

# Conviviality in the Workplace: The Case of Polish Migrant Women in Manchester and Barcelona

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*Workplaces have become increasingly diverse as a result of migration and other socio-economic changes in Europe. In the light of post-2004 migration, many Polish migrants find themselves in workplaces where multiculturalism is an everyday lived experience. By drawing on narrative interviews conducted with Polish migrant women in Manchester and Barcelona, this paper focuses on the complexities of interaction with other ethnic groups at work, demonstrating various forms of conviviality. The study reveals more and less meaningful forms of contact at work including workplace friendships, light-hearted forms of conviviality characterised by the interplay of language and humour, relations based on care and respect for difference, as well as forced encounters marked by superficial and involuntary interaction. The findings show that while workplace can be a place of meaningful interaction, it can also involve conflict and tensions. The narratives illustrate that workplace relations can be influenced by the dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances and immigration discourses. The paper contributes analytically and empirically to the understanding of different forms of encounters in the workplace.*

*Keywords: workplace; encounter; conviviality; Polish migrant women*

## Introduction

The typical workplace has been described as ‘a variable hotbed of sociability and cooperation, of constructive and mostly friendly interactions among co-workers’ (Estlund 2003: 3) and ‘the most natural place for people to meet, make friends, and develop social networks’ (Fong and Isajiw 2000: 252). While a growing body of research has mainly focused on exploring neighbourhoods as sites of encounter with difference (Heil 2014; Jensen and Gidley 2012; Wessendorf 2013; Wise and Velayutham 2014; Władyka and Morén-Alegret 2013), workplace encounters remain largely under-explored.

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As a result of European Union expansion in 2004, many Polish migrants are in workplaces where multicultural is an everyday lived experience. Much attention in Britain has been paid to the lower end of the labour force and it has been argued that the mixing of Polish migrants and other Europeans with co-workers of different ethnic backgrounds is ‘the exception rather than the norm’ (Cook, Dwyer and Waite 2011b: 11). Furthermore, studies of workplace encounters between post-accession migrants and established communities tend to focus on the negative experiences of these individuals (Fox 2013; McDowell, Batnitsky and Dyer 2007; Parutis 2011), while the examples of positive mixing at work are described as superficial (Cook, Dwyer and Waite 2011a; Harris and Valentine 2016). There is some evidence that the workplace has the potential to be an important site of prejudice reduction and can promote meaningful encounters with people who are different in terms of ethnicity, religion, sexuality and disability; although it is argued that relationships established at work rarely extend into spaces beyond the workplace (Harris and Valentine 2016). In Spain, social relations between Polish migrants and the local population at work are particularly under-researched. The study conducted by Colectivo Ioé (1998), focusing on construction workers of Polish and Moroccan origin in Madrid and Barcelona, highlighted limited contact between these migrants and native workers as a result of a preference for their own national group, language barriers, stereotypes and suspicion based on assumed cultural differences and discrimination. More recent literature stresses that, while interaction between Polish migrants and the native population is often described in terms of cultural proximity, encounters with others are described in terms of distance and of prejudiced views influenced by negative rhetoric about non-white and non-European migrants in Spain (Nalewajko 2012).

The narrative interviews conducted with Polish migrant women in Manchester and Barcelona reveal much more complex realities of interaction at work demonstrating various forms of conviviality. This paper illustrates how the interplay of language and humour facilitates forms of conviviality characterised by playful interaction between co-workers. It also explores more meaningful forms of conviviality by concentrating on workplace friendships, largely overlooked in research, which provide migrants with support and a sense of inclusion and belonging. These meaningful relations are contrasted with the example of conviviality characterised by forced encounters. This paper also demonstrates how experiences of conviviality may be limited by prejudiced views, negative discourse about Polish migrants in the UK, and ethno-stratification of the Spanish labour market.

The paper draws attention to the importance of exploring conviviality at the workplace as a possible frame for interaction across difference in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion and other categories. Therefore, it firstly sets out the theoretical background underpinning this study, reflecting on the key concept of conviviality understood as a dynamic and a highly contextualised process of living together which needs to be studied with consideration of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic and personal circumstances, and other categories which often intersect. After discussing the methodology applied in the research, the paper explores examples of conviviality by focusing on the narratives of selected interviewees in Manchester and Barcelona, providing detailed accounts of interaction in the workplace. This paper illustrates how this study of conviviality contributes analytically and empirically to the understanding of different forms of encounter in the workplace.

### **Exploring workplace encounters through the lens of conviviality**

In recent years, a growing number of scholars and researchers have focused on conviviality to explore ways of living together in urban spaces (Gilroy 2004; Heil 2014; Morawska 2014; Nowicka and Vertovec 2014; Wessendorf 2014; Wise and Velayutham 2014). Gilroy (2004: xi) has defined conviviality as ‘the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multicultural an ordinary feature of urban life’. The concept of

conviviality offers an angle from which to explore and describe complex everyday practices of living with difference in multicultural environments.

