Symbolic capital within the lived experiences of Eastern European migrants: A gendered perspective

Abstract

Despite recent large flows of migrants to the UK, the gendered nature of how men and women experience migrant entrepreneurial journeys remains under-researched. This article contributes to debates within the field of entrepreneurship by exploring the lived experiences of transnational migrant entrepreneurs setting up enterprises in the UK. Reporting the findings of interviews with forty-seven Eastern European transnational migrant entrepreneurs, this article focuses on the rarely discussed form of symbolic capital understood as the prestige, status and positive reputation individuals possess in the eyes of others. Our findings demonstrate the multifaceted and often gendered nature of forms of cultivated symbolic capital. Men use traditional conceptions of 'status' and 'prestige' to accrue forms of symbolic capital, which consequently facilitate and legitimate the transfer of economic capital into their UK businesses. In contrast, women, by setting up successful businesses in the UK, gain legitimacy in the eyes of family and friends in their home countries. This in turn enables them to overcome traditional gendered ascribed roles in which their visibility is centred solely around looking after children and the family. The article concludes by reflecting on the contributions and implications for theory and practice before identifying directions for further research.

Introduction

Over the past decade, despite the growth in 'new' migrants in the UK (Jones et al. 2014), such groups have rarely figured in contemporary debates on entrepreneurship, other than in a few notable studies (Barrett & Vershinina, 2016; Ram et al, 2008; Rodgers et al., 2018; Smallbone et al., 2010). Within these contributions, the gendered nature of how men and women experience migrant entrepreneurial journeys (Koning & Verver, 2013) remains silent. This article seeks to contribute to academic debates exploring how men and women's lived experiences of setting up enterprises as migrants is gendered. Furthermore, we add a transnational dimension as our examination centres on transnational migrant entrepreneurs (Brzozowski et al., 2017).

Women have often been constructed as an 'other' within normative accounts of entrepreneurship research (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Marlow & McAdam, 2012), and women's roles in entrepreneurial activities have tended to be gendered and unconsciously incorporated and reproduced within businesses as unrecognized and/or invisible. Consequently, it is important to shift the focus away from a narrative of 'invisibility' involving images of migrant women as uneducated, illiterate and passive (Pio and Essers, 2013). Rather, this article provides new insights into the everyday experiences of transnational migrant men and women entrepreneurs in the UK, in particular illuminating the active agency of women negotiating gendered societally imposed norms whilst operating across transnational spaces. We adopt Bourdieu's 'forms of capital' approach (Bourdieu, 1986; Vincent and Pagan, 2018). Whilst extant literature has explained how migrant entrepreneurs mobilise different forms of capital (Baltar & Icart, 2013; Pluess, 2011; Vershinina et al., 2011) to further their business ventures, this article focuses on the rarely discussed form of symbolic capital understood as the prestige, status and positive reputation individuals possess in the eyes of others (Pret et al., 2016). We pose two research questions: *How do transnational migrant entrepreneurs utilise symbolic capital within their entrepreneurial activities in the UK? What role does gender play in this process?*

In order to do this, this article reports the findings of a series of interviews with forty-seven Eastern European transnational migrant business owners, including twenty-five men and twenty-two women undertaken between 2011 and 2014 in three major urban centres in the UK, whose lived experiences of transnational migrant entrepreneurship we compare. Our findings elucidate how transnational migrant entrepreneurs cultivate forms of symbolic capital from the use of '*blat*' networks, a social practice of using personal connections to 'get ahead' (Ledeneva, 2009) and often to circumvent formal rules and regulations, developed within Soviet times and still persisting today within post-socialist societies (Rodgers et al., 2018). We find that such practices in turn are fuelled by our respondents identifying themselves as being '*nash*' ('one of us'), a member of a wider Russian-speaking community with shared legacies of a common Soviet past. These 'new' migrants have shied away from nurturing links with pre-existing co-ethnic communities in the UK. In contrast, these individuals are engaged in developing broader co-migrant communities within UK cities. Significantly, our findings demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the role that symbolic capital plays in transnational migrant entrepreneurial journeys and its multifaceted, often gendered nature. We find that the cultivation of symbolic capital can be equally facilitating and constraining. We find that men use traditional conceptions of 'status' and 'prestige' of being a 'successful businessman in the UK' in order to accrue forms of symbolic capital, which consequently facilitate and legitimate the transfer of economic capital into their UK businesses. For women

however, the development of a business in the UK provides them with legitimacy across transnational spaces, involving a different manifestation of symbolic capital, enabling them to challenge traditional gendered roles in which their visibility is centred solely around looking after children and the family.

This article is structured as follows. The first section reviews literature on migrant and transnational forms of entrepreneurship including gendered conceptions of entrepreneurship within marginalised groups. The second section presents the methodology used in this research study. The third section outlines the findings of our empirical study and underscores the under-researched role of 'symbolic' capital in driving transnational migrant entrepreneurial practices and its gendered nature. The article concludes by reflecting on the contributions and implications for theory and practice before identifying directions for further research.

