Austerity and women's employment trajectories in Spain and the UK: a comparison of two flexible labour markets.

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Abstract

Using a mixed methods approach this article investigates the impact of the financial crisis and austerity on women's employment and life chances in Spain and the UK through tracking women's changing labour market transitions and exploring women's responses to disrupted employment paths. Women's experiences were found to be strongly influenced by the different employment and social models and the specific austerity policies. In Spain women faced increases in both labour market flexibility and segmentation, involving more entrapment in unemployment and temporary jobs and declining protection within permanent contracts. In the UK women retained more access to employment but faced destabilisation of public sector employment and a strong budget squeeze from wage and benefit cuts. They were less able than women in Spain to draw on both family support and unemployment benefits to reorient their careers but in both countries women were resisting employment changes and reaffirming their commitment to employment.

Introduction

This article analyses the impact of the financial crisis and austerity turn on women's employment and life chances in two European countries, Spain and the UK. The largely unanticipated severity of the crisis in employment could be expected to have a significant impact on two dimensions to women's integration: that is their commitment to employment and their employment trajectories. Comparison of these two countries could be expected to reveal important differences in the pattern of change: women's employment integration was more long term in the UK than Spain where women's employment rate had increased remarkably in the pre-crisis decade, by 20 percentage points to reach 55.5% in 2007, although still some 10 percentage points below the UK. Also the form and nature of women's labour market integration has taken different paths. Even pre crisis, women in Spain faced high unemployment and concentration in temporary but primarily full-time work while in the UK women were more likely to work part-time and had lower unemployment rates. These differences provided a basis to explore two propositions from the extant literature (Karamessini and Rubery 2013, Bettio et al. 2013). The first is that women's work commitment has been moving from more contingent to permanent within advanced European countries, although this development may depend upon how embedded women's integration has become in social norms and expectations (Rubery, 2013). The second proposition is that the immediate impact on women's employment opportunities is linked both to the specific recession path and subsequent austerity policies and to the gendered division of labour by occupation and contract type.

The pre-crisis indicators of women's employment integration in Spain and the UK reveal contradictory tendencies, rendering the expected impact of the crisis on women's work commitment ambiguous. Despite the longer history of women's integration in the UK and the potential for recent integration to be vulnerable to reversal under the weight of the crisis and austerity, women in Spain

had demonstrated stronger commitment to full-time employment. Thus even though the upsurge involved a growth in part-time work (see below table 1), most women entering part-time work only did so because they could not find full-time employment. In contrast women in the UK reveal a much higher level of voluntary part-time working and if calculated on a full-time equivalent basis, the female employment rate gap between the two countries narrows from 9.9 percentage points to 2.4 as part-time work only accounted for 22.1% of women's employment in Spain 2007, roughly half the UK share (EU 2015:40-41). Furthermore, women's traditional pattern of labour force withdrawal after childbirth had been declining pre crisis while in the UK the common pattern is still for women to return to work part-time after childbirth, although breaks before returning are now shorter (Scott et al. 2008).

Likewise the similarities and differences in women's labour market position across the two countries can be expected to have significance for the immediate impact on employment trajectories. In both countries women are heavily involved in service work but the share of women in public services employment is higher in the UK (Conley 2012, Thornley 2007, Rubery, 2013) which under austerity moved from being a protected to a vulnerable employment form. Furthermore, although women are overrepresented in both countries in non-standard and flexible employment, the differences in contract form, between temporary but full-time and relatively stable part-time, may have implications for employment loss and the incidence of unemployment.

The comparison of the impact of the recession and austerity on women's employment position also requires consideration of the national social model. Although the models in both Spain and the UK still bear the legacy of the male breadwinner, they are organised on very different principles. The UK social model falls into the residual welfare state category proposed by Esping Andersen (1990). Means-tested residual welfare support with limited contribution-based benefits reduces notions of entitlement linked to quasi-property rights in benefits (Clasen 2000). The Spanish model in contrast falls into both the conservative insurance-based welfare state model and the subset of Mediterranean welfare models where the family provides a high share of the support compared to liberal market economies such as the UK where family ties are weak. These models take on significance first in shaping the sources of support available during the crisis and austerity which may have impacted on women's responses and experiences. Second the models are themselves dynamic: changes in pre-crisis had the capacity to improve the fit with the emerging dual-earner model but these reforms became vulnerable to slow down or reversal under austerity. Third, austerity implies the scaling back of the social model and choices made under austerity programmes may have differential gender effects. Thus the longer term impact on women depends on the future availability of support, taking into account labour market, gender and social policy developments.

To tease out the recession and austerity effects on women's employment and life chances, it is helpful to make comparisons at a range of levels using mixed research methods. At the macro national level we compare the type and form of the crisis and the policy changes to overall national models under austerity; at the labour market level we explore changes in labour market flows by gender to identify impacts on work commitment and changes to or ruptures in employment trajectories; and at the individual level, we explore individual women's narratives on how they responded to major turning points in their employment trajectories. This enabled us also to explore how the social model and gender regime shapes the support available when careers are disrupted by the crisis. The more changes in employment trajectories are unanticipated and the more those affected have limited resources to draw on to help them respond the greater the likely impact. This approach has parallels with the flexicurity perspective promoted by the EU which recognises that individuals facing restructuring need support to re-orientate their employment trajectories. However, by emphasising resource availability, we also aim to avoid an individualistic focus on resilience, or personality and attitudes, over social support structures (for critique see Harrison 2012).

To provide the institutional context for the comparison we first consider the variations and trends pre crisis in the social and gender models, across the three pillars of employment, welfare and the family. After discussing the rationale for mixed methods research, the findings are presented in three parts.

The first identifies the main changes in aggregate macro outcomes and national policies in the recession and austerity periods while the second analyses changes in women's individual employment transitions over both time periods. These two dimensions to change are used to identify for each country the most characteristic disruptions to employment prospects facing women. The third section draws on narrative biographies of women affected by these types of disruptions to explore how they responded and what sources of support they were able to draw on. The final section reviews these findings and considers their implications for longer term changes in both gender and social models in the two countries.