While the current literature makes an important contribution to the understanding of conviviality, there are several shortcomings. Firstly, it often focuses on encounters between native population and non-white and non-European minorities (Gilroy 2004; Heil 2014). However, convivial encounters should be explored in the context of diversity characterised by the presence of migrants with diverse ethnic origins, migration histories, religions, languages, ages, genders, legal statuses, educational and economic backgrounds (Vertovec 2007). Secondly, the impact of gender on conviviality remains underexplored, especially when it intersects with other axes of difference (Morawska 2014). Exploring encounters should take into account an intersectional approach that acknowledges the complex dynamics between gender, race, ethnicity, class and other social categories (Anthias 2009; Valentine 2007). Thirdly, while many scholars have focused on conviviality at the level of neighbourhoods (Heil 2014; Jensen and Gidley 2012; Wessendorf 2013; Wise and Velayutham 2014; Władyka and Morén-Alegret 2013), conviviality at work has been largely overlooked. Therefore, this paper aims to expand the understanding of conviviality by exploring workplace encounters influenced by gender, race and ethnicity dynamics, which often intersect. Finally, existing literature often interprets conviviality as limited to superficial, fleeting and casual encounters in public spaces unlikely to generate meaningful engagement with difference (Valentine 2008). This interpretation of conviviality overlooks the possibility of different forms and degrees of living together.

Conviviality can be better understood in conjunction with the Spanish word *convivir*, which describes the action of living and interacting together (Giménez Romero and Lorés Sánchez 2007). Therefore, I use the term 'convivial' as informed by the idea of *convivir* to describe relations of living together, which involve various forms and degrees of interaction. The Spanish understanding of *convivencia* is based on interaction between people characterised by mutual understanding and respect, with tensions resolved in a peaceful way (Giménez Romero and Lobera 2014). I expand my conceptual framework of conviviality by drawing on the contemporary uses of the term *convivencia* in Spanish society to refer to social relations between people, for instance between family members, neighbours and co-workers (Suárez-Navaz 2004).

Conviviality is explored in this paper as a process of interaction embedded in social practice which is not free from racism and tensions (Gilroy 2004; Wessendorf 2014; Wise and Velayutham 2014). Based on their research in Sydney and Singapore, Wise and Velayutham (2014) explain conflict as an integral part of social interaction between neighbours. This paper illustrates how the interviewees experience tensions and hostility and also often engage in convivial interaction, illustrating a complexity of social relations and a dynamic nature of both conviviality and racism which may overlap. While it acknowledges the hierarchies often present in encounters with difference, it also explores the ways in which differences are negotiated and connections are built.

When exploring the narratives of Polish migrant women coming from a predominantly white society to super-diverse cities, it is important to consider how whiteness is produced through encounters with non-whiteness. The constructions of whiteness should be situated within the socio-historical context of the home country, partly shaping perceptions of difference (Rzepnikowska 2016b). While whiteness has been explored widely in the West, it remains underexplored in the context of post-socialist societies. Since race has been associated with non-whites, Polish people's whiteness has been normalised and is invisible. Nevertheless, whiteness is asserted when non-white Others become visible in host countries.

Following the recent large-scale migration of Polish people to other European countries, many became conscious of being white as a result of contact with non-whites and at times, 'not-quite-white', through contact with the white hosts (Parutis 2011; van Riemsdijk 2010). In Britain, following the EU enlargement in 2004, Polish migrants were initially recognised as a 'desirable' migrant group and labelled 'invisible' due to their

whiteness. Some emphasise their whiteness/Europeanness and distinguish themselves from other migrants and ethnic minorities on the basis of skin colour and place themselves in the category of whiteness to assert their privileged position (Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Parutis 2011). It has been argued that these migrants, along with other Central and Eastern European arrivals, have been involved in the process of ‘whitewashing’, although whiteness might not be claimed explicitly (Fox 2013). They may use whiteness as a tool of racism in order to establish their racial superiority towards those seen as racially inferior (Fox 2013). Some Poles may occupy an ambiguous position in between the assumed higher racial status of white Europeans and a lower social status as a result of low-skilled employment (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2015). Nevertheless, the presumed whiteness of these migrants in the UK has not exempted them from racism, violent attacks and discrimination, partly fuelled by the negative discourse on migrants in some British media and politics, especially in the light of Brexit. In the Spanish context, the issue of whiteness and migration is relatively under-researched. The existing literature stresses the invisibility and the privileged treatment of Polish migrants who, due to their skin complexion, are considered *nórdicos* from the North, and are highly respected in Spain (Nalewajko 2012; Ramírez Goicoechea 2003). The ‘invisibility’ of Polish migrants is explained by the physical similarity of these migrants to Catalans and Spaniards (Władyka and Morén-Alegret 2013).

The Others are socially constructed in everyday encounters and shaped by national contexts based on fears instilled by assumed threats (Ahmed 2000; Harris, Jackson, Piekut and Valentine 2017). Harris *et al.* (2017) discuss how, in the British context, the construction of strangers is primarily shaped through the notion of race. Furthermore, in the light of Islamophobic discourse, Muslims are often perceived as the Other. Recently, Polish migrants in the UK have become imagined as the new Other (Rzepnikowska 2016b). Even if the newcomers are white, they are also imagined through the category of race because they are immigrants (Gilroy 2006: 56). In the Spanish context, while Polish migrants are seen as culturally close, Muslims are constructed as Others, possibly as a way of distancing Spain from its ‘Moorish past’. This paper raises the importance of the discourses of whiteness and racialisation in discussions on conviviality.

### **Researching Polish women in Manchester and Barcelona**

Although this paper focuses on convivial experiences at work in two different cities, it does not aim to present a perfect set of comparisons between Manchester and Barcelona. I follow Wise and Velayutham (2014) who advocate a less strict approach to studying convivial multiculturalism in Sydney and Singapore because each context is shaped by multiple framings. Instead, this paper aims to advance a better understanding of conviviality by exploring the different ways in which it is experienced in two cities, with attention to some contextual similarities and differences.