Transnationalism, migration and gender

Entrepreneurship practices of migrants has been the subject of much academic scrutiny with particular focus on how migrant entrepreneurs utilise resources at their disposal including various forms of capital (Barrett & Vershinina, 2016; Ram et al., 2008). Moreover, studies showcase the super-diversity (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015; Vertovec, 2007; 2014) of migrant entrepreneurs with differences attributed to their social positioning, ethnicity and culture (Chaganti & Greene, 2002; Koning & Verver, 2013). Within this literature there has a clustering of studies exploring under-resourced migrants, whose reliance on the facilitation of social capital from within co-ethnic networks (Drori et al., 2009) sustains their entrepreneurial ventures.

From within these debates, a mixed-embeddedness approach (Kloosterman et al., 1999; 2010) has developed prominence, by demonstrating the critical importance of not only the embeddedness of migrant entrepreneurs within their co-ethnic networks, but also how the context of the broader social, political and economic environment within the host country underpins their entrepreneurial activity. Although this approach focuses on structural conditions in the host country, including access to finance and training for migrant entrepreneurs, nonetheless, it takes into account the importance of individual agency, how migrants develop personal strategies and tactics as they act to overcome potential structural constraints and develop their entrepreneurial businesses.

Recently an emerging strand of the literature, transnational migrant entrepreneurship, has underscored not only how migrant entrepreneurs utilise resources within networks within the host country, but also significantly the value of the 'home country' in the lives of many migrant entrepreneurs (McKenzie & Menjivar, 2011; Walther, 2012; Wilding, 2006). It is to this literature, that the article now turns. Within studies of transnational migrant entrepreneurship, two key elements maintain importance, namely the country of origin and the newly formed host country and how they interact. For the purposes of this article, ethnic entrepreneurs are understood as active in their ethnic enclaves in their host societies, often reliant on co-ethnic networks (Koning & Verver, 2013). In contrast, transnational entrepreneurs can be defined as 'social actors who generate networks, ideas, information, and practices for the purpose of seeking business opportunities or maintaining businesses within dual social fields' (Drori et al., 2009). As such, they operate the dual environments of host and home countries. Studies have highlighted how transnational migrant entrepreneurs exploit their cross-border networks to access capital, knowledge and technology (Chen and Tan, 2009; Drori et al., 2009), which

can lead to positive outcomes for the firm and the entrepreneur (Kariv et al., 2009).

However, a further distinction needs to be made between transnational migrant entrepreneurs and transnational diaspora entrepreneurs. As Brzozowski et al. (2017) point out, transnational migrant entrepreneurs operate between home and host countries and are recent migrants to the host country. Transnational diaspora entrepreneurs may engage in similar processes, but these individuals are second and third generation migrants (Elo, 2016; Mayer et al., 2015; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011). Within this article, our focus is on first generation transnational migrant entrepreneurs. These individuals arrived in the UK since 2007 from a variety of former Soviet republics (Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) and operate businesses in the UK whilst maintaining connections in a variety of different ways, with their home countries.

Vincent and Pagan (2018) present a strong support for a Bourdieusian perspective on both structure and movement within structures. As such, "how structures influence individual thought and action, and how individuals also replicate, create or transform these structures" (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007; Vincent and Pagan, 2018: 2;) represents a relevant perspective for understanding transnational migrant entrepreneurship. Bourdieu's concepts of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), field (Bourdieu, 1977) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) offer both macro and micro level perspectives. However, in the literature, they are often considered as less precise for interpreting respondents' descriptions of the setting and their experiences within it, despite frequent adoption (Hill, 2018; Ram, et al 2008; Vershinina, et al, 2011;). Within the 'forms of capital' approach, Bourdieu (1986) defines four forms of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic), which individuals draw upon. Within the context of entrepreneurship, economic capital represents money and financial assets, which are important for economic wealth creation. Cultural capital manifested in various forms, refers to dispositions and habitus that individuals acquire during their socialisation process through experiences such as formal education qualifications, training and mentoring. Social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Karataş-Özkan et al., 2014; Karataş-Özkan, 2011) represents the totality of actual and potential resources that can be accumulated through identification and engagement with social networks.

