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**Urban Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in transnational perspective: reflections  
from Brazilian women in London**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the nature of urban VAWG among Brazilian migrants in London from a transnational perspective. Through adapting the continuum approach to understanding VAWG from a multi-scalar and non-hierarchical viewpoint, the paper develops a 'transnational continuum of urban VAWG' highlighting the diversity of types of GBV across individual, community, city, state and transnational scales over time. Drawing on research with Brazilians in London, VAWG emerges as multi-dimensional, complex and endemic, especially in the public sphere and with transnational continuities. Underpinning the VAWG continuum is recognition that a transnational lens is essential in understanding the causes of GBV rooted in patriarchal gender inequalities which emerge as very resistant in reconfiguring violence among Brazilians in London. In turn, these causes intersect with various risk factors many of which are linked with the transnational migrant experience, especially insecure immigration status and limited English language proficiency.

## Introduction

A key dimension of ensuring that cities are safe and inclusive revolves around understanding and addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Indeed, the repercussions of gender-based violence (GBV) in cities is to limit women's participation in key economic, social and political activities and to undermine gender justice (Chant and McIlwaine, 2016; Moser, 2016). While the exact relationship between urbanisation and VAWG is not clear-cut, women can be more likely to experience such violence in cities compared to rural areas, especially non-intimate partner violence (McIlwaine, 2013). As such, VAWG is not confined to the specific spaces of the home as is often assumed, but is also perpetrated in the public domain in workplaces, transportation systems and public spaces (Datta, 2016), as well as being socially, economically and politically motivated (Moser and McIlwaine, 2004; Wilding, 2010, Hume, 2009). Acknowledgement of the diversity of VAWG is increasingly being extended to its relational and spatial constitution. Yet, while there is recognition that it varies across different spaces and scales beyond the public/private and from the intimate to the geopolitical (Pain, 2014), there is much less empirical work that demonstrates this, especially transnationally. Linked with this, despite a growing body of research on GBV among migrants in cities in the global North (Erez et al, 2009; Rehman et al., 2013), analyses tend to focus on them *in situ* rather than as part of wider transnational networks. Again, there has been much less work on the transnational dimensions of how GBV against female migrants plays out across borders especially when flows are from the global South to North. Indeed, in the context whereby cities are part of global urban systems (Peake, 2016), it is increasingly important to make links between multiple forms of gendered marginalisation and violence across the global South with exclusions in cities of the global North, especially among migrants and/or those from minority ethnic origins (Auyero, 2011).

This paper addresses these concerns and argues for more critical reflection on and recognition of spatialities in understanding VAWG beyond the private sphere (Brickell and Maddrell, 2016). It draws empirically on recent research conducted with Brazilian migrants involving a quantitative survey with 175 women, together with 25 in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions, as well as mapping of organisations providing support for women victims-survivors of violence. Conceptually, the paper develops a 'transnational urban VAWG continuum' that builds on Kelly's (1988) seminal approach to sexual violence, reclaiming the original non-hierarchical perspective, and foregrounding the spatial dimensions of GBV against women which stretch across scales from individual to the transnational. We suggest that such a perspective is especially useful in capturing experiences of VAWG among migrant women in terms of how and why the gender ideologies underpinning it transform in multi-scalar ways. In turn, we foreground the importance of the transnational migrant experience in facilitating and reconfiguring violence.

### **Conceptualising the transnational continuum of urban Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

'Violence Against Women and Girls' denotes violence where women and girls are targeted specifically because of their gender (Watts and Zimmermann, 2002) and where the motive for the violence revolves around the exercise of social, economic or political power by men against women. It is a form of GBV where gendered power relations underpin the perpetration, but where the main victims are women (McIlwaine, 2013). As a result of decades of campaigning by women's movements, the benchmark definition enshrined in

Articles 1 and 2 of the United Nations Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (UN 1993) refers to ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life’. The key issues in this and subsequent international declarations are the emphases on VAWG beyond the private sphere, entailing physical *and* psychological violence, and VAWG as a human rights violation underpinned by systemic gendered inequalities of power (Hughes et al, 2016; Kelly, 2005, UN Women, 2015).