Both Manchester and Barcelona are characterised by a super-diverse population, mixed neighbourhoods and workplaces, making them ideal settings for studying encounters with difference. Both are cities with a migration-friendly narrative characterised by wide support from the local governments. Whilst the two cities share a number of similarities, there are nevertheless important differences to be acknowledged. Manchester has been a city of migrants since the end of the eighteenth century. According to 2011 Census data, the total population of Manchester was 503 127. The largest ethnic minority groups are Pakistani, African and Other White (CoDE 2013: 1). The recent international migrants formed 16 per cent of the city’s population (Manchester City Council 2015). Barcelona, with 1 619 839 inhabitants according to the 2012 Local Census (*Padrón Municipal*), is the capital of a Catalan nation without a state with its own language, customs, and national identity. Since the last decade of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Barcelona has witnessed the arrival of international migrants mainly from Latin America, Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, China and Europe (Escandell and Ceobanu 2009). At the time of my fieldwork in 2012, the

proportion of migrants was just over 17 per cent with the highest number of migrants from Pakistan, Italy, China and Ecuador (Barcelona City Council 2012). Barcelona is characterised by a strong discourse of *convivencia*, as an integral part of a political strategy towards diversity and shaping social relations between the local residents and migrants – which makes it a particularly interesting context for studying conviviality.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in Manchester and Barcelona between June 2012 and March 2013. The ethnography was initiated by participant observation with groups and organisations involving Polish migrant women (mainly Europia in Manchester, and the Catalan–Polish Cultural Association and Casa Eslava in Barcelona), which allowed the researcher to establish trust with and gain access to research participants. Narrative interviews were conducted with 20 Polish migrant women in Barcelona and 21 in Manchester, all of whom had entered Britain or Spain just before or after Poland joined the EU. The interviewees were mainly contacted initially through the groups with which I conducted the participant observation. The majority were young and educated to a university degree, especially those interviewed in Barcelona. Subsequently, snowball sampling was applied to diversify the sample. Through narrative interviews, the interviewees were able to unfold their stories and develop extended accounts over the course of the interview (Riessman 2002). The questions were formulated broadly but specifically with the interest of the research in mind. For instance, the questions ‘Tell me what happened when you arrived in Manchester/Barcelona’ or ‘Tell me about your experiences at work’ allowed the interviewees to tell their stories in their own way. The third method employed in this research was a focus group conducted in each city made up of five to six women previously interviewed. The participants were asked to bring photographs reflecting everyday situations in multicultural Manchester and Barcelona, which were then used to stimulate group discussions.

The narrative interviews were transcribed, summarised and coded manually to identify the main themes, and subsequently analysed as narratives (Riessman 2002). The data from the narrative interviews were cross-checked with the data from the focus groups and the participant observation. All participants were given pseudonyms. The empirical analysis in this paper is based on a person-centred approach through the use of cases. The cases were selected to illustrate a range of accounts about encounters in the workplace demonstrating various forms of conviviality.

During the research process I considered my positionality as a female Polish researcher studying Polish migrant women. Who the researcher is shapes how the interviewees behave and what they say. My positionality facilitated entering the field, establishing contacts and building rapport with the informants. However, the insider assumptions based on ethnicity and gender may obscure the diversity of experiences and viewpoints between and within various groups (see also Nowicka and Cieřlik 2014; Ryan 2015b; Valentine 2002). The encounters with my informants were highly dynamic, and multi-layered positionalities influenced the research process.

### **Workplace encounters in Manchester**

Previous research has established that many Polish migrants work in poor quality, low-skilled and manual jobs in Britain (Cook *et al.* 2011b). Since many Polish migrants are considered overqualified for the jobs they accept in the UK, some of these migrants believe they are ‘worse off’ than other ethnic minorities (Cook *et al.* 2011b). It is argued that such views arise because these ‘migrants see themselves as whites in a largely white country and expect to not suffer discrimination or even be in a privileged position in the job market’ (McDowell 2009: 30). In addition, Polish migrants have often been represented in some media and politics as an economic threat and have been blamed for job shortages, unemployment and strain on social services. This part of the paper aims to explore diverse and complex encounters experienced by the interviewees at their workplaces in Manchester, involving not only tensions and conflicts but also more meaningful forms of contact.

*Lucyna: the impact of anti-Polish discourse on relations at work*

Lucyna is a 34-year-old interpreter who came to Manchester in 2008. Her case illustrates how anti-immigrant rhetoric in the UK contributes to a general climate of resentment in the workplace. Her narrative about experiences at work mainly focused on how the negative discourse about Polish migrants in Britain influences her encounters with co-workers. She believes that these negative perceptions are adopted across social classes, as she has also been subjected to prejudiced comments by medical staff while working as an interpreter:

*I personally heard these types of comments from people from all classes and from different groups. For example, I had to deal with doctors when I worked for some time as an interpreter and they asked: 'How much do you earn?', 'Those Poles come over here and they don't learn English', 'I don't need you here, why did you come here? How much is the hospital spending on you?'. Especially when the economic crisis started, these situations became so notorious that I decided to quit that job.*

These attitudes are voiced despite the workplace being regulated by diversity and equality regulations under the Equality Act 2010, which aims to ensure that the workplace environment complies with the law (see also Valentine and Harris 2016). Ashe and Nazroo (2017) argue that racism remains a persistent feature of work life in Britain which disadvantages ethnic minority workers and they emphasise the inconsistency in the promotion of equality, diversity and fairness in workplaces (see also McGregor-Smith Review 2017).