Within the sub-fields of migrant and transnational migrant entrepreneurship, there has been a plethora of studies examining the role of social capital (McKeever et al. 2014) as a resource that entrepreneurs draw upon to access their co-ethnic social networks (Vershinina et al. 2011). However, recently there has been a turn in recognising that social capital can have both positive and negative effects and does not act in isolation from other forms of capital (Jones et al., 2014; Ram et al., 2008; Sepulveda et al., 2011), including cultural and/or symbolic forms of capital. To this end, symbolic capital is understood as positive reputation, prestige, legitimacy and status that individuals possess in the eyes of others (Bourdieu, 1989). Bourdieu (1985: 731) posits that symbolic capital represents 'distinction', which can be derived from having access to the "right forms of capital to succeed within a field according to its rules" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), thereby, legitimising the process of facilitating access to resources by using 'favours' and other positive forms of recognition (Bourdieu, 1990: 119). Symbolic capital, as situated value, can be seen as an acknowledgement of access to other forms of capital. In terms of transnational migrant entrepreneurs, symbolic capital will necessarily have cultural connotations, validated through enduring links with the home country and its cultural and social heritage including language use. As such, Bourdieu offers entrepreneurship

scholarship a toolkit for examining the relational nature of entrepreneurial activities (Tatli et al., 2014).

Whilst forms of capital are commonly discussed independently, in fact they are often interdependent and have capacity for storage and convertibility. Whilst the attainment of forms of capital is generally seen as a positive for individuals, temporal dimensions of storage can have negative outcomes (Light, 2004). In the context of migrant entrepreneurship, education obtained in one jurisdiction may not be recognised in another. As such, it loses its transferrable value. Convertibility of forms of capital is complex and time consuming. Individuals tend to adjust their expectations in relation to the forms of capital that they have access to. The ability to convert forms of capital is limited by the field, an individual's education and background, their social position and connections.

Furthermore, whilst the emerging field of transnational migrant entrepreneurship has underscored the importance of the duality of the everyday experiences of entrepreneurs operating across transnational spaces, to date very little is known to what extent these experiences are gendered. Studies to date have examined how gender and ethnicity of migrants are fundamental in supporting the identity transformations of individuals in the post-migration stage (Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015). Similarly, Aygören & Wilińska (2013) in their study of the lived experiences of Turkish women entrepreneurs in Sweden pinpoint how individuals articulate their experience of difference through their interactions with structures, agents, time and space. In the latest work on gender and entrepreneurship, Yeröz (2019) recognises the dearth of work on migrant women entrepreneurs and offers life-story narratives of seventeen women entrepreneurs from Turkey. In the study, the author draws particular attention to the conditions of possibilities for agency of migrant women entrepreneurs as a result of struggles and power relations, which they experience in their everyday lives. Whilst studies on men are implicit and a few studies outline women migrant entrepreneurial journeys, nevertheless, there remains a paucity of studies examining how men and women experience processes of migration and how they are able (or not) to tap into a set of resources for the development of entrepreneurial ventures across both host and home environments.

Within this article, we maintain an implicit understanding that transnationalism creates tensions between embedded notions of identity, power and agency for individuals operating across transnational spaces (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). Entrepreneurship experiences are implicitly and explicitly diverse (Marlow et al., 2009) as a combination of local gender regimes and actions of individuals may together constrain entrepreneurial endeavours, especially in the case of women. Within entrepreneurship studies, there is a tendency to depict women owned and managed firms as limited, unfocussed and inefficient in comparison with men owned and managed (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Moreover, within the literature women are perceived as less growth-orientated, employ less people and their businesses are situated in sectors with lower levels of profitability (Vershinina et al., 2019). Whilst this might be the case, Jennings & Brush (2013) explain that women entrepreneurs tend to be less focussed on profits and instead may have alternative motivations, including self-fulfilment, flexibility, social impact and helping others alongside fulfilling family responsibilities.

The literature thus often depicted women as an 'other' in comparison to men (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; McAdam and Marlow & McAdam, 2012), portrayed as invisible within the contours of entrepreneurial and business development. This is particularly the case in relation to the images of migrant women (Prasad, 2003, 2006).

Such accounts fail to recognise the active agency of marginalized individuals, specifically women, where narratives position women in subordination (Hyndman, 2004). Grewal and Kaplan (1994) posit that the hegemony of normative understandings of gender including the 'otherness' and invisibility of women remain undisturbed whilst crossing national borders. Indeed, Pio and Essers (2013) argue that this process of the "continued enactment of nuanced power which follows migrant women in their migration journeys into the host country" needs to be placed under further critical scrutiny. Within this article, we directly address this issue. Through the lens of symbolic capital, we illuminate the everyday lived experiences of migrant men and women engaged in transnational migrant entrepreneurship and in particular underline the marginalised and often 'silenced' (Calas et al., 2009) voices of transnational migrant women. By doing so, we expose their agency and how they negotiate wider circuits of power (Kaplan and Grewal, 2002) across transnational spaces.

