1996), who analysed class-based interpersonal power in couples, claims that ‘the ideological supremacy of the male career is piled on top of other, more deeply seated patriarchal ideologies concerning the essential nature of gender differences’ (Pyke, 1996:533). The strategies employed reflect the underlying privileging of men’s careers over women’s careers, which result in a medium-term family strategy to reconfigure the position of men as the main breadwinner. The interviewees strategies conform to their ideas of class-based masculinities (i.e., the hegemony of the man’s career), and class-based femininities (i.e., the need for women to ‘sacrifice’ and be more flexible for the sake of the family’s wellbeing as well as achieving middle-class status based on the husband’s occupation).

**Entrepreneurial strategies:Negotiating masculinity, femininity and class**

The narratives of working-class Latin American women presented above indicate that for them the business represented autonomy and self-realisation through a venture that did not require reliance on family or kinship ties or support from their husbands for everyday tasks. The business provided a break from patriarchal relations, which was reflected in narratives in which women explained that they like ‘being on their own’, having ‘my norms, my rules’, and making their own money without giving explanations.

However, their narratives exhibit a contradiction between breaking away from patriarchal relations while compensating for their earned independence with a strong conformity to expectations of femininity with respect to caregiving and other domestic tasks. These accounts are consistent with claims regarding the construction of ‘new femininities’ (Budgeon, 2014) that reconcile traditional femininity with new forms of self-entitlement, self-reliance and individual freedom (Budgeon, 2014:320). This perspective of ‘new femininities’ that Budgeon (2014) details explains the ways in which migrant entrepreneurs comply with traditional feminine roles, whilst at the same time also engaging with values of independence, and discourses of feminine empowerment. The working-class Latin American women viewed their entrepreneurial strategy both as providing independence and conforming to expectations associated with femininity. Being a business owner did not challenge their domesticity but actually magnified it due to the ‘flexibility’ achieved by being one’s own boss. They often reported that being self-employed provided a better balance between work and family life compared to paid employment. Estrella provides the following illustration:

This is one of the advantages of being on my own. If my kids want me to do something with them, I can decide to finish earlier and go. I don’t do it often, but there is that possibility. You cannot do that under an employer. . . . The same with spending time with my husband. I like being there for him if he needs me to prepare something to eat before going to work or to have someone to talk with. Now I feel I control my time more (Estrella, Uruguayan with a grocery store).

For the middle-class Latin American families, men were able to overcome their precarious position in the Spanish labour market by taking advantage of class-based gender ideologies that position their professional performance above that of their wives. Thus, their feminine identity and role of men was not questioned nor challenged. By becoming independent entrepreneurs, migrant women conform to expectations of femininity by accommodating men’s interests (Connell, 1995; Budgeon, 2014). When asked why they adopted the arrangements described above rather than others, such as having husband’s support to run the business and finding a job elsewhere, the Latin American middle-class women entrepreneurs maintained that women were able to be more flexible in deviating from their professional trajectory. This explanation claims that men feel their masculinity threatened when deviating from their professional identity, while women are able to find spaces for identification and social recognition when ‘sacrificing’ for the family. This view is illustrated by the following accounts:

You know how men are with their work and studies. My husband has always worked as an architect. That’s the only thing he knows. That is ‘him’, you know what I mean? He would be very unhappy. I would feel bad if he at least does not try first. Of course, if he doesn’t find anything, well we will have to think of something or he will have to come and help me, but we are trying this way first (Beatriz, Venezuelan with a laundrette).

We learn so many other things [*as a woman*]. Listen, even if you have 3 PhDs, as a woman you normally know how to cook and know how to take care of someone. You know how to manage a house, and managing the bakery is not that different. . . . Costs, expenses, making sure everyone is satisfied with the products you are serving . . . . Men, well, they have changed now, new generations are different, but my husband, he can’t do anything besides his profession. He is the best professional as an accountant but don’t make him serve a table or make a sandwich. But I can do that (Elena, Argentine with a bakery).

The ‘sacrifice’ of restricting their social and labour mobility in the short to medium term was portrayed as the ability to place family wellbeing before their individual career trajectories and to understand the value of work for men’s identity. These two strategies conform to values associated with traditional femininity. However, failing to challenge their husbands’ masculine identity took its toll on the women’s class positions. These aspects are reflected in the yearning for a past when reminiscing on experiences in their countries of origin, where they worked in their own fields at levels that corresponded to their qualifications.

I had so much more freedom back home. I had my mom and my mother-in-law. They used to take care of the girls: my mom three days a week, my mother-in-law two days a week. I used to go to the office and pick them up at 5-6, but sometimes if I wanted, I could say ‘Mum, I am attending this event, or I am going to the gym’, and then I could have lunch with a friend, go to play tennis . . . it was so different. Here I am a ‘mum’ 24 hours a day. Now I am so tired that even if I wanted to, I wouldn’t be able to have a social life . . . . I really miss being in a job I enjoy, having new challenges, and talking to people ‘like you’ (Ana, Venezuelan with a café).

Sometimes, when I am serving coffee and cake to some of the customers, I think of when I would have an important meeting, and new projects were coming through. I also used to travel quite a bit, which made you feel part of something bigger. . . . Of course, other things are much better for our wellbeing in general: personal safety, education is good, the kids are happier, but here I am just in touch with people from the neighbourhood by serving them coffee and tea, whereas I used to be on the other side of the counter (Laura, Argentine with a café).