The presumed whiteness has not exempted Polish migrants from discrimination in the workplace (see also Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012). The privilege of whiteness disappears once they start speaking. While whiteness allows a certain level of invisibility, Lucyna's foreign accent marked her as the Other:

*It sounds sad but if you don't speak, then everything is alright, because people are not entirely sure if you are Polish, or maybe English, because I am white. But it is obvious that as soon as I start speaking, you can tell that I have an accent and people straight away know and always ask this question: 'Where are you from?'*

This illustrates an unstable racial positioning of Polish migrants and confirms Frankenberg's (1993: 21) argument that whiteness is always situated and temporary.

Lucyna's narrative illustrates how the negative discourse about Polish migration affects relations in a wider multicultural spectrum in the context of the workplace and leads to inter-ethnic tensions between some established groups and Polish migrants marked by dynamics of competition and conflict over jobs and resources. Lucyna told me she mostly experienced discrimination and prejudice by established ethnic minorities. She gave an example of how the negative rhetoric about recent Polish migrants affected her relations with female workers of South Asian origin who:

*questioned whether Polish people should be here. Before they were exploited (...) and now they were trying to show me that they have been here longer than Poles and this allows them to be treated better and now 'you have to go through what I have been through, and you will see how it is'.*

Lucyna believed that *these strained relations between the British and the Poles and other migrants result from the media manipulation of the image of the Poles (...) and this badly influences relations between people*. This narrative highlights how such rhetoric may lead to tensions between settled ethnic minorities and Polish migrants at work.

*Bogusia: in-between light-hearted and forced conviviality*

Bogusia is 37 years old and has completed vocational education. She arrived in Manchester in 2009 with her daughter while her husband had already lived and worked there. Bogusia got a job in the same hotel as her husband as a housekeeper. Upon her arrival in Manchester, she did not speak English and this prevented her from establishing contact with people in everyday situations. The workplace became the most significant place of interaction with people from different backgrounds. Bogusia's narrative about encounters at work begins with a description of positive relations with mainly white English co-workers. She is proud that they liked a Polish cake regularly prepared by her and her husband for parties and gatherings at work. This sociality promotes familiarity and gives co-workers an opportunity to interact, get to know each other better and to bond through interaction during work events.

Another important element of conviviality experienced by Bogusia is the use of Polish words and phrases by some of her work colleagues, demonstrating openness, negotiation and accommodation of difference:

*They learn silly Polish words so to speak, not only swearwords but useful Polish phrases too. For example, when I arrive at work I don't hear 'please' and 'thank you' in English but they say it in Polish. (...) It is nice that they want to learn and try to communicate with us. (...) The more time I spend with them, the more I feel at ease. I would like to have these kinds of relations with my neighbours, but there is no way because I think that they don't really want it, because they think 'They are Poles'. I can feel the difference in the way they treat us.*

Bogusia makes a clear distinction between encounters at work and in the neighbourhood, where conviviality is limited due to the negative discourse about Polish migrants. By contrast, positive relations at work characterised by some work colleagues adopting Polish phrases forms an integral part of everyday convivial culture, making her feel welcome and included. This narrative demonstrates how communication between Bogusia and her co-workers is facilitated by language-accommodating practices, acknowledging a minority language. Adopting phrases from a different language in everyday speech 'legitimises differences between people and their languages as part of everyday conviviality' (Heil 2014: 8). Thus, cultural differences may become important resources for conviviality at the workplace, facilitating positive relationships across difference. While Lucyna's case shows how Polish language can be seen as a burden and a foreign accent can become a marker of Otherness, Bogusia's example demonstrates that the minority language can also serve as a bridge between people.

The interplay between language and humour constitutes an integral component of everyday interaction among co-workers and helps them feel included, as observed in several narratives. Previous research has highlighted the importance of humour at work (Graham 1995; Holmes 2006; Holmes and Marra 2002; Wise 2016). However, jokes and banter, particularly in relation to foreign accents, have been reported as examples of racism at work (Ashe and Nazroo 2017). Several narratives in this research illustrated how humour and language differences became integral components of contact at work, facilitating more amusing but, most of all, inclusive and bonding interaction with co-workers beyond language and cultural barriers. The interplay between humour and language serves as 'the lighter touch, "cooler" qualities of conviviality that enables exchanges to happen through and across difference' (Neal, Bennett, Cochrane and Mohan 2013: 316).