Methodological Approach

Studies of how transnational migrants engage in entrepreneurial ventures cannot be detached from the context in which such activities are developed and sustained (Welter, 2011). In the UK, recent migration flows from war-torn countries including refugees and asylum seekers (Edwards et al., 2016) have taken place simultaneously with large flows of migration from new EU member-states (Ciupijus, 2011; Khattab & Fox, 2016) as well other European countries such as the former Soviet states of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. Each of these 'home' countries represents a specific context for individual transnational migrant entrepreneurs. To date, whilst there has been some focus on the importance of socialist legacies for new migrants coming to the UK from newly-accessed EU states in Central and Eastern Europe (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017; Rodgers et al., 2018; Vershinina et al., 2011), there remains an opportunity to focus on how the cultural and social legacies of a specific Soviet past impact upon entrepreneurial activities.

Hence, this article examines the everyday practices of Eastern European transnational migrant entrepreneurs operating in three major UK urban areas of Sheffield, Birmingham and Leicester. Between 2011 and 2014, forty-seven in-depth qualitative interviews were undertaken with Latvian, Russian, Belarusian, Moldovan, Ukrainian and Lithuanian entrepreneurs aged between 25 and 55 years old, including twenty-five men and twenty-two women (see details in Table 1). To ensure the confidentiality of respondents, we have anonymised all of their names. Our sample was developed using a variety of means, including contact with migrant groups, community organisations, and personal contacts across Eastern Europe and in the UK.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

We adopted a snowball sampling technique, which has been frequently used in reaching 'hidden' populations (Blanken et al, 1992). To overcome the potential difficulties of sampling bias, we adopted elements of referral driven sampling method (Vershinina and Rodionova, 2011). In each urban centre, we identified and then approached a variety of communities, centred on churches and local community groups, involving some based on social media. Initial searching for contacts realised eight lead respondents, who then offered further access points into their respective co-

ethnic and migrant networks and communities. Consequently, this generated a further eleven contacts. Using the technique of chain referral, the authors obtained a further fifteen contacts. A further thirteen contacts were sourced via various avenues including LinkedIn, Facebook and personal contacts with Russian-speaking communities. In following this rigorous process, used previously in recent studies of migrant communities in the UK (Vershinina et al, 2011; Jones et al, 2014), we sought to eliminate the risk of relying on only a narrow set of social contacts.

Our interviews lasted between sixty and ninety minutes and were conducted in the Russian language with the consent of each respondent. Both authors are fluent in the Russian language. This enabled both researchers to develop a rapport with the respondents and ensured consistency in translation of the interviews into the English language. Interviewees talked about their lived experiences of migration to the UK and developing their business ventures. Our conversations focused on the transnational nature of their social networks and how they navigated the dual fields of home and host environments (Drori et al., 2009). A set of narratives emerged, highlighting the practicalities of how gendered forms of symbolic capital manifest themselves and facilitate entrepreneurial activities at an everyday level. The interviews were audio-recorded and then translated into the English language by an independent translator. In order to ensure the validity of the translation, a selection of transcripts were then translated back into the Russian language. The verbatim transcripts were then used for thematic analysis.

We undertook a thematic analysis of the interview data following Braun and Clarke (2006)'s qualitative thematic analysis process. Firstly, we read all the transcripts individually to ensure full understanding of the issues. As we started to code the data, manifestations of the concept of 'symbolic capital' such as 'status', 'prestige', 'reciprocity' and 'legitimacy' emerged. Also, differences according to gender emerged through the voices of our respondents. Moreover, the critical role of context became apparent. These key issues underpin the first and second order thematic analyses, illustrated in Table 2.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

As we derived our second and third order themes, we adopted a constant comparative, iterative approach (Silverman, 2005). The final set of core categories was considered in relation to contemporary literature, enabling links between data and literature to be explored and made explicit, underscoring the critical role of context in academic studies of entrepreneurship (McKeever et al., 2014). Within our qualitative exploratory research study, we did not seek to generalise our findings back to theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Rather, we sought to ensure credibility, transferability as important markers of the rigour within our research process (Patton, 2015).

Several themes were distilled from the data, which we theorise in our discussion: the enduring cultural and social legacies of a common Soviet past, the mechanisms of accrual and usage of symbolic capital within everydayness of entrepreneurial activities of transnational migrant entrepreneurs and the gendered nature of such practices, manifested in a myriad of ways. These are discussed in turn in the following section. We now move on to present our findings.

Findings

We set out to answer the two research questions namely; *How do transnational migrant entrepreneurs utilise symbolic capital within their entrepreneurial activities in the UK? What role does gender play in this process?* Our findings section is structured as follows. First, we provide the critical context which serves to explain the processes which have enabled symbolic capital to be cultivated in the entrepreneurial journeys of our respondents. As such, we examine the relevance of historical legacies of a common Soviet past for our Eastern European transnational migrant entrepreneurs. We find that common everyday experiences of migration become particularly pertinent amongst co-ethnic and co-migrant entrepreneurial journeys. Common feelings of solidarity, similar geopolitical viewpoints, an underlying distrust in authorities and formal institutions, all underpinned by a common and continued use of the Russian language, reveal not only the enduring significance of the legacies of a Soviet past but also the identification of our respondents as being '*nash*' ('one of us') part of a Russian-speaking community with shared values and norms, transcending national boundaries. In turn, this acts as an arena in which symbolic capital emerges.