Variations and trends in the social and gender models in Spain and the UK

Country employment, social and gender models may shape both the gender impact of the recession and the available support across the three pillars of employment, the state and the family. Each is found to differ in the extent and form of support between Spain and the UK.

The Spanish labour market has been segmented between permanent and temporary contracts ever since reforms in the 1980s promoted flexibility through temporary contracts. This segmentation revolves around job security as wages are set by collective regulation for both permanent and temporary contract employees. Women are over-represented alongside young people in temporary contracts but those who secure permanent posts enjoy more security than in the UK. Thus the long term core deficiency in the Spanish labour market is the supply of enough jobs and secure jobs. In contrast the UK has lower unemployment rates, with men facing higher unemployment than women. However, the jobs available to the unemployed and to the majority of women are relatively low paid, mainly part-time and outside of collective regulation. The problem in the UK is not so much finding a job but obtaining progression beyond a relatively low paid job that may also involve insecure or short hours of work. In this context the somewhat higher paid and more secure employment in the public sector takes on significance, as does the availability of in-work benefits to bring low wages up to the level necessary for minimum living standards.

For those affected by labour market problems, the different types and level of state support available have marked consequences; Spain, in line with the conservative welfare model provides earnings-related unemployment benefits and compensation for employment loss while the UK's residual welfare state model provides mainly household-based means-tested benefits for main breadwinners who are either out of work or in low paid employment. There are more similarities in state support for care; both the Spanish and UK governments were laggards in recognising the need for childcare services although the UK has traditionally had more state-funded elder care (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996) reflecting the UK's weak family ties. However, by the 2000s notable changes were taking place, labelled a 'sea change' in the UK (Waldfoegel, 2011) and in Spain as the first step towards extending the three pillars of education, health and pensions to a 'fourth pillar of welfare', with family and social services (Navarro, 2009). New laws even recognised rights for social support for elderly people living with their children who were traditionally expected to receive family care (Sarasa, 2011). Both countries expanded childcare provision with coverage in Spain exceeding that recorded for the UK. This meant a great expansion in public sector jobs for women: in Spain this sector accounted for a quarter of the four fifths growth in overall women's employment. In the UK the overall growth was slower at 11.4% but public services accounted for almost all of this at 10.5%. Despite the faster rate of increase, women's concentration in public services jobs in Spain remains only 38% compared to 49% in the UK (Rubery, 2013). Again the predictions of the impact of cuts to planned and existing services on women's employment are ambiguous as in both countries women had entered employment before the development of widespread care support; nevertheless the austerity policies can be expected to increase women's total work burdens and limit their capacity to enter or remain in wage employment.

With respect to the third pillar, it is clear that the family in Spain is more deeply engaged in providing care and financial support across generations but there is also evidence that family patterns were changing and moving away from the traditional southern European family model (Moreno and Mari-

Klose, 2013). For example, births outside of marriage rose from 11.1% in 1995 to 35.5% in 2012². Trends in the UK were similar but from a higher starting point; births outside marriage rose from 33.5% to 47.6% by 2012.

The prevailing gender regime can be considered to be constituted by the three pillar social model and by women's own orientations and commitment to paid work. Even pre-crisis there is evidence of a convergence in commitment and the potential for women to Spain to even move ahead of women in the UK through their continued preference for full-time work and their associated even more critical contribution to household budgets. This amounted to 40% or more of total income in nearly 50% of households, compared to 42% in the UK in 2010 (Mills et al. 2014:15). However, the form of the gender regime is still heavily influenced by variation in the employment and social models as is very evident in the two countries compared here. For Spain the most critical life stage for women is initial entry to employment as young people face prolonged transitions into stable employment via successive temporary contracts and spells of unemployment. This pattern applies also to some young people in the UK, particularly post crisis, but remains more limited than in Spain. In the UK childbirth is the key life stage for women, often marking a turning point in employment trajectories towards part-time and often lower paid jobs. In the 2000s new rights to request flexible work arrangements enabled some to avoid this turning point to lower paid jobs especially in the public sector. In Spain women have been much less likely to take up part-time work after childbirth. Traditionally they either remained in full-time work or exited and engaged in informal employment (Torns et al., 2013) but withdrawal after childbirth has been reducing in Spain (Salido, 2011). Moreover in Spain despite growth in part-time work, rates of part-time working among mothers of young children are only slightly higher than for those without children, while in the UK the rates for mothers are around five times higher (Rubery, 2013).

The trends towards more care provision indicate some changes in the gender regime but this stops far short of a shift towards a Scandinavian-type adult worker model (Lewis et al. 2008) and its associated high tax regime. In Spain many of the halted developments were future promises – at least for elder care- and in the UK care services were expanded through outsourcing to low-paying private contractors to reduce costs (Bessa et al. 2013). Overall, following Daly (2011), we can characterise both countries as “dual-earner gender-specialised” models, where in parallel to some trends towards the adult worker model (Lewis, 2001), moves towards or continuation of familialisation policies persist.

These patterns of both variation and change in employment, social and gender models thus provide the context in which first the financial crash and second the austerity policies were set to impact on women's employment. Before analysing these impacts we set out the rationale for mixed methods research to explore change at different levels of analysis.

Research methods

This article explores the following questions: 1) what is the impact of recession and austerity on women's labour market integration in Spain and the UK; 2) what are the main differences in these impacts on women's employment trajectories; and 3) what are the main differences in resources available to women to support them in adjusting to these turning points, and how has this access been affected by recession and austerity policies. The research design follows a mixed methods approach (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). It involves three types of data collection and analysis following a sequential design (Creswell, 2003). To identify changes or breaks in employment trajectories we utilise the EUSILC (Eurostat) four years rolling longitudinal sample to analyse three different periods: pre-recession (2004-2007 but 2005-2007 for the UK as SILC only started in 2005), recession (2007-2010) and austerity (2010-2013). The transition rates are based on changes from the situation in time t-1 to the situation in time t with respect to employment status (employment, unemployment, domestic tasks) and employment forms (full-time, part-time, temporary, permanent, employee and self-employed). Across each four year period the same individual could be involved in up to three transitions of each type. These transition rates enable comparison of within-country transition patterns

across the three periods, for women compared to men and across the two countries. Specifically, we analyse transitions for those aged 25-64, that is excluding 16 to 24 year olds from the standard working population definition due to difficulty in establishing turning points for first entrants and because the magnitude of youth problems might obscure the mid-life changes for women that we were interested in exploring. Second, employment and welfare policy changes enacted during the recession and austerity periods were identified to provide contextual information on how these policy changes were likely to enhance or moderate turning points in labour market trends and the support available to those affected.