Bogusia stressed that despite working as a housekeeper, she prefers to interact with the kitchen staff because they create a space with a 'family-like atmosphere' where she felt accepted. The family-like bonds point to a more meaningful form of sustained and deeper social relations: *They are not just friends, it is one big family.*

Apart from discussing relations with peer co-workers, a substantial part of the interview involved a narrative about Bogusia's relations with a black male supervisor which sharply contrasts with her experiences discussed above:

*There is one Murzyn [black man – ambivalent term] at work. (...) I work with him and I have a feeling, not as a result of his or my racism, but I am his slave. This time I am black and he is white. (...) He makes me work hard. (...) From him I only get orders and this is when my racism comes out. (...) I am telling you, I have nothing against him but I feel like I am his slave. (...) He is so lazy.*

Bogusia's narrative reflects previous research findings revealing that relations between Central and Eastern European interviewees and black supervisors often lead to tensions and demonstrations of power (McDowell, Batnitsky and Dyer 2007; Parutis 2011). This narrative illustrates how uncomfortable Bogusia was about finding herself in a subordinate position to and being given orders by a black supervisor. This positioning clashed with the idea of whiteness associated with a position of dominance and privilege. She reinforced preconceived notions of blackness associated with slavery and laziness. This demonstrates how deeply rooted racialised notions of blackness and whiteness can be in some migrants' consciousness. It is possible that conflicting relations have led to a sharpening of difference and racialisation (Fox 2013). The gender dimension is also important in shaping these encounters. Based on their research on migrant workers in the hotel industry, McDowell *et al.* (2007: 20) argue that 'racism mirrors the extreme segregation between jobs and makes solidarity at work harder to achieve', and they emphasise that the ethnic and gender divisions of labour are reinforced by limited contact between different groups in the hotel.

As a result of her conflictual relations, Bogusia felt reluctant about interacting with her supervisor, and this shows that humour does not always work:

*He sometimes tries to say something funny to keep the conversation going, but for me this is forcing a conversation, forcing a smile. (...) If there is nobody to talk to, he comes to me but I don't need to talk to him. I am nice and I say 'Hello, how are you?', but I don't start a conversation.*

This narrative shows an example of forced conviviality which I define as a form of coexistence marked by 'involuntariness of interaction' (Estlund 2003: 4) within the workplace. This means that people have little choice with whom they work and they can be 'forced to get along – not without friction' (*ibid.*). As seen in Bogusia's example, forced conviviality is characterised by superficial and limited involuntary interactions of a strategic nature. She has developed strategies in the form of everyday performances of forced encounters in order to get by (see also Datta 2009). Furthermore, legal frameworks of equality legislation in the workplace 'shape encounters through performances of civility' (Valentine and Harris 2016: 918). Despite exchanging civilities at work with her supervisor, Bogusia held prejudiced views and negative feelings. Forced conviviality is specific to particular workplaces where workers are 'forced to get along and get things done together not where we choose to do so' (Estlund 2003: 5) and where certain norms of behaviour are expected.

#### *Krysia: meaningful forms of conviviality in domestic work*

Krysia is the oldest research participant (51) with a lower level of education and very basic English language skills. For Krysia, the workplace also became one of the main sites of interaction with difference in terms of ethnicity, religion, class and age. When Krysia worked as a cleaner in the local cinema, her co-workers from various backgrounds were younger than her. She was surprised that her age and limited English language skills



did not prevent her from establishing convivial relations with them. As a self-employed cleaner, she mainly cleaned people's homes and offices. During the interview at her house, Kryisia pointed to a framed picture on the living room wall illustrating a Jewish family she worked for:

*Can you see this family? (...) I got this picture for my fiftieth birthday. (...) When I left the hospital, they called me and texted me. I don't remember how many 'get well' cards I received from them. It was very nice. I was in tears when receiving the cards, because it was hard to believe that they would treat a cleaner like this. (...) I wasn't well with my injured arm, I couldn't do anything, but when I heard the 'get well' wishes, that the children missed me and asked when I would return, I felt better. I also received greetings from others. They were also Jewish because this family told their friends about me and I got their trust. (...) Jewish people have Shabbat and their own customs as in any other religions and I have always respected it and I still respect it.*

Domestic work is often associated with the exploitation of migrant workers and the feminised and racialised character of its labour force. However, Kryisia's narrative shows that a strong bond grew between her and the household owners. Through domestic work, a private household becomes a space of contact with individuals from social groups with which Kryisia previously did not have any connection. Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010: 10) stresses that although migrant domestic workers and their employers come from different backgrounds and live in different neighbourhoods, 'in the privacy of the households, these two women meet and share moments of unprecedented intimacy. Moments of worries, anxieties, fears and joys are exposed, expressed and exchanged instating the affective encounters between these two women'. Kryisia's narrative confirms Gutiérrez-Rodríguez's portrayal of domestic work as affective labour involving the creation of emotional bonds and relational complexity within private households. Even though Kryisia and Bogusia had similar jobs (housekeeping), their experiences differed. Kryisia did not feel the need to assert her whiteness. Parutis (2011: 274) describes private households as facilitating 'personal interaction' and 'friendly relations' in comparison to other workplaces. She further stresses that during interaction in private households, house owners express interest in the lives of the domestic workers beyond the workplace and that this helps migrant women feel seen as individuals and even friends.

Kryisia's example of conviviality characterised by affection transcends a domestic work space through gestures of gift giving, phone calls, text messages and get well cards which demonstrate Kryisia's employers' sensitivity, compassion and affection in response to her illness. Her narrative illustrates the capacity to be mutually affective and establish meaningful convivial contact with the members of the household, as opposed to the perception of domestic workers as robots and subjects of exploitation (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010).

### **Conviviality at work in Barcelona**

Spain did not open its labour market to the new accession countries until 2006 and Polish migration since then has been characterised by the arrival of young and educated migrants from bigger cities. Their employment often matches their qualifications or serves to improve them, in a sharp contrast to the disadvantaged labour market position and deskilling often experienced by Polish migrants in Britain. They are often referred to as a model of a well-integrated migrant group in Spanish society (Nalewajko 2012). Also, my research results confirm Nalewajko's (2012) argument that Polish migrants in the Spanish context are hardly associated with anti-immigrant rhetoric, again in sharp contrast to the negative discourse about Polish migrants in Britain.