Second, talking directly to the first research question, we reveal the mechanisms used by Eastern European transnational migrant entrepreneurs to accrue and leverage symbolic capital. This is particularly visible as our respondents outline narratives of the support sought from co-ethnic and co-migrant networks in the host country and the reciprocity involved in accruing resources to drive their entrepreneurial ventures in the UK. Associated with this process, the accounts of our respondents demonstrate the critical role of '*blat*' transnational networks (Rodgers et al. 2018) as individuals negotiate various forms of symbolic capital existing in dual fields (Drori et al., 2009).

Finally, to address the second research question, our findings illuminate the gendered nature of accrued symbolic capital in how status, prestige and legitimacy are being leveraged by men and women in different ways, across transnational spaces. Our findings reveal how context, especially across dual transnational spaces, represents a site of enduring contestation of gendered roles, including status, prestige and legitimacy for both men and women. Whilst such contested spaces highlight the challenges women entrepreneurs face in confronting existing ascribed, normative roles, centred around the family and childcare, nevertheless, we demonstrate how symbolic capital acts as a facilitator to enable women transnational migrant entrepreneurs to transcend gendered norms and claim legitimacy for their entrepreneurial ventures in both the host country (UK) and also back home. Whilst women achieve legitimacy through the cultivation of symbolic capital, men strive for and achieve more valuable elements of prestige and status. As we present below, symbolic capital can have constraining as well as facilitating effects on men and women. We present a set of key illustrative quotes in Table 2, highlighting our findings.

Enduring Context: The legacies of a common Soviet past
Following the collapse of socialism across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, over the past two decades, an emergent stream of literature within entrepreneurship (Batjargal, 2006; Ledeneva, 2009; Smallbone & Welter, 2001; Welter et al., 2017; Welter & Smallbone, 2011) has examined the relevance of various contextual factors including the institutional and economic factors within the transformations taking place in these societies. Underpinning these transformations,

however, is the implicit reliance on personal networks as a mechanism to get by on an everyday level within such rapidly changing and often hostile, institutional environments. As Ledeneva (2009) outlines, within the late Soviet period, notions of '*blat*' involving the importance of connections as a means for individuals to navigate the intricacies of the Soviet deficit economy, underpinned the societal context and everyday practices in which Soviet citizens sought to facilitate access to commodities or services in short supply (Rehns & Taalas, 2004, 239). During the post-socialist period of transformations, personal networks have remained important in these societies (Puffer et al., 2010) and the cultivation and maintenance of personal ties is being refashioned to be much more based on material reciprocity and calculations about contacts' resources (Batjargal, 2006). As such, these actual and potential sources of social and cultural capital were being converted into symbolic capital also.

Amongst our respondents, there was a wholehearted consensus about the common feelings of solidarity, as being both migrants in the UK and also coming from the former Soviet Union. Nadya's voice is particularly pertinent as she explains her journey from Belarus to developing a cleaning business in the UK. She underlines how Moldovans and Ukrainians in her local community helped her with practical issues. As Nadya states, '*We were taught to be all brothers and sisters together. It is still the same here*' (**INT: 7**). Respondents also reflected on the way that they felt that Russia was often portrayed negatively in the UK media. Andrey, an ethnic Russian and owner of a property business, spoke about how within the Russian-speaking community in his city and also on social media online, friends and acquaintances joked about this. As Andrey stated, '*Russia is always seen as the evil empire here. We often talk about this and don't fully understand. For us, we have different memories and views*' (**INT: 42**).

Such viewpoints seemingly worked to reinforce commonalities amongst our respondents and as a consequence, respondents spoke about how they regularly helped each other to navigate the UK's institutional milieu. Moreover, a mutual and enduring distrust in authorities and formal institutions in their home countries also bound these individuals together. As Zan, a car parts exporter from Latvia stated, '*at home the government is always trying to catch you out. You are always in the red*' (**INT: 26**). Underpinning these negotiations and these examples of how networks were emerging amongst transnational migrant entrepreneurs in the UK was a common and continued use of the Russian language and the symbolic importance bestowed upon its usage. Katyr, an ethnic Latvian who had developed a car-washing business summed this up. '*Speaking Russian has been really useful here. It's helped me get to know lots of local people. We know straightaway where we're from. It can help develop business opportunities*' (**INT: 3**). Katyr identified herself as '*nash*', stating that '*lots of my contacts are from Ukraine, Moldova and Lithuania. These differences aren't important. Our memories and being Russian speakers hold us together*'. These manifestations demonstrate the relevance today of shared Soviet legacies, not only within the context of previously researched home countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but also significantly, how such Soviet legacies remain potent across transnational spaces. These cultural artefacts in essence are converted into symbolic capital within the UK context.