These first two stages were then combined to identify typologies of the most characteristic ‘turning points’ in women’s individual biographies in each country during recession and austerity. These turning points were the basis for purposive sampling (Ritchie et al., 2003) in each country of women affected. Biographies have been identified as the suitable technique for capturing the complexity of individual lives, the impact that events have on them, and to enhance understanding of human experience as it occurs within social and cultural contexts (Denzin, 1989; Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). The interviewees lived in two large urban areas, Barcelona and the North West of England, chosen to provide some comparability in labour market and social life dynamics, although the two cases reveal different stories and experiences. Some comparability in pre-crisis experience was considered more important for making sense of the different narratives than aiming to represent experiences of all women in each specific country. The interviewees were identified through informal contacts with rank and file union members in order to access workers in sectors where they were likely to have been affected by a turning point. Additional respondents were identified through a snow ball strategy. Anyone holding a union position was excluded and inclusion was restricted to those affected by a major event and by difficulties in returning to a similar employment status or trajectory, in line with the concept of turning point leading to a substantial change in life direction (Elder et al, 2004; Verd and López-Andreu, 2011). The labour market trajectories of potential interviewees were scrutinised before the decision to include them into the sample and to characterise the employment path previous to the event. Our sample focused on women with a relatively stable and continuous formal employment path pre crisis. Interviews took place during 2014 but the employment change that defined their inclusion occurred between 2009 and 2012. Interviews lasted about 90 minutes and in total 15 narrative biographies of women affected by the identified turning points were collected (eight for Spain, seven for the UK), all between the ages of 30 to 60 with different educational levels and family situations which provided insights into the varied consequences of and responses to these employment changes.

To place the critical role of the employment trajectory change in context, the biographies covered the employment path across the whole working life as well as household and social origin information, including significant family or household events. To develop a picture of an individual’s story with the highest possible level of contextualisation (Verd and López-Andreu, 2011), account was taken of the interactions between the changing employment and social model during austerity and the observed everyday strategies and capacities to resist using a categorical-content reading (Lieblich et. al., 1998) where the focus is on the narrative content. In this regard, and taking its cue from research about how individuals and households act in certain contexts (Hall, 2011 and 2015; Nico and Caetano, 2017) the interview findings offer an in-depth, qualitative account of the nuances of everyday practices of women embedded in specific employment, social and household contexts, and cannot be taken as representative of the diversity of employment and social situations in the UK and Spain.

From prosperity to crisis and austerity: economic and policy changes

The specific characteristics of the recession and austerity phases of the crisis in Spain and the UK, as in other European countries, depended upon both their position within the global economy and on national as well as international policy responses (Lehndorff, 2015). The UK as a finance-led economy was hit more directly by the financial crash but subsequent manufacturing and construction downturns had more impact on Spain whose pre-crisis boom had been construction-led. Thus Spain suffered more severe employment losses and rising unemployment even in the immediate recession

period (table 1). There was a huge collapse of employment in Spain especially for men whose employment rate fell by 16.9 percentage points between 2007 and 2013 compared to 5 percentage points for women. Nevertheless this contrasts with previous strong upward trends for women. Table 1 shows the main employment declines in Spain were in temporary and full time jobs⁴ with part-time jobs the only growth area, especially for men. The changes in the UK for both sexes are in comparison moderate, with men's employment rate falling by around one percentage point and that for women rising slightly. Changes in employment types were also marginal. The employment collapse in Spain was mirrored in steep rises in unemployment rates for both sexes in both recession and austerity periods. From 2007 to 2013 women's unemployment rate increased 250% while that for men quadrupled, almost reaching women's unemployment rate which had long been higher. In contrast in the UK men's unemployment rate has always exceeded women's but rates increased at most by 2 to 3 percentage points for both sexes, even at the recessionary trough for men. Under austerity, however, it was men's rates that reduced slightly while women's continued to rise. Rises in labour force participation rates of 2 percentage points in the UK and 6.8 in Spain signalled an added worker effect which also fuelled women's unemployment rate in Spain. The outcome of this economic turbulence thus appears to be that men in Spain are catching up with the insecurities experienced by women –including lower employment, more part-time work, and higher unemployment- while women in both Spain and the UK are reinforcing their commitment to employment.

[Table 1 here]

These employment changes are in part an outcome of the crash but also of policy choices. Policy responses were relatively similar with both countries initially introducing stimulus packages but from 2010 onwards both switching to strong austerity policies. The UK being outside the Eurozone and supported by the currency markets, its austerity turn was more voluntary while the Spanish programme, started by the Socialist government but consolidated by the subsequent right wing government, occurred under the threat of a Troika-imposed reform programme. This was avoided at the cost of one of the toughest fiscal consolidation agendas (Banyuls and Recio, 2015) together with major employment regulation reforms, likely to bring some convergence with the already highly flexible UK labour market. In both cases, the incoming governments used austerity to further long term agendas (Blyth, 2013) to shrink and reshape the social state (Farnsworth and Irving, 2015). In neither country were policies analysed for gender impacts, despite the UK government's commitment to gender impact analysis (Conley 2012).

Despite similar agendas, differences in institutional frameworks influenced the substance of the policy programmes. Spain entered the crisis with much more extensive collective bargaining covering 80% of private sector employees (Aragon et al, 2011). This promoted an emphasis on reducing wage costs through undermining comprehensive coverage in the private sector, ostensibly to boost competitiveness (Hermann, 2014) and imposing pay cuts and freezes on public sector employees. UK wage policies focused primarily on the public sector where collective regulation still prevailed. Spain was intent on downgrading its stronger employment regulation, for both permanent and temporary contracts. Likewise the UK downgraded its already low protection further by extending the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims from one year employment with the same employer to two years and by weakening protections for outsourced staff. Both countries also reduced public sector employment, the UK mainly through redundancies and Spain mainly through hiring freezes (Muñoz de Bustillo and Antón, 2013) which affects interim and temporary workers who account for a quarter of the public sector workforce and nearly a third of the women employed (Fernández-Gutiérrez and Díez-Fuentes, 2009: 57). In the UK the aims of drastically scaling back public sector employment and levelling down public to private sector conditions have strong gender impacts due to women's high concentration in public services. With respect to welfare, the UK adopted a more punitive regime than Spain involving cuts and use of sanctions. The UK's more developed care services provided more scope for these to be curtailed while in Spain it was mainly plans that were put on hold.

Overall austerity policies in both countries reduced support for working age adults (see table 2). First with respect to support from the labour market, in Spain insecurity was increasing through a double problem of reduced security in permanent contracts and reduced opportunities to move into permanent contracts. Furthermore a very high share of both men and women facing wage cuts, particularly in the austerity period (table 3) reflecting the public sector wage cuts and the changes to private sector collective bargaining agreements aimed at allowing wage cuts instead of dismissals. In addition Spanish reforms -both pre and during the crisis- reduced the support available from redundancy payments although these still exceeded UK entitlements. Overall resources from the labour market diminished, representing both intensified segmentation and a general downgrading of pay for both sexes.

[Table 2 here]

[Table 3 here]

In the UK women had more access to employment but the security associated with employment was reduced by trends towards more variable and insecure employment including zero hours contracts (Grimshaw et al. 2016), a higher share of workers paid close to the minimum wage (Grimshaw 2014) and further weakening of unfair dismissal protection. The incidence of wage cuts was even higher than in Spain during recession but the rates were at a comparably high level under austerity, with the risk for women slightly exceeding that for men in both countries. Redundancy payments have historically been relatively low and were cut in the public sector where they traditionally exceeded statutory compensation.

With respect to state support, Spain made only moderate cuts to unemployment benefits (see table 2) and allows the unemployed more scope to use their benefits to support activities such as education or retraining (Bartelheimer et al, 2009) while in the UK benefits claimants must engage full-time in job search. However, a new Spanish policy option to use unemployment benefits to support partial redundancy or work sharing risks leaving people with more limited support if eventually made redundant. The UK's more aggressive stance on welfare support has led to cuts and freezes in contributory benefits and in-work benefits and caps on housing benefits, combined with more pressure to seek work, reinforced by benefit sanctions. This represents not only a real reduction in support, particularly for single mothers (TUC 2015), but also a further stage in a long term downgrading of the status of benefit recipients and the erosion of any notion of welfare entitlements. In both countries state-supported childcare has also been cut back. In Spain expansion plans were halted while in the UK major cuts were implemented in 2010 but subsequently partially reversed through new schemes but still within a context of limited and expensive childcare.

Finally, with respect to family support, Spain's much stronger tradition of supporting family members both through co-residence, direct funding support or care services may be under strain due to job losses and wage cuts, while attitudes towards family support may also be changing, with younger cohorts favouring more independence. In the UK family ties have been much weaker for a long time with families fragmented geographically or through divorce and a limited tradition of intergenerational support. Despite this weakness the government has sought to pass more support back onto families, arguing, for example, that young people could return to living with their parents after housing benefit for young people was eliminated (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012). Support for families' costs has also been cut, including cuts to child benefits.

Identifying changes in trajectories

To explore changes in women's trajectories we use the EU-SILC panel data to track women's⁵ transitions over three periods: *before recession (2004-7)*, *during recession (2007-2010)* and *during austerity (2010-2013)*. Table 4 illustrates the very different patterns in the two countries even pre-recession: Spanish women already had much higher risks of transitioning to unemployment from all employment types than UK women and much lower chances of transitioning from domestic tasks to

employment, possibly due to lower re-entry chances. Transitions from unemployment to employment were slightly higher in the UK and operated via permanent part-time jobs compared to the main route in Spain via temporary contracts. Spanish women's chances of transitioning from temporary to permanent jobs were also much lower, although a much smaller share of the British workforce was in temporary work. In Spain, flows out of part-time to full-time work were much higher than in the UK and somewhat lower in the opposite direction, revealing that part-time work pre-recession was not a preferred employment form. Women in Spain were thus more confined to temporary work and women in the UK to part-time work.

[Table 4 here]

Turning to recession and austerity periods we find that Spanish women's already high transitions into unemployment increased across all employment forms in both periods. The same applies in the UK though at much lower transition rates and with steeper increases under austerity than recession. The transitions out of unemployment also fell more in Spain (by about 40% by 2010-13 compared to 14% in the UK), particularly affecting transitions into both permanent and temporary jobs, while transitions into part-time were less affected. Despite reduced availability temporary contracts remain the main route out of unemployment. For unemployed UK women, the share of transitions into part-time jobs increased due to absolute declines in transitions to full-time jobs. In Spain transitions out of domestic tasks fell steeply in recession but rose under austerity, into both full- and part-time jobs, consistent with an added worker effect. In the UK transitions out of domestic tasks rose under recession but declined to pre-recession levels under austerity although with somewhat higher transitions into full-time work. However, the stand out change is the 55% fall in Spain in the transition rate (35.7 to 16.1) from temporary to permanent jobs indicating that more women can expect to be trapped longer within temporary employment.

The transitions data thus confirm both the tendency for an added worker effect as flows from employment into domestic tasks decline, especially in Spain and a trend towards even stronger segmentation in temporary jobs in Spain despite rising insecurity for those in permanent employment. In the UK, the overall trends were more moderate but women's prospects were declining further under austerity as men's prospects were starting to improve.

Turning points, austerity and women's coping strategies

The evidence explored so far indicates that for women in Spain the key turning points relate to the deep deterioration in employment opportunities (see figure 1), involving increased redundancy risks from all job types including permanent private sector jobs, reinforced by reduced redundancy protection, and declines in career possibilities due to blocked movement out of temporary into permanent jobs. These trends represent significant disruptions to employment prospects for women in Spain. Although similar and even stronger changes applied to men, women's position deteriorated from a lower position. In comparison the deterioration in state support for the unemployed is more limited, though redundancy payments have declined along with wage cuts.

[Figure 1 here]

In contrast career prospects in the UK, as measured by transitions, have not deteriorated to the same extent, though evidence of more deterioration under austerity suggests that women, who constitute the majority of public service workers, are facing a higher risk of displacement from previously stable public sector jobs (Conley, 2012) in addition to the conversion of high paid public sector work to outsourced low paid work. This represents in some respects a 'completion' of the flexible labour market project and provides us with a first key turning point for many women in the UK. The second turning point is the impact on women of the decline in available sources of support, consequent upon both stricter benefit regimes (with particular impacts on lone parents).

These turning points have implications for the employment and social models in both countries. In Spain they represent processes of both reinforced segmentation and general downward compression of employment conditions and security. In the UK the two turning points represent further steps towards a flexible neoliberal labour market, with further downgrading of both the public sector and welfare support systems. Furthermore, because in the UK family support is less reliable and social care and in-work benefits have been more developed, adjustment to these changes may be particularly problematic.

The coping strategies of women in the UK and Spain under austerity

Selection of the interviewees depended explicitly on their experiences fitting the key turning points for each country (see table 5 for characteristics of interviewees). Five of the Spanish sample had lost a permanent private sector job and all had had to accept either long term unemployment (two waitresses) or downgrading of employment status to temporary work or self-employment (three white collar workers). One older waitress lost her job as her employer replaced older with cheaper young workers, made worthwhile by reduced redundancy compensation. The other three Spanish women had lost the prospect of moving from a temporary to a permanent contract in public sector jobs. In the UK sample, three had lost permanent public sector jobs and only one had been able to secure a new permanent job, after periods of unemployment and temporary work. The other two had failed to find new employment, due to age discrimination or problems finding a sufficiently high paid job to cover childcare costs. Four had faced reduced resources through combinations of changes in employment and benefit conditions (with the latter also experienced by two of those who lost permanent jobs). In fact all seven UK interviewees had faced a significant downgrading of their employment or income prospects linked often directly to the policies of public sector restructuring and benefit tightening.

[Tables 5a and 5b here]

Experiences of support systems in a changing context

The interviews provided examples of strong differences across the two countries in the support available to women to assist their adjustment to changed conditions. First, with respect to labour market support, redundancy payments figured as more important in the Spanish women's experiences and supported some reorientation of careers, as discussed below. Conversely, in the UK sample only one older worker (5UK) was able to take an occupational pension when made redundant. Furthermore, as noted above, the interviewees were all facing the prospects of more precarious and insecure jobs, as explained by a British elder care support worker: 'We had to take up a 40% pay cut in real terms (...) They cut our salary, sick pay, holidays, etc.' (7UK). The precarious conditions in the available jobs are also described by a Spanish engineer after one year unemployed:

'(...) the conditions are very precarious, I do not have a contract, I am self-employed, false self-employed. ...I capitalised what remained of my unemployment benefit to pay the national insurance, if not, I couldn't do this.... I am earning less than a half of what I was earning before for a minimum of 8 hours per day and of course no payment for overtime' (1SP)

With respect to support from the state, the contributory unemployment benefits provided an important breathing space for the Spanish interviewees to adjust to new conditions, with the problems really intensifying once benefits were exhausted: 'Yes I got that six months job and then I had neither the unemployment [benefit] nor the 400 [the extraordinary unemployment allowance introduced in 2008] so I had no income then' (3SP).

In contrast those UK interviewees claiming unemployment benefits (e.g. 2UK) experienced strong pressures from the start to take whatever job was available to move off benefits as soon as possible. However, the UK women were much more reliant upon state support while in work - including tax credits, childcare tax credits and housing benefits- and the squeeze on all these benefit forms affected

several of the interviewees. One social worker had experienced a severe reduction in her net wage income and narrates the problems she is facing:

"Living costs are increasing and our wage has been frozen for 5 years (...)I am feeling that I am working to pay my bills and to pay my childcare, and that's it" (4UK)

Moreover, the veterinary nurse felt she had little option but to work full-time, even though it left her hardly any better off than when unemployed: 'I get working tax credits, £29 a month, that is not much. Is not enough incentive. Compared from when I was on benefits it is just £50 better' (2UK)

Interviewees from both countries reported reliance on family support. For the British women this mainly amounted to financial support for housing. For example living with a partner in the parents' house to save the deposit for a house (3UK) or paying low rent in a house owned by the mother (6UK). In only one case (4UK) was support provided with care. In contrast the Spanish women reported on multifaceted family support, covering housing, childcare, and even support for living. One interviewee with a professional background commented: 'our parents are buying us the fish and the meat for our children, we cannot afford it' (8SP). Although this support was recognised as vital it also undermined adult independence even in mid age. One 44 year old explained: 'I am living in my parent's house paying a very low rent and expenses ... It is fine but it is a bit hard because you have to accept and not complain about a lot of things' (2SP).

The strategies and responses of women

All 15 women responded to the downgrading of their employment opportunities in similar fashion to that identified at an aggregate level, namely through strong commitment to wage work, in some cases strengthened by recession and austerity. Only when there were severe barriers to further employment, such as age discrimination or high childcare costs, did respondents consider reducing activity (3SP, 4SP, 5UK, 6UK), as the Spanish waitress aged 55 and facing long term unemployment states:

'...I am thinking about taking care of my mother and bringing her home [and then receiving the subsidy as main carer]. ...if I do not get a job I am thinking of doing this...' (4SP).

Furthermore, several women from both countries had actively resisted changes to their employment. This resistance mainly involved action via trade unions: one of the Spanish waitresses (4SP), was still contesting the legal basis for the redundancy, and another (5SP) had taken action to increase redundancy compensation for all those affected. One UK interviewee (4UK) had opposed through her union a requirement to take unpaid leave, another (1UK) appealed against being made redundant three weeks before her maternity leave commenced and a third (7UK) took strike action over pay cuts.

Resistance to changes is also evident in more individual responses: the UK care worker whose strike action failed to stop the pay cuts was considering switching to less demanding supermarket work as her care job had been outsourced and hourly pay reduced from £11 to £8 per hour:

'I love my job, I love my ladies, but with this salary? I am thinking to take off my pension and go to work in a supermarket or something, I will get the same money, (7UK)'

The Spanish nurse (6SP) was reluctant to accept a 15 hour contract for fear that she might have to work extra hours for no pay but recognised she might have no option if her partner failed to find work. An academic (7SP) turned down an assistant professor job below her status, preferring unemployment and eventually taking a job abroad and commuting. Another Spanish interviewee was aware that by working freelance she was undercutting other consultants just to keep a foot in the market but felt she had little choice:

‘The public administration is outsourcing consultancy so I have some contacts and sometimes I work together with a company to get a tender and I work in it if we get it. I get some because my price is very cheap, basically I blow out prices’ (8SP)

Another response to changing employment prospects was to upgrade skills and employability. Five of the Spanish interviewees, all supported by their unemployment benefits and redundancy pay, had taken courses ranging from English language courses to masters degrees. The professional workers benefitted most because of earnings-related benefits (1SP, 8SP). However, family support became crucial in providing the care they needed to attend education:

‘... without my mother I couldn't have studied the Masters as she was taking care of her [the little daughter] when I was in the course and picking the older one from the school, at lunch time, etc.’ [1SP]

In contrast, although fewer of the UK interviewees had been unemployed for a long period, two had effectively abandoned plans to enhance employability; one (2UK) had her request turned down to do voluntary work while claiming benefits: ‘(...) they are not helpful at all, when I was in benefits I tried to do voluntary work, that it would help me to find a job. But I was not allowed, they were not going to pay my benefits if I was volunteer, it was nonsense’; while the second (6UK) had considered studying to enhance chances of returning to social work but both tuition fees and the childcare costs had proved unaffordable.

The interviewees, particularly those in the UK, also felt trapped in a budget squeeze whatever action they took. As already cited one interviewee (2UK) was very dissatisfied by the increase in her net income after taking full-time work and another (4UK) needed to work more to compensate for wage cuts but faced very high childcare costs due to reduced tax credit support (a problem also for 1UK and 6UK): ‘I am doing overtime to pay childcare but at the same time I need more money to pay for the childcare while I am doing overtime (...) I think it has no sense’ (4UK). She had therefore to rely on family support to enable her to work more hours while another professional (1UK) had to rely on her husband’s flexibility to cover the childcare to enable her to work full-time at a distance from her home. Among the Spanish interviewees there was more evidence of grandmothers stepping in but where public nurseries were available these were preferred over family provision, indicative perhaps of the trajectory away from the traditional family in urban Spain:

‘The little one was not going to the nursery because we could not enter the public one and couldn't afford a private one, so this is why my mother is taking care of her (...) Yes, sure, she is helping a lot but I think it is not fair to ask so much of her’ (1SP).

Both sets of interviews reveal the high personal costs of austerity, including the loss of employment status or career prospects, the acceptance of longer commuting or inconvenient shifts and the need for adjustments due to squeezed budgets. These adjustments varied but often involved housing decisions, foregoing independence to save money. In one case the uncertainty over career prospects even led to one interviewee abandoning plans to have children as she would be too old by the time she could achieve any security:

‘(...) I am not going to lie, we were thinking of having children a couple of years ago, I am getting old, (...). But ...how can I do this, it is not a matter of money,... how can I take such an important decision if I do not know about my life in the future’ (8SP).

Discussion and conclusions

The focus on individual experiences in a comparative context using a mixed methods approach has highlighted the real consequences of recession and austerity for women. Their stories provide more

holistic insights into how women lives are being affected and how individual women are adapting, reacting to and resisting these structural changes.

In relation to the first research question on women's integration, in neither country have women taken a contingent approach to integration. This is evident in the panel data on trends in labour market flows and in the interviewees' stories, including their engagement in resisting cuts to jobs and working conditions, particularly in the public sector. This is possibly surprising in Spain due to the more recent increase in integration but added worker effects appear strong in both countries, particularly in Spain. This is in line with the wider findings that in more developed European countries women are no longer a buffer or contingent workforce and commitment to work has been if anything intensified by recession and austerity (Bettio et al. 2013; Karamessini and Rubery 2013).

Indeed the commonalities in women's responses across the two countries are evident despite very different and diverging labour market conditions. The risk of being unemployed and remaining excluded from stable employment have increased markedly for both sexes in Spain since 2007 while in the UK employment opportunities have been maintained, particularly in low paying part-time jobs, while pay and employment protection in both private and public services has been downgraded. Thus the employment trajectories for women in the two countries, research question two, have taken quite different paths under recession and austerity involving different types of key turning points, reflecting continuing differences in the national employment models, different configurations of the crisis and different policy choices.

This increasing commitment of women to wage work evident in the labour market flow data and some interview accounts has not come about through promising new opportunities for women's work. It may thus be potentially described as evidence of resilience, that is the ability of individuals and communities to resist or absorb these shocks, but we follow Harrison (2012) in being concerned to make visible the costs of these adjustments. In exploring the third research question, that is the differences in available resources and the impact of recession and austerity policies on access to resources, three conclusions can be drawn, based on the overview of changing models and the individual women's experiences. The first is that support from all pillars has been generally downgraded, particularly from the labour market (lower employment opportunities and downgraded wages and employment protection) and from the state (stalled or reversed expansion of care services, reduced benefits especially in the UK). Family support capacities are also likely to have declined, especially as older women are returning to or staying more in employment. The second conclusion is that despite common trends towards reduced support, the changes are in some respects exacerbating and in others narrowing the gaps. For example Spain has retained the basic entitlements to unemployment benefits characteristic of an insurance-based conservative welfare state while the UK has reinforced the residual nature of its welfare system by reducing benefits, increasing means testing, applying ever stricter sanctions and partially withdrawing from its recently expanded support for household heads in low wage employment. The less conditional and stigmatised support system in Spain provided many of the interviewees with some space to pursue active strategies in response to redundancy while in the UK women had fewer options for self-development after redundancy due to low out-of-work benefits, higher pressures to take any job and higher fees for study. However, the Spanish system primarily benefitted the more advantaged due in part to earnings-related benefits. Examples where there could be argued to be more a process of convergence include the reduced employment protection for both permanent and temporary contracts in Spain, although not to the same low levels as in the UK, and the dramatic changes to collective bargaining regulations which may result in many women being excluded from collective protection in the future. Also both Spain with its strong family ties and the UK with its weak and fragmented family system are relying more on the family to fill the gaps in support. In practice women in the UK were more dependent on the state for benefits and services and thus at least in the short term less able to make good the cutbacks through family resources.

This final example leads to the third conclusion that many of the strategies used by both Spanish and UK governments to adjust to the crisis and then to impose austerity are not sustainable long term. In

Spain adjustment to the employment collapse was in part achieved at a family level first by women's reinforced labour supply and second, for those displaced from work, by both state support to enable re-orientation of employment trajectories, in line with a conservative welfare state models, and by family support, both to support expenses and to provide childcare. The UK's retreat towards a more residual welfare state has happened alongside a further trend towards downward convergence of employment conditions between the public sector and private sectors. The sustainability of both of these 'solutions' must be questioned. Women in Spain in future are likely to have less access to resources. The women sampled here are not intended to be representative of all women in Spain in the crisis as all had well established employment paths, pre crisis, making them eligible for unemployment benefits. An even smaller share of women will have good unemployment benefit entitlements in the future due to more unemployment, shorter employment records and fewer contracts offering good redundancy compensation. Access to family support or childcare may also reduce as older women- the grandmothers- enter or remain in employment. The sustainability of the UK low wage policy and reduced state support model depends on the willingness of UK workers- women and men – to accept squeezed living standards, an issue that came to the fore in the UK 2017 election when there was a stronger vote to end austerity than had been anticipated.

In both countries therefore we find a reinforcement of the trend towards long term change in gender relations and specifically in women's employment integration, operating alongside a failure to adjust the divergent but in different senses deficient national social models to the new reality of dual earner households and increasingly flexible labour contracts.

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¹ Own calculation using table [lfsa_egana] (Eurostat database) and public services defined as NACE L, M, N (public administration, education, health and social work).

² OECD family database section SF2.4 <http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>, accessed 7.12. 2016

³ <http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/oecdindicatorsofemploymentprotection.htm>, accessed 8/01/2016

⁴ The absolute falls can be calculated taking into account the overall change in employment volumes as i) temporary jobs 45% for men and 32% for women and ii) full-time jobs 26% for men and 12% for women.

⁵ Comparable data for men is available on request from the authors.

Tables

Table 1. Change to employment status and by employment form, UK and Spain.

	Population 16-64 years old	SPAIN				UK			
		1997	2007	2010	2013	1997	2007	2010	2013
Men	Activity rate	76.5	81.4	80.6	79.8	83.1	82.2	81.5	82.1
	Employment rate	64.1	76.1	64.8	59.2	76.3	77.6	74.4	75.4
	Unemployment rate	16.2	6.5	19.7	25.7	8.2	5.6	8.7	8.2
Women	Activity rate	47.9	61.9	66.3	68.7	66.9	68.9	69.3	70.9
	Employment rate	34.5	55.3	52.8	50.3	63.0	65.5	64.5	65.8
	Unemployment rate	28.1	10.7	20.3	26.8	5.8	5.0	7.0	7.2
Men	Total Employment	100.0 (71.5)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (86.4)	100.0 (77.2)	100.0 (94.2)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (97.7)	100.0 (99.6)
	Full-time employment	96.8	96.1	94.8	92.3	92.2	90.6	88.7	93.3
	Part-time employment	3.1	3.9	5.2	7.7	7.6	9.3	11.0	12.2
	Temporary employees	24.3	24.4	18.9	17.4	5.2	5.4	4.6	4.8
	Self-employed	23.2	19.4	19.2	21.0	16.3	17.9	17.2	18.4
Women	Total Employment	100.0 (54.7)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (97.3)	100.0 (91.7)	100.0 (89.3)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.2)	100.0 (102.7)
	Full-time employment	82.7	77.9	77.4	74.8	55.6	58.6	57.5	58.3
	Part-time employment	17.3	22.1	22.6	25.2	44.3	41.3	42.2	41.4
	Temporary employees	28.4	28.6	23.0	21.1	7.6	5.8	5.8	5.9
	Self-employed	15.1	11.6	11.0	12.0	7.0	7.5	8.2	8.9

Note: Second section shows employment form by total employment and data in brackets shows total employment relative to 2007=100

Source: Labour Force Survey (Eurostat)

Table 2. Social support systems in Spain and the UK and the impact of 2010-2014 austerity policies

	Spanish model		UK model	
Pillars of the social model	Before crisis	Changes under austerity	Before crisis	Changes under austerity
Labour market	Relatively strong employment protection for permanent and temporary workers. Regulated wages and hours.	Weakening of employment protection for permanent (not civil servants) and for temporary contracts plus reduced employers' social contributions for unemployed hired on permanent contracts. Policies to reduce wages in private and public sector. Freeze on hiring in public sector. New work sharing schemes using unemployment benefits.	Weak employment protection. Wages set mainly by management in private sector, by collective regulation in public sector. Opportunities to employ without guaranteed hours.	Unfair dismissal protection after 2years employment instead of one. Reduced protection for transferred staff. Wage freezes plus expenditure cuts/job losses in public sector. Extension of zero hours contracts/ low wage employment in private sector.
State	Contribution based unemployment benefits (4 months to 2 years maximum with six years employment service). Limited public care services,	Unemployment benefits largely maintained with means-tested extension. Plans to expand care services postponed.	Low contributory benefits but extensive means-tested benefits. High and expanding in-work benefits. Limited but expanding childcare, more extensive elder care.	Freezes/ cuts in real value of benefits out-of-work and in-work. Increase in benefit sanctions and caps. Reduced support for childcare and eldercare from 2010 (but some new childcare policies).
Family	Strong family model (co-residence and intra-family care services).	Employment losses may put strain on family support system.	Weak family ties – legally and in practice,	Cuts to child benefits and support for young people / families expected to fill gaps.

Source: Authors' compilation

Table 3. Employees affected by a salary decrease by sex. UK and Spain

Population aged 25-64	Spain		UK	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Pre recession 2004-7	35.8	33.2	36.0	37.5
Recession 2007-10	38.5	35.4	53.5	52.8
Austerity 2010-13	45.4	48.9	46.7	47.9

Note: Lower salary in t in comparison with t-1 (being an employee in t and t-1)

Source: EU-SILC (Eurostat) own calculation

Table. 4. Employment transitions for women in the UK and Spain, 25-64

	SPAIN			UNITED KINGDOM		
	Pre - recession	Recession	Austerity	Pre-recession	Recession	Austerity
	2004-2007	2007-2010	2010-2013	2005-2007	2007-2010*	2010-2013
Transitions from employment to unemployment or domestic tasks by employment form (%in employment form in t-1)						
Permanent to unemployment (domestic tasks)	2.1 (1.4)	3.2 (0.6)	3.4 (1.1)	0.8 (1.2)	-	1.6 (1.0)
Temporary to unemployment (domestic tasks)	2.9 (1.3)	3.7 (0.2)	4.3 (0.9)	0.0 (0.4)	-	0.2 (0.3)
Full-time to unemployment (domestic tasks)	3.7 (2.8)	5.5 (0.9)	5.9 (1.4)	0.6 (0.8)	0.7 (0.7)	1.1 (0.6)
Part-time to unemployment (domestic tasks)	1.5 (2.1)	1.9 (0.7)	2.5 (1.9)	0.2 (0.9)	0.5 (0.6)	0.9 (0.4)
Transitions from unemployment or domestic tasks to employment and by employment form(% of those in unemployment or domestic tasks in t-1)						
Unemp (domestic tasks) to employment	33.3 (9.2)	23.9 (3.9)	19.7 (6.9)	40.6 (16.1)	33.1 (20.3)	35.7 (16.1)
Unemp (domestic tasks) to permanent	8.5 (2.4)	5.6 (1.2)	4.2 (2.7)	29.2 (12.3)	-	23.7 (11.0)
Unemp (domestic tasks) to temporary	22.5 (4.9)	15.9 (1.6)	13.2 (2.5)	6.3 (1.6)	-	6.7 (1.4)
Unemp (domestic tasks) to full-time	22.3 (5.1)	16.3 (2.1)	12.4 (3.9)	18.7 (4.1)	14.4 (6.3)	14.3 (5.2)
Unemp (domestic tasks) to part-time	11 (4.0)	7.5 (1.8)	7.3 (2.9)	21.9 (12.0)	18.6 (14.0)	21.4 (10.8)
Transitions between employment forms (% of those in employment form in t-1)						
Temporary to permanent	35.7	23.4	16.1	57.6	-	67.7
Permanent to temporary	6.2	2.5	2.0	1.5	-	1.1
Part-time to full-time	32.1	24.5	27.9	14.7	15.1	14.5
Full-time to part-time	7.5	5.3	7.0	8.5	11.0	11.5

Source: EU-SILC (Eurostat) own calculation

*No data by type of contract for the UK for 2008, 2009

Table 5a Characteristics and experiences of the Spanish interviewees

	Age	Education ^a	Partner	Dependent children	Employment situation before recession-austerity	Changes in employment ^b	Change in employment status from key event to interview ^c	Resistance to employment change	Support for upskilling/ Employability ^d	Support from extended family ^e
1SP	36	High	√	2	Engineer permanent job, 5 years of seniority	RPI, W	E to SE		√	C
2SP	44	High			Teacher on succession of temporary contracts during 7 years	T, W	T to T			H
3 SP	42	Low	√		Waitress in stable job	RPI	E to U		√	
4SP	55	Low	√		Waitress - permanent job for 25years	RPI	E to U	√		
5SP	30	Medium			Clerk -permanent job	RPI, W	P to T	√	√	H
6SP	32	Medium	√	2	Nurse on succession of temporary contracts	T, W	FT to PT		√	H
7SP	42	High	√		Academic on temporary lectureship	T, W	T to overseas		√	
8SP	37	High	√	3	Research consultancy in permanent job	RPI,W	E to SE		√	C, H, O

Table 5b Characteristics and experiences of the UK interviewees

	Age	Education ^a	Partner	Dependent children	Employment situation before recession-austerity	Changes in employment ^b	Change in employment status from key event to interview ^c	Resistance to employment change	Support for upskilling/ Employability ^d	Support from extended family ^e
1UK	35	High	√	2	Career advisor , permanent job, 8 years of seniority	RPU, B	P to P	√		
2UK	35	Medium			Veterinary nurse , working on temporary contracts.	B, W	P to P		----	
3UK	32	High	√		Public health administrator , permanent job.	O, W	P to P			H
4UK	43	Medium		3	Social worker , permanent job.	W, B	P	√		
5UK	57	High			University librarian , permanent job, 6 years of seniority.	RPU	E to U			
6UK	31	High	√	1	Social worker/clerk , permanent job, 6 years of seniority	RPU	FT to PT			H
7UK	55	Low			Elder care support worker , permanent job	O, W	P to P	√		

^aLow=Lower secondary or below, Medium=Upper secondary, High=Tertiary

^b RPI=Redundant from permanent private sector job, RPU=Redundant from permanent public sector job, O= Outsourced/ transferred T=trapped in temporary job, W=Wage cut, B=Benefit cut.

^c E=Employee, SE=Self-Employment, U=Unemployment, FT=Full-time, PT= Part-time, P=Permanent, T= Temporary.

^d Support from unemployment benefit or redundancy payment ✓ or support declined ----

^e Housing =H, Childcare=C, Other=O

Figures

Figure 1: Outcomes of recession and austerity for women. Spain and the UK

Source: authors' own design