Unlike Britain and other European countries, Spain, including Catalonia, has not seen a significant backlash against immigration, even though an economic crisis significantly affected the country and led to high levels

of unemployment (Arango 2013). The economic crisis does not seem to have had a significant impact on intercultural relations (Giménez Romero and Lobera 2014). It is also important to stress the significance of the Catalan context with a strong emphasis on *convivencia* as part of a political strategy towards diversity shaping social relations. However, while there is an emphasis on respect for difference in Catalonia, the issue of socio-economic inequalities experienced by non-European migrants and minorities was raised by several interviewees.

This part of the paper explores three different narratives of encounters at work in Barcelona illustrating workplace friendships, highlighting the importance of working together as equals and the limitations of contact with difference as a result of ethnic stratification of the labour market.

#### *Eliza: openness to difference and workplace friendships*

Eliza is 32 and arrived in Barcelona in 2005. Initially, Eliza experienced difficulties in finding a job as a result of restrictions imposed on the new EU members in 2004. When the restrictions were lifted in 2006, she realised that she had many more employment possibilities due to her English and Spanish language skills. She got a job at an international charity organisation and worked there for five years as an office worker. Eliza established positive relationships with people at work, although she stressed that these relations were not ‘typical’ as they differed from everyday relations with people in Spain:

*My position at work was not typical and it does not illustrate the situation in Spain because the organisation was very international, multicultural. (...) My Spanish friends were always telling me that I live on a rose-tinted planet, that what happens at my work does not take place at a normal workplace. (...) There were people from all over the world speaking different languages (...) and the relations between us were very good because there was a strong emphasis on team work and a positive work climate.*

Although little is known about the organisational factors that impact social relations at work, Eliza’s narrative demonstrates that the environment and the type of workplace are important characteristics shaping relations with co-workers. By joining the charitable organisation she worked for, employees were expected to commit to its values and principles and follow their professional code of ethics with respect for the cultural traditions and religious beliefs of others. By employing people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and emphasising the importance of teamwork and a positive working atmosphere, the supranational organisation facilitates an environment that fosters workplace relationships. The positive relations and work climate discussed by Eliza differ from the hostile working environment experienced by Lucyna.

Eliza’s narrative demonstrates the absence of stigmatisation of Polish workers in her workplace, contrary to Lucyna’s case:

*I often used to go to work with a smile on my face and I have never felt that I was an immigrant and that because of that I earned less or that a Spaniard was better treated than me. Sometimes it was quite the opposite. I thought that I received a preferential treatment.*

Favoured treatment of Polish migrants by Spanish employers compared to other migrant groups is also reported by Nalewajko (2012), who claims that it is a result of assumed cultural proximity between Polish migrants and Spaniards, which makes them feel more welcome than other groups. Nalewajko (2012) and Ramírez Goicoechea (2003) stress the invisibility of Polish migrants in Spain and suggest that in the Spanish imaginary they are not considered as a problem in contrast to Moroccans, *gitanos* (Gypsies) or, as Eliza noticed, South Americans.

Like some other interviewees in Barcelona, Eliza was aware of discrimination experienced by other ethnic minorities and their absence in public positions contrary to the super-diverse workforce in Britain:

*I realise that there is a lot of discrimination, even in Barcelona, because I have many South American friends who were discriminated in employment. (...) In Great Britain you can see an Indian doctor or a bus driver from Pakistan, but in Barcelona, Pakistani minorities (...) don't have access to this kind of public position. The Catalan language is an additional barrier.*

These structural factors limit possibilities of conviviality at the workplace. Eliza's narrative illustrates how certain groups of foreign origin labelled as 'outsiders' tend to be pigeonholed in marginal spaces of the labour market. These dynamics result in a segmentation of the labour force based on ethnic criteria and often intersecting with gender, regardless of non-EU migrants' education levels, skills and work experience (Colectivo Ioé 1998; Solé and Parella 2003). Despite the anti-discriminatory legislation in Spain, the discourse of 'preference based on nationality' is still present. In this case, the Others are certain groups characterised by certain nationalities and ethnicities, particularly non-whites and non-Europeans from the so called 'South' (Colectivo Ioé 2000). In contrast, the whiteness and Europeanness of Polish migrants in Spain become an advantage. This is contrasted with their experiences in Britain where they can be perceived as 'less white'. Although the interviewees in Barcelona were aware of this preferential treatment and privileged position, most of them did not explicitly discuss whiteness; possibly because it was considered as something natural and taken for granted (Ryan 2010).

One of the most significant aspects identified in Eliza's narrative about encounters at work are workplace friendships:

*Until now, some of my good friendships were made at work and I was always able to count on them. For example, a year ago I moved to another flat in Barcelona. (...) It was unfurnished and I only asked at work if anyone had some furniture, and they started bringing everything they had from their homes (...) so basically everybody offered some kind of help.*

This example highlights the importance of friendship as a possible outcome of conviviality at the workplace. Previous research discusses workplace friendships (Rawlins 1992; Sias and Cahill 1998) characterised by 'voluntariness' since they develop by choice (Ryan 2015a; Sias and Cahill 1998). This distinguishes workplace friendships from forced conviviality marked by obligatory ties as described in Bogusia's example.