The mechanisms of cultivation and leverage of symbolic capital

Our findings reveal how belonging to both co-ethnic and co-migrant networks in the host country and the continuing reciprocal '*blat*' networks with contacts back home,

represent sites through which transnational migrant entrepreneurs cultivate and leverage various forms of symbolic capital, often involving the conversion of other forms of capital. Co-ethnic networks provide a ready-made set of relationships and connections often for migrants arriving to the UK. Stories amongst our respondents are similar and resonate to what Ivan, an ethnic Russian and owner of a computer software firm stated, '*When I arrived, my cousin put me in touch with some Latvian associates. They looked after me until I was on my feet and got started*' (**INT: 43**). The importance of reciprocity within migrant networks also meant that networks were not solely based around shared ethnicity. Instead, our findings reveal rich narratives suggesting that our transnational migrant entrepreneurs developed relations with shared migration experiences and status, irrespective often of the country of origin. As Ira, hairdresser from Belarus sums up succinctly, '*If I help someone in my neighbourhood whether it's someone from Russia, Pakistan or Romania, I can always ask for help back*' (**INT: 20**). We find common stories with respondents reflecting on their early days in the UK.

Nevertheless, our findings also underline how migrants develop and utilise networks not only with people in the host country, the UK, but also invest time and resources to maintain existing contacts and networks back home. From our respondents' accounts, it was explicitly clear that the advent of the Internet and Skype has enabled our respondents to maintain transnational ties through regular and affordable communication (Baldassar et al., 2016; Perkins & Neumeyer, 2013). As Aleksandr, an ethnic Russian involved in running a tutorial college, aiding Russian-speakers to enter UK colleges and universities, stated: '*I've known my business partners since we studied together at Oxford University. When I decided to migrate to the UK, one friend helped me with documents. Another one invested some money into our business in Birmingham*' (**INT: 33**). Such transnational '*blat*' networks, underpinned by shared legacies of a Soviet past, worked to enable and drive forwards these transnational migrant entrepreneurial ventures in the UK. Whilst both men and women in our study have engaged in the conversion of forms of capital into symbolic capital using similar strategies outlined above, during the analysis of generated data, we identified clear but parallel pathways in how men and women cultivated symbolic capital in different ways to develop their businesses. It is in uncovering the gendered nature of cultivated symbolic capital we were able to observe its constraining as well as facilitating effects.

The gendered nature of cultivated symbolic capital

There are clear diverging narratives, which emerged from the stories which men and women recounted during our research study. Several men particularly focused on the importance of 'status' and being seen as possessing '*avtoritet*' (some form of authority) amongst their family and friends in their home countries. As Anatoliy, an ethnic Ukrainian running a car sales business stated, '*Running my own business has given me lots of respect back at home*' (**INT: 23**). Similar to this, Nikolay, a Moldovan, an owner of a clothing business, highlighted how since he had set up a clothes shop in Moldova and local people in Moldova had subsequently found out that he owned a business in the UK, people back home had changed their perspectives and opinions on him, now seeing him as a '*real businessman who was successful, serious and somebody to know*' (**INT: 27**). Related to this, other men talked about the 'prestige' they had received as a result of running a transnational business, with operations in the UK and abroad. As Maksim, a car mechanic from Ukraine stated,

'*Suppliers treat me with respect. They think I'm a big businessman because I have foreign operations. This helps me here as other people can see this also*' (**INT: 46**). Also, manifestations of 'prestige' enabled several men to facilitate the transfer of economic capital from home to their UK-based businesses. Aleks, a Latvian, an owner of a co-working space stated, '*I am perceived as a high achiever amongst my friends, and my relatives are proud of me. They didn't think like this when I was back in Latvia. Since then, they've invested into my business*' (**INT: 29**). Somewhat surprisingly, within our findings, men considered running a business in the UK as a given and not something which required justification or the seeking of legitimacy from others. As such, the accrual of symbolic capital for men was wholly facilitating.

However, amongst our women respondents, there was no discussion about notions of 'status' or 'prestige'. Furthermore, symbolic capital acted to constrain as well as to facilitate. Dominant narratives involved issues around how women negotiated their roles as not only business owners in the UK but also simultaneously family members, mothers, daughters and sisters within the extended family back home. What emerged was the centrality of seeking of 'legitimacy' from others, including family members and close friends, to enable the continuation of their entrepreneurial ventures in the UK. Elina, a Latvian owner of a delicatessen business sums this up, '*Developing my business here has been tough but persuading family at home to understand what I'm doing has been even more difficult*' (**INT: 6**). Elina stated '*My older sisters had already moved to the UK. As such, my parents and my sisters pressurised me to stay in Latvia and look after the family*'.