As the above excerpts indicate, their different occupations in Spain also marginalised them from other social activities associated with their class position in the country of origin, such as ‘going to the gym’ and ‘being on the other side of the counter in a café’. These discourses conform to their class-based ideas of femininity but do not relegate them to the low social status positions of domestic and care work, which would place them as working-class in their country of origin and Spain.

**Discussion, conclusions and policy implications**

Research on the use of family members in immigrant entrepreneurship (Phizacklea, 1988; Ram and Holliday, 1993) has found that female labour is a key factor in the formation and continuity of small immigrant firms (Villares-Varela, Ram and Jones, 2017) and that women’s contributions, which are largely invisible, contravene their independence (Hillman, 1999). Women have been conceptualised either as hidden contributors to the success of the husbands, brothers or fathers who exploit their labour (Phizacklea, 1988) or as entrepreneurs who only escape patriarchal domination if they break away from the ethnic economy (Morokvasic, 1991). The present paper reveals that these aspects significantly condition what it means to become an entrepreneur and the mechanisms available for doing so by examining the factors behind not having their partners employed or helping out (Anthias and Mehta, 2003).

These findings also reveal the centrality of class for understanding the role of ethnicity for women migrant entrepreneurs and for the study of migrant enterprises in general. Sensitivity to class (re)positioning and context seem to be crucial to understand the trajectories and experiences of migrant women entrepreneurs. The overwhelming focus on the ethnic and cultural traits that motivate particular groups to enter the ethnic economy obscures the importance of class resources and class-based identities. The present paper reveals that these aspects significantly condition what it means to become an entrepreneur and the mechanisms available for doing so by examining how different family strategies respond to imaginaries of class-based masculinities and femininities.

A signal theoretical contribution of the present paper was its use of a translocational positionality (Anthias 2008, 2013) framework to unpack the extent to which the gender ideologies and negotiations brought from the country of origin were translated and intertwined with class repositioning in Spain. Translocational positionality was used as an analytical lens to examine the intersection of gender, ethnicity and class because it is sensitive to the translation of these positions between the country of origin and Spain. Analysing the interplay of gender ideologies with class indicates that by adopting the dominantly masculine occupation of becoming an entrepreneur, women manage to break away from traditional feminine roles in the reproductive realm. This was the case for the lower class Latin American women who escape working as caregivers or domestic workers to establish an independent business without their husbands’ involvement; whilst middle-class Latin American women establish their own businesses to avoid falling into occupations as caregivers or domestic workers. However, becoming an entrepreneur does not challenge class-based femininities but amplifies them. Although lower class migrant entrepreneurs report that this role enables them to resolve the conflict between family care duties and work, middle-class Latin American women entrepreneurs preserve the family’s social class status and the husband’s masculinity by supporting their husbands’ professional occupations rather than their own, and restoring previous gender relations arrangements from the country of origin. Their current class repositioning was compensated for by the importance of their male partner’s career.

*Policy implications*

The policy implications of this article relate to bringing class-based resources and aspirations to the forefront of the design of policy tools for supporting the labour market incorporation of migrants, and in particular to (i) matching the resources and aspirations that migrants bring with the contexts of settlement (Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela 2016); and (ii) the gender-specific implications that nuance the value of entrepreneurship as a tool of empowerment for female migrants.

As discussed by Rath and Swagerman (2015), policy developments related to supporting migrant entrepreneurs, have been, generally, agent centred and mainly focused on the characteristics of particular migrant/groups. The overwhelming focus on the ethnic and cultural traits that motivate particular groups to enter the ethnic economy (Waldinger, Ward and Aldrich, 1985; Ram and Jones, 2001) has concealed the importance of class resources and class-based identities. This ‘ethnic exceptionalism’ (Ram, Theodorakopoulos and Jones, 2008) has masked that migrants come from a wide range of social positions; and more so within a *superdiverse* (Vertovec, 2007) context, where we contemplate a surge in countries of origin, levels of education, profession and multiplicity of statuses. Therefore, policies developed to support the labour market incorporation of migrants ought to take into account a comprehensive approach to the aspirations and resources of migrant entrepreneurs. This means not only taking into account specificities about particular national or ethnic groups, but also how migrants situate their migration aspirations and life trajectories within the resources (financial, human and social) they bring. This has been also rehearsed by Kontos (2003) when looking at Germany support policies for migrant entrepreneurship and suggesting that these should take into account the position of the business in the types of biographical paths for migrant entrepreneurs. This biographical approach proposes that entrepreneurship should be understood as a process intertwined with other life-cycle circumstances, such as family, migration and occupational trajectories, which might drive the development of the self (*ibid*.). Following Kontos’ (2003) perspective, support schemes should be sensitive to the ways in which specific contexts maximise the resources migrants bring and match their long-term professional aspirations.

Measures supporting entrepreneurship among migrant women have been linked to fostering economic empowerment (Morokvasic, 1991; Gill and Ganesh, 2007). The examination of the trajectories of the Latin American immigrant women presented in this article challenge the claim that entrepreneurship *per se* will enable women entrepreneurs to engage in trajectories that provide self-realisation and independence. The data indicate that women who independently operate their own business do not necessarily feel a sense of empowerment. This article has shown that, whilst this is the case for migrant women who have set up a firm as a stepping stone for economic independence and escape from precarious sectors, business ownership might actually entrap those who have higher education and different occupational aspirations. In these cases, women’s entrepreneurship actually boosts the professional careers of their spouses, and might hinder theirs. Therefore, programmes utilising entrepreneurship to empower migrant women ought to take into account a biographical approach (as Kontos 2003 proposes) to capture their professional aspirations, and how business ownership will fit into their overall trajectory, in order to promote both economic integration and gender equality.

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1. NOTES

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