Eliza's narrative about turning to her co-workers for support after she moved to an unfurnished flat demonstrates that life events influence workplace friendships. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that co-workers often become a valuable source of support when individuals deal with important events in their personal lives (Ryan 2015b; Sias and Cahill 1998; Sias and Gallagher 2009). The practical support offered by Eliza's friendly co-workers transcends the workplace setting and demonstrates how the line between the workplace and personal life may blur. This contrasts with the argument that relationships formed at work hardly translate into other spaces (Harris and Valentine 2016). Ryan (2015a) stresses the importance of temporal and spatial dynamism, indicating that the relations do not necessarily remain the same over a period of time. She further argues that ongoing mobility can impact on whether or not friendship ties are sustained. Eliza's narrative indicates that some of her workplace friendships continued even though her employment ended.

*Irena: workplace conviviality blurring ethno-religious boundaries*

Irena is a 28-year-old part-time PhD student and product engineer. Although Irena had some contact with people of different ethnicities in her home city in central Poland prior to arrival in Barcelona, she stressed that *it was strange to see a black person because in Poland immigration is not very high*. When she arrived in Barcelona in 2009, Irena was very surprised with the super-diverse population. She compared her fascination with difference to that of a child visiting a shop with sweets for the first time.

Irena's narrative mostly focused on acquaintances made at the workplace considered as the main place of everyday interaction in comparison to other places of encounter:

*I've had this job since May, this is not a very long time so I can't say yet that they are my best friends. Sometimes we go for dinner, but nothing other than that. When I worked at the university we used to go out together. It was a larger circle of friends. (...) You spend eight hours with a person from a different culture you have no idea about. At work you don't always work, you talk, go for a coffee or do other things. This gives you the opportunity to get to know the other person and if not at work then where?*

The length of time of working together becomes a significant factor shaping Irena's experiences of conviviality at work and beyond the workplace. She stressed the importance of time spent with co-workers and socialising over coffee or lunch as a way of getting to know them as individuals. This socialisation takes place at work, during breaks and outside of the workplace. The theme of work-based relations not being confined to work-based activities runs through all the cases discussed in this paper.

Habitual contact at work allowed Irena to look beyond the ethno-religious differences of Muslims, often stigmatised in Spain:

*If you can see that I work shoulder to shoulder with a Muslim man or woman, and she does exactly what I do, and she is treated exactly the way I am, I start treating her the same way too. (...) You see, she wears a burka, or however you call it, but she works with me. She is a scientist. She is a normal human being like you and me. (...) This is a chance to get to know her and her culture.*

The theme of veiled Muslim women was frequently mentioned during the interviews and in the focus group in Barcelona, while this issue was hardly discussed by the research participants in Manchester. Some interviewees were fascinated by veiled Muslim women, while others discussed the veil as a symbol of oppression by the Islamic religion and culture. The rhetoric of the headscarf in the informants' narratives in Barcelona may have been influenced by anti-Muslim discourse in both Spain and Poland, according to which gender is one of the categories through which Islamophobia operates (Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr 2017; Rzepnikowska 2016b). However, Irena's narrative illustrates how boundaries along ethno-religious lines become blurred through everyday interaction at work (Rzepnikowska 2016a). The construction of Otherness, based on assumptions that the Other is 'not quite human' (Harris *et al.* 2017), is deconstructed through everyday workplace interaction. Irena realised that she shares a common humanity with her co-worker who initially was perceived solely through an ethno-religious lens. Furthermore, the equal status, in this example shared between Irena and her colleague, is one of the key conditions under which contact between different groups and individuals can occur in order to foster positive relations (Hewstone 2003). It is the perceived similarity which can have a profound impact on relationship development at work (Sias and Cahill 1998). This example demonstrates an emergence of workplace relationships encompassing both similarity and difference (Andrew and Montague 1998).

Like Eliza, Irena stressed the specificity of her workplace in comparison to low-paid and low-skilled jobs often occupied by non-European migrants. Irena was aware of the limited possibilities of contact with people from different cultures at the workplace as a result of inequalities in employment based on ethnicity:

*Today, if you see that people from South America mostly work in bars (...) and in grocery shops you usually see Pakistani or Chinese people [pause] then they are not seen in the same way. Also, you can't see them in politics and in public offices. There is a lack of possibility to work with them and to get to know them. The first step is for the employer to treat everyone equally, and then you have a chance to get to know others. (...) These people are not treated fairly; they are not given equal chances to get a better job.*

While anti-discrimination law is considered the UK's greatest area of strength, it is one of Spain's weakest policy areas (Niessen, Huddleston and Citron 2007). The Council of Europe (2011: 5) suggests that a specific recruitment strategy should be implemented in Barcelona 'to ensure that the ethnic background of public employees reflects the composition of the city's population'.

#### *Dorota: women's friendships at work and beyond*

Dorota is 36 and completed secondary education in Poland. Before she got divorced, she was limited to the domestic domain as her husband wanted her to adopt traditional gender norms, to be a housewife and look after the family. After the divorce, Dorota had to find a job to support herself and her son financially. The workplace became a place of new acquaintances and friendships with co-workers: *It was like a waterfall where I could meet people from different cultures.* Dorota mainly talked about convivial relations with Spanish and Catalan female co-workers. Dorota was not only fascinated by their lifestyle but she also identified with them. This was reflected in her discussion of liberation from the oppressive husband, and of contemporary Spanish women freed from the past of the oppressive Franco regime:

*I started going with them to parties. (...) I saw how they think and, as they say, las españolas llevan los pantalones, that it is the Spanish woman who wears trousers in a relationship, that it is the Spanish woman who decides whether she wants to get married, have children or not, that she will do whatever she wants, and so on. Today the Spanish woman doesn't want to have anything to do with the past of her mother or grandmother who was kind of imprisoned by the Franco regime. (...) In the meantime, when I worked there when I was a divorcee, when my husband could not gag me at home [laugh], I went out to people with freedom, as I am, because he wanted a quiet kind of woman who wouldn't talk or laugh too much. (...) But after the divorce my situation changed. I got a job and started interacting with Spanish women. It was a new world for me.*

Dorota's identification with Spanish and Catalan women underpins the processes of workplace relations formation, a possibility of experimenting with a new lifestyle and a way of distancing herself from the previous experiences of a housewife. Furthermore, convivial workplace relations with Spanish and Catalan women were also shaped by the nature of her workplace with roles that are still gender-specific.

Several other research participants highlighted the importance of friendship with other women. Ryan (2015a) points out that in her research on network formations of highly qualified Irish migrants in Britain, most of the women had largely female friendship groups. For Dorota, socialising with female co-workers was possibly a way to challenge social control (O'Connor 1992). This contributes to the argument that women's friendships may serve to challenge patriarchal practices (Andrew and Montague 1998).

While in the British context, workplace relations with the native population were sometimes marked by tensions resulting from the negative discourse about Polish migrants, as seen in Lucyna's case, Dorota's narrative illustrates that her ethnicity was not an obstacle to forming workplace relations with Spanish and Catalan women. It is not only a perceived cultural proximity between Polish migrants and Spaniards/Catalans (Nalewajko 2012), but also the importance of gender shaping these relations.

Even though Dorota was made redundant and had to look for a job elsewhere, at the time of the interview she was still friends with some of the women from work. As discussed in Eliza's example, ongoing mobility does not necessarily lead to a breakdown of friendships made at work. To explore how these friendships are sustained would require longitudinal research over a longer period of time.

## Conclusions

This paper examined examples of conviviality by exploring narratives about under-researched workplace relations. As illustrated above, migrants spend a large proportion of their time at work and one cannot avoid interacting with others. The narratives revealed complex encounters with difference at work demonstrating various forms of conviviality.

Humour and language differences may become integral parts of convivial culture at work, facilitating not only playful but also inclusive and bonding interaction. Ethnic and cultural differences become less important in the context of more meaningful workplace relations and friendships based on deeper social bonds, care and respect for difference. Nevertheless, the workplace can also be a place of conflict and tensions between different groups and individuals, characterised by hostility, prejudice and racism. When conflicts at work arise, whiteness may be asserted and differences racialised. Some interviewees openly spoke about their whiteness and expressed prejudice, as observed in Bogusia's case in Manchester; yet in Barcelona, the interviewees hardly mentioned it in discussions about workplace relations. This could be due to a different profile of Polish migrants in the two cities. Nevertheless, as Ryan (2010) argues, whiteness might not be explicitly discussed because it is assumed as natural and therefore taken for granted. Leitner (2012: 837) stresses that 'more educated and well-off whites are better able to control forms of racial signification than are working-class whites'.

Despite conflict and tensions, migrants may use survival strategies to get by, as manifested in examples of 'forced conviviality' characterised by involuntary and superficial interaction. Workplaces usually have rules and regulations with regard to diversity and equality. Therefore, employees are expected to be convivial, although they may hide prejudiced views in fear of disciplinary action (Valentine and Harris 2016).

The paper has illustrated that the type of workplace and equal status may influence relationships with people at work. Equal status shared between co-workers in a non-competitive working environment seems to aid conviviality at work, while power hierarchies, especially between the established ethnic minorities and new arrivals, may result in tensions. The time-varying factor might influence the experiences of conviviality since the longer the time of employment, the more opportunity there is to get to know co-workers and establish friendships. The narratives of Eliza, Krysia and Irena stressed the spatio-temporal character of conviviality, with possibilities of establishing more meaningful relations over time and beyond the workplace, but this would require further research over a longer period of time. The role of gender was particularly important in the narratives of Bogusia and Dorota. While in Bogusia's case, gendered divisions of labour combined with racialised discourses negatively impacted on relations with a black male supervisor, in Dorota's example, convivial workplace relations with Spanish and Catalan women were partly shaped by the gender-specific nature of her workplace.

Experiences of conviviality at work are highly contextual. In the British context, the portrayal of Polish migrants as invaders stealing jobs, as discussed in Lucyna's case, may seriously harm their relations with the

local population likely to adopt opinions and stereotypes repeated over a long period of time. In the light of Brexit, this may lead to further divisions along ethnic lines and discourage minority groups from actively interacting with others who use a discriminating rhetoric. As highlighted in McGregor-Smith Review (2017: 6), ‘employers need to act fast and ensure that outdated and offensive views or behaviours are not tolerated’. In contrast, in the Spanish context, there is an absence of such negative discourse about Polish migrants. They are seen as skilled, well-educated and culturally close to Spaniards and Catalans mainly due to assumed whiteness, Europeaness and Christianity. Nevertheless, the narratives illustrated that ethnic stratification in the Spanish workplaces may lead to limited contact with non-whites and non-Europeans. However, occupational segregation affecting ethnic minorities is not unique to Spain. Hence, there is a need for a more representative workforce and more inclusive workplaces.

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