This narrative resonated amongst the women in our study, who explained how family members at home constantly reminded them of their roles as mothers and sisters and the associated gendered role expectations of them as carers not as breadwinners. This is outlined by Luda, a Ukrainian owner of a grocery store, '*It's a constant balancing act. All the time, my family in Krivoi Rog remind me of my duties back at home as a woman. These thoughts ring in my ears. However, I've worked hard and the business has taken off now. This has made things easier*' (**INT: 11**). As Nadya, a Russian now running an events management business also states, '*At first, everyone at home was criticizing me for leaving my children with my mother. Now, they think I'm great. I'm a big businesswoman and successful*' (**INT: 13**).

The accrual of symbolic capital was not an easy task for women. They spoke about constant challenges and how in time only by making their business in the UK financially sound and successful did this legitimate their existence in the UK, away from traditionally ascribed gendered roles. Nastya, a hairdresser from Moldova highlights the emotional rollercoaster of her entrepreneurial journey, in which she has been forced to negotiate and challenge gendered ascribed roles of a carer in the family. '*At first my family in Moldova wouldn't speak to me when I left for the UK. I was treated like an outcast. Now, my business is doing quite well. I am able to send money home and we've started talking again*' (**INT: 19**). Raimonda, a Lithuanian owner of a crowd-funding business, also stated how she had struggled to persuade her family back home in Vilnius about the viability of her business. She highlighted the implicit gender bias within her family and friends also. '*When I first mentioned about my business ideas, they just laughed at me. They didn't believe that a Lithuanian girl could do something like crowd-funding*' (**INT: 8**).

As presented in the narratives, men and women articulate their capacity for adjusting their expectations in relation to the capitals they are likely to attain based on their position in the field, their education background, social positioning and connections (Karataş-Özkan et al., 2014; Karataş-Özkan, 2011). Women's assessment

of their capacity to convert forms of capital, which they possess into symbolic capital is constrained owing to the gendered nature of the context in which they operate, whilst for men, no such constraints exist.

Discussion

We now discuss our interpretation of these findings. To sum up, three dominant themes emerged from our findings in relation to how transnational migrant entrepreneurs utilise symbolic capital in their business activities in the UK. We find that whilst several studies have underscored the importance of context for the entrepreneurial endeavour (Kalantaridis & Fletcher, 2012; Welter et al., 2017, 2011; Welter & Smallbone, 2011), our findings extend such work to encompass an appreciation of the critical role of context across transnational spaces. Furthermore, we discover how cultural markers of a shared Soviet past continue to play an enduring role in the everyday practices and accumulation of capital for transnational migrant entrepreneurs in the UK, beyond the borders of their home countries. We find that such processes are fuelled by continued and constant use of the Russian language, used as a mechanism to identify '*nash*' – 'one of us'. This subsequently enables migrants to embed themselves into networks in the UK, not centred around ethnicity and country of origin, as previously posited (Ram et al., 2008; Vershinina et al., 2011). Instead, the Russian language acts as a glue, transcending layers of ethnicity and binds individual co-migrants together.

Literature to date on entrepreneurship amongst migrants and minority groups (Jones et al., 2014; Smallbone et al., 2010) has often focussed on social capital as a resource offering migrant entrepreneurs access to co-ethnic social networks with the aim to obtain finance (Vershinina et al. 2011), whilst others have noted the dangers of over-stating the importance of social capital to facilitate migrant entrepreneurial businesses (Sepulveda et al., 2011). Within these debates, the role of symbolic capital, understood as prestige, status and positive reputation in the eyes of others, is scant if at all present, despite a few exceptions (Karataş-Özkan, 2011; Pret, et al, 2016; Rodgers, et al, 2018).

In this article, we have uncovered how for this specific group of Eastern European transnational migrant entrepreneurs, symbolic capital, in a variety of its forms, plays a critical role in enabling entrepreneurial endeavours in the UK. Rather than blindly seeing social capital as 'largely as an unmitigated good' (Edwards, 2004) possessed by migrants, we demonstrate how symbolic capital underpins the practical workings of social capital by giving individuals various degrees of power and legitimacy in the eyes of others. Thus, we offer a more nuanced understanding of the linkages between various forms of capital and their convertibility (Light, 2004). Whilst we highlight how transnational migrant entrepreneurs utilise social networks within co-ethnic and co-migrant groups in the UK as well as using '*blat*' networks across transnational spaces, these processes can only be realised in conjunction with leveraged forms of symbolic capital. Moreover, we find that symbolic capital should not be viewed as a homogeneous construct. Rather, we elucidate the multi-faceted nature of symbolic capital (whether cultivated in the form of status, prestige or legitimacy) and thus it cannot be excluded from analyses of transnational migrant entrepreneurship. In particular, we showcase the gendered nature of symbolic capital. We outline how it has wholly facilitating effects for men, involving the bestowing of unquestioned status and prestige. Yet for women, symbolic capital involves a constant battle for legitimacy with no guaranteed success in this contestation. As such, symbolic capital can be constraining as well as facilitating for women.