In part, acknowledgement of this diversity has been linked with an intersectional approach which recognises multiple forms of discrimination as causing and exacerbating GBV in relation to gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, age and citizenship (Kelly, 2013). There have also been more nuanced analyses of the inherently scalar aspects of VAWG at interpersonal, family, community, and macro-institutional levels, especially from epidemiological, public health perspectives that draw on the ecological model (Abraham and Tastsoglou, 2016; UN Women 2015). This has entailed moving away from explanations rooted in biological differences or ‘impaired masculinities’ which are assumed to be immutable, to those located within patriarchal relations (O’Toole and Schiffman, 1997). In turn, patriarchies which underlie VAWG are influenced by structural factors such as poverty, socio-economic change and armed conflict as well as citizenship (Heise and Kotsadam, 2015; McIlwaine, 2013). However, the relationships among different scales of analyses have been much more explicitly expounded through such notions as ‘intimate geopolitics’ which maps the relations between intimacy and geopolitics through a prism of violence against women and resistance (Pain and Staeheli, 2014; Pain, 2014). With some

exceptions (Faria, 2017), there is considerable scope for international migration to be more explicitly integrated into these debates, foregrounding intersecting spatial and temporal analyses as different types of gendered violence intersect (Brickell and Maddrell, 2016; see also Reina et al 2013).

The foundation for a holistic spatio-temporal perspective for understanding VAWG lies in Liz Kelly's (1988) pioneering work on a continuum of sexual violence against women. Through analysis of types of sexual violence affecting women that are underpinned by threat, intrusion, intimidation, abuse and coercion, Kelly (2013) suggests that it is important to categorise different types of sexual violence as interconnected to show how violence identified as a criminal act such as rape is reinforced by other misogynistic behaviour such as harassment. The continuum also highlights the invisibility and routinisation of extreme and everyday gender-based violence against women (Boesten, 2017). It has been especially useful in exploring gender-based violence during armed conflict (ibid; Moser, 2001) and in exploring links between 'intimate' and other forms of urban violence (Datta, 2016; also Hume, 2009; Wilding, 2010). Although Kelly (1988) was careful not to encourage the creation of hierarchies of types of sexual and related gender-based violence, others, arguably erroneously, have used continuum thinking to place more extreme forms at one end and less extreme at another (Heise et al, 1999).

However, while we endorse the utility of a continuum approach, we argue for reclaiming Kelly's original idea with respect to VAWG in general and not just sexual violence, where the continuum is not hierarchised and where one type of GBV is not more important or severe than another but interlinked. In addition, we highlight the importance of the spatial

dimensions of GBV against women which stretch from the individual and family levels to the public spheres of community within cities and states and also transnationally across borders and over time as people migrate. The 'transnational continuum of urban Violence Against Women and Girls' therefore focuses on a range of different types of VAWG and recognises that these are not continuous or sequential. In turn, it challenges the severity-leniency dichotomy and suggests that different types of GBV overlap in complex ways that are spatially extended and transnational. The 'transnational continuum of urban VAWG' approach is therefore especially useful for understanding the nature of GBV among international migrants and especially among those who move between cities of the global South and global North.

The 'transnational continuum of urban VAWG' also acknowledges that patriarchal relations underpin VAWG but that these vary in context-specific ways over space and time. Just as patriarchy itself transforms and mutates in different settings (Pessar and Mahler 2001), patriarchies 'travel' with migrants in complex ways that can facilitate the perpetration of VAWG at different points across migrant trajectories. These patriarchies and resultant gendered violence intersect with other types of everyday violence in cities, especially in poor communities (Moser and McIlwaine 2004; 2014). The transformation and mutation of GBV is especially notable among international migrants who face new gendered constraints and discriminations as they move and settle elsewhere; these can provide fertile ground for the perpetration of physical and psychological VAWG across private and public domains (Menjívar 2011; Reina et al 2013). Indeed, it is now widely acknowledged that migration can engender disempowerment among men who struggle with their deteriorating status and racism in new societies (Datta et al. 2009; Menjívar and Salcido 2002), with some resorting

to GBV in order to regain a perceived loss of power and to reinforce hegemonic masculinities (Kim, 2006). With migrant women also facing exclusion and discrimination, their ability to leave violent situations or to secure appropriate services and support can also be compromised (Dominguez and Menjivar, 2014). This vulnerability can be further exacerbated by their depiction as 'exotic others' (Beserra, 2005; Datta and McIlwaine, 2014 on Brazilians).

However, despite burgeoning work that explores the nature of GBV among international migrant women, it is notable that much of this focuses on the community, city or nation-state as a unit of analysis, neglecting transnational and scalar dimensions (Dominguez and Menjivar 2014). In turn, this work tends to focus on specific aspects of domestic and intimate partner violence, especially in delineating prevalence and state responses, or examining specific types such as honour killings (Anitha, 2008). Similarly, important research on the risk factors affecting the propensity of migrant women to experience VAWG in terms of immigration status, language, poverty and access to information, and on levels of reporting (Erez et al, 2009; Loya, 2014), again tends to focus on these women *in situ*. While some work identifies transnational relationships as influencing women's experiences (Menjivar and Salcido 2002), there remains considerable scope to foreground these transnational ties and acknowledge a more explicitly multi-scalar analysis along the lines noted by Glick-Schiller (2015: 2276) where 'local, regional, national, pan-regional and global are not separate levels of analysis but are part of mutually constituting institutional and personal networks of unequal power within which people both with and without migrant histories live their lives'. A relational perspective is therefore essential in understanding the risks and causes of GBV against

migrant women in cities of the global North, many of which also overlap with those widely identified in cities of the global South (Chant and McIlwaine, 2016; Datta, 2016).

The remainder of the paper explores the nature of VAWG among Brazilian migrants in London after an outline of the context and methodological framing.

### **Brazilians in London and VAWG: context and methodological framework**

Brazilian migration to the UK has increased markedly since the late 1990s. While some Brazilians migrated in the 1970s, flows burgeoned after 2000 linked with neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s leading to increasing inequalities that prompted much movement. This has continued despite an economic boom and subsequent collapse (Sheringham, 2013). While estimates vary, the census of 2011 reported 52,000 Brazilians in the UK, representing an increase from 8,000 in 2001, with 61% concentrated in London. In terms of the profile of Brazilians in London, it is a feminised, youthful population who are well-educated and from middle or lower-middle class backgrounds, with most migrating in search of better economic opportunities and to study (Evans et al 2011, 2015). However, although 42% have some form of tertiary education (according to the census), a quarter work in elementary (manual, low-paid work) jobs. This is mainly because of English language difficulties with one in five having problems with English. Almost a third have an EU passport with 14% holding British passports. However, these figures hide the undocumented population which comprises as much as a third (Evans et al. 2011), with women more likely to have irregular immigration status than men (42% compared to 34%) (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016).

Methodologically, the research on which the paper is based was conducted in 2016 and 2017 and entailed 12 interviews with service providers providing assistance for Brazilian

migrants in London. These included generic organisations that support those who suffer violence, as well as those who provide services for women in general or specifically for Latin American and Brazilian women (Evans and McIlwaine, 2017). An online survey was also conducted with 175 Brazilian women which addressed issues such as whether GBV had been experienced and if so, the types, frequency and spaces where it occurred in the UK and Brazil and the nature of the perpetrators. While there are limitations to such a survey including it only being completed by those with access to a computer or being more educated, it allowed women to carry it out anonymously and thus potentially to disclose sensitive information about violence without fear. Indeed, the women who completed it tended to be relatively young (74% aged under 50), well-educated (72% with a university degree) and ethnically white (73% identifying as such). Many were from São Paulo (43%) and were settled in London (41% having lived in the city for more than 10 years). Almost 70% engaged in paid work, with more than half employed in professional and associated jobs. Two thirds had entered the UK with temporary visas, but almost 80% had permanent residence. While this profile reflects more privilege than has been found in other research (Evans et al., 2015), the in-depth interviews provided insights from women who were less fortunate, with many working in low-paid sectors and having insecure immigration status. In total, 25 testimonial interviews were conducted, 20 with women who were victims-survivors and who had sought help from a migrant organisation (Latin American Women's Rights Service - LAWRS), and five recruited randomly through Brazilian networks and who had not necessarily experienced GBV. Finally, six focus groups were conducted, five with women and one with men (a total of 16 people) using various forms of participatory appraisal methods to explore the types, causes and consequences and reporting of VAWG (Moser and McIlwaine, 2004). All the interviews with women victims-survivors and all the female focus

groups were carried out at the migrant organisation in Portuguese with a trained counsellor on hand in case the situation was distressing (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018).

In terms of briefly contextualising the nature of VAWG among migrant and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women in the UK, while research has burgeoned since 2000, most focuses on domestic violence among South Asians (Gill and Rehman, 2004) with little work with other groups, with even less among Latin Americans (but see McIlwaine and Carlisle, 2011). As for incidence, among women in general in the UK, in 2012, 1.2 million women experienced domestic abuse with 60,000 being raped and two women a week being killed by their current or former partner (Rights of Women, 2013). The actual rates are likely to be higher because of routine under-reporting. While evidence is scarce, migrant and BME women are thought to experience higher rates. In qualitative work among Spanish-speaking Latin Americans, for example, one in four women reported intimate partner violence (McIlwaine and Carlisle, 2011). Yet, levels of reporting are thought to be even lower than among women as a whole. While women who have experienced domestic violence make 11 contacts with agencies before getting help, BME women have to make 17 before they can secure assistance (Anitha 2008: 197). This is exacerbated by insecure immigration status; in an interview with LAWRS, it was estimated that undocumented Latin American women are assaulted 60 times before their first call to the police compared to 35 assaults among women in general. The paper now turns to the specific case of Brazilian women and their experiences of VAWG.

### **Diversity across the transnational continuum of urban VAWG among Brazilians in London**

As noted above, the continuum of urban VAWG highlights that such violence is not deviant or episodic. Instead, it is routine and normalised for many women and girls with different types often merging and overlapping across various spaces and among individual women over time. Among Brazilian women in London, overall incidence of VAWG was alarmingly high with four out of five (82%) in the survey suffering some form of GBV over their life-course. The most common broad category of VAWG was psychological/emotional violence (48%), followed by physical violence (38%), with 14% experiencing sexual violence. In terms of specific types, unwelcome physical contact was the commonest specific form of violence, followed by physical assault, and being humiliated or suffering discrimination (see Table 1). It is also important to note that many women in the interviews spoke about how they were not aware that emotional abuse was a form of violence before contacting a support organisation, and that once acknowledged, they began to realise that it was frequently more difficult to deal with. For example, 34-year-old Flavia noted:<sup>i</sup>

One day you wake up and you discover that you have been sleeping with a monster  
... I'd rather have been slapped in the face than to have heard and seen all that I saw;  
it hurt much more ... I didn't know till then that this was DV [domestic violence]. To  
my mind, DV was only physical.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

In terms of perpetrators, two-thirds (66%) of VAWG was perpetrated by people known to women. Indeed, almost a quarter (23%) was by an intimate partner, with bosses and colleagues in the workplace responsible for more than a quarter (26%) (the rest was committed by friends [8%] and family members [2%]). This highlights the importance of not assuming that VAWG only occurs in domestic spaces of the home given that only 30% of all violence reported in London occurred in this sphere (see Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Yet, and being careful not to create a hierarchy of VAWG, violence in the home was often discussed as extremely severe and complex. For example, 36-year-old Paula from Curitiba, lived with her Brazilian partner who had an alcohol dependency problem (see below) and constantly abused her verbally:

He'd call me a bitch and a slut, "You don't do anything, you're trash! Grab your garbage and get out of my house", "You're a waste of space! You mean nothing to me, you're only here because of my daughter, otherwise you'd be on the streets!"

However, Paula's partner also raped her on a regular basis and forced her to engage in a range of sexual acts against her will:

He would be verbally aggressive and then he would want to have sex and I'd say no. I would put the baby on the bed with me to prevent him from coming, but he'd pick

up the baby and put her on the sofa ... Then he'd come over, he'd rip my clothes off and wanted to have anal sex with me.

The vast majority of coercion and control took place in the home on the part of intimate partners (88%) and mainly involved preventing women from exercising their freedom in terms of going out, working or getting involved in education. Valentina spoke of how her husband stopped her from learning English as a way of manipulating her; she said that he realised that she would be more independent and therefore threatening to him, if she knew the language. Manipulation often revolved around financial abuse with many complaining about partners who did not work and who stole money from them. Miriam, 46, recalled how her husband had only worked for 2 months during the 14 years they had been in London. When she was in hospital for her daughter's birth, he went into their bank account and withdrew £15,000 which he never returned.

Among the women who had experienced physical assault, much of this took place in the home and mainly, although not exclusively by intimate partners. One of the most severe cases reported was of Bianca, 70, who recalled how her ex-husband attacked her:

He landed with his knee on my back, grabbed my leg and bent it backwards behind my back, twisting my knee ... Crack! I'll never forget this noise, not ever. I thought, "He's finished me. My life is over." ... Well, when he twisted my knee, he twisted the main artery and there was blood going into my lungs! The doctor told me I'd been very lucky, that if it had been in the heart, I would have died instantly.

While most VAWG in the home was among conjugal partners (75%), fathers and step-fathers were also violent towards against daughters (see also below). For example, 53-year-old Carolina discussed how her ex-husband attacked their youngest daughter, breaking her nose with a punch that 'sent her flying over the sofa'.

However, reflecting that a quarter of perpetrators were work-based, it is not surprising that the single most common space where VAWG occurred was in the workplace (23%) (see also Table 2). This took many forms although much of it was sexual harassment as in the case of Isabel who worked at a hotel. She spoke of how a male colleague tried to sexually assault her; he pushed her into an empty guest room, holding her arms in a lock and fastening his legs to hers to immobilise her, and then threw her on top of a bed, throttling her whilst trying to have sex with her. Fortunately, she managed to escape.

Other spaces outside the home where VAWG was perpetrated included café and bars (16%), transport (10%) and public areas (10%) (Table 2). Harassment extended to public officials as Camila recalled how she was harassed by an immigration officer at a London airport:

After I'd been interviewed for 3 hours, I was released to go get my luggage. An immigration officer accompanied me into the lift to take me to where my luggage was. Inside the lift he said, "Wow, you've got beautiful breasts. Can I touch them?" Something like that. I looked at him and thought, "I've just arrived, and the harassment has already started?" I told him no and felt afraid inside the lift.

Therefore, VAWG among Brazilian women in London was hugely variegated taking multiple and intersecting forms across private/public spaces, but with most occurring outside the home, which is important in terms of thinking about such violence in cities more widely. However, individual women experienced multiple types of violence over time across their life-course. One woman, 40-year-old Sofia suffered the following: in the home she had been beaten, locked up, had her hair pulled, been kicked, raped, defamed, harassed, controlled, coerced and financially abused by her husband who had also neglected their two children, spanked them and verbally abused them. In the public sphere, she had been sexually harassed by a fellow churchgoer.

### **Transnationality of the continuum of urban VAWG among Brazilians in London**

Experiences of VAWG among Brazilian women are intricately mediated by their transnational lives and many experienced continuities in violence as they migrated as gender ideologies transformed (Menjívar and Salcido 2002; McIlwaine and Carlisle 2011). While the vast majority of women experienced GBV in Brazil before migrating (77%), half (52%) also experienced it again in London. In Brazil, 42% of women reported experiences of physical violence, followed by emotional (36%), and sexual (22%). These include a variety of specific types, the most common of which was unwanted physical contact, followed by verbal abuse of a sexual nature, physical assault, and verbal abuse relating to appearance or character (see Table 1). As in London, most women knew the perpetrator with 20% being identified as friends, another 20% as work colleagues and bosses, 16% who were intimate partners, and 14% who were family members. The vast majority of VAWG experienced in Brazil was in the public sphere (73%) rather than the home (27%) (see also Krenzinger et al 2018).<sup>ii</sup> In relation to workplace VAWG in Brazil, 62-year-old Elisa spoke of its normalisation

in the IT and banking sectors in the 1980s and 1990s: 'It was considered normal to be harassed by the boss, by colleagues, to be accosted, to be handled, which is never accidental ... that happened so many, many, many times, I lost count.' Much of this violence was sexual as in Camila's case where she narrowly escaped being raped by her boss in the office where she worked; he locked her in a room and then threw on her onto a desk and tried to have sex with her before she managed to escape. Many women also reported being accosted in the street. Patricia, 27 and from São Paulo, was walking on the roadside when she was accosted by a man on a motorbike who assaulted her sexually, tearing her clothes without taking his helmet off. Within the home in Brazil, sexual abuse on the part of uncles and other family members was very common with about eight out of 25 interviewees reporting being subjected to this, often at a very young age (as young as 4 or 5) and invariably scarring the women for life (see below).

This picture highlights the continuities in types of violence committed against women and girls which stretch across the continuum from the intimate scale of individuals and families, to communities, nations and across borders, taking multiple and interrelated forms (UN Women 2015; see also Moser 2001). From the perspective of Brazilian women themselves, some thought that VAWG continued or intensified as they moved with 44% perceiving there to be as much or VAWG in London as there was in Brazil or more. Yet, another 43% felt that it ameliorated somewhat identifying it as less frequent in London. Flavia, for example, felt that VAWG was more normalised in Brazil:

Because it's culturally accepted, we think that men flirting with you is part of the culture and sometimes we don't see this as harassment. Lack of information is

another issue too ... in Brazil, you have to live it to learn about it and sometimes even living it you don't have the awareness, you don't recognise it. So