Entrepreneurship studies to date have offered limited accounts of the roles women play in entrepreneurial endeavours, often presenting women as the 'other' (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Aygören & Wilińska, 2013; Marlow & McAdam, 2012; Yeroz, 2019) with their roles tending to be unrecognised and invisible as a result of the reproduction of patriarchal cultural norms. With the aim to look beyond such narrow conceptions of women's role in entrepreneurship and such narratives of 'invisibility' (Pio and Essers, 2013), in this study, we sought to bring visibility to women's voices. As part of our analysis the gendered nature of how symbolic capital is leveraged became evident. We show that men in our study accrue forms of symbolic capital in the forms of status and prestige, which consequently enable their UK-based businesses to benefit from economic capital, arriving from their networks on the premise that they are indeed 'successful businessmen'. In contrast, whilst for men leveraged symbolic capital acts as a 'top-up' to their existing legitimized existence within the business milieu, for women the situation is in stark contrast. For women, we find that they develop their businesses in the UK with the sole purpose to justify and legitimate their existence in the UK, far away from their home countries, where their extended families and associated responsibilities lie. Whilst men might also have such responsibilities, these are not subject for negotiation. For women, only when their UK-based business becomes successful, do we witness how their existence as business owners is legitimated in the eyes of their co-migrants in the UK and crucially their family and support networks across transnational spaces. As such, this leveraged symbolic capital acts as a 'baseline' to overcome rather than a 'top-up' to enjoy. In this fashion, this alternative manifestation of symbolic capital enables women (those that do succeed) to challenge traditional gendered roles, ascribed and embedded in their home countries and simultaneously brings them 'visibility' and showcases the active agency amongst them.

Conclusions

This article makes the following contributions to the literature. This article highlights the significance of the under-researched notion of symbolic capital being leveraged across transnational entrepreneurial environments. Previous literature essentialises social capital as the primary engine for the creation of economic capital of migrant entrepreneurs. However, we demonstrate the critical role that symbolic capital plays in giving individuals various degrees of power and legitimacy, which subsequently fuels the accumulation of their symbolic capital, highlighting a more nuanced understanding of the linkages between various forms of capital and their convertibility. Symbolic capital not only fuels entrepreneurial activities, but also is multifaceted and often gendered in nature.

Secondly, our empirical findings reveal a highly gendered nature of how Eastern European migrants utilise symbolic capital to harness their entrepreneurial activities in the UK. Men perform traditional gendered roles as the 'breadwinner' in order to leverage 'symbolic capital'. We demonstrate that men utilise forms of symbolic capital, based around concepts such as 'status' and 'prestige' of being a 'successful businessman in the UK' in order to legitimate economic capital being transferred and invested into the development of their business operations in the UK. For men, symbolic capital acts in a wholly facilitating fashion. For women, developing a successful business in the UK acts as a form of 'symbolic capital' asset at home, which bestows onto them 'legitimacy'. It enables them to move away from their 'traditional' gendered roles of looking after the children and the family back

home. This challenges embedded social and cultural norms in their home culture vis-a-vis the role of women in society. However, obtaining legitimacy constitutes a continual struggle with no guarantee of success. For women, symbolic capital acts in a constraining as well as a facilitating manner.

Thirdly, in contributing to the debates about the critical importance of context within entrepreneurship studies (Welter, 2011), we highlight the shift amongst Eastern European transnational migrant entrepreneurs towards reliance on co-migrant rather than co-ethnic networks in business development. Our findings demonstrate how forms of social and cultural capital based around language use (Russian language) and legacies of a shared Soviet past, are just as important as the role of 'co-ethnics' in facilitating small business development. Rather than assuming that migrants have ready-made social networks within the host country embedded within co-ethnic communities to utilise to develop their entrepreneurial activities, our findings highlight how 'new' migrants from Eastern Europe have shied away from nurturing links solely with pre-existing co-ethnic communities in the UK. In contrast, these individuals are engaged in developing broader co-migrant communities within UK cities.

Finally, this paper also contributes to work on the everyday lived experiences of individuals within the UK's 'ethnic economy' (Batnitsky & McDowell, 2013). Rather than Eastern European migrant entrepreneurs being excluded from formal labour markets and being concentrated in enclaves defined by their ethnicity, our findings highlight how new migrant businesses act as important mechanisms in maintaining positive community and social relations, driving forward local economic development in often ethnically mixed, low income urban areas and are beginning to reshape the urban communities in which they live. Future research could examine in more depth the multifaceted nature of symbolic capital including its positive and negative manifestations and its role in entrepreneurial processes amongst different ethnic groups and also across different social classes and accommodating multiplicities of gender. Moreover, it may be fruitful to examine transnational migrant entrepreneurial practices in the context of their relationships with customers, clients and their positioning in the market and the role that symbolic capital plays within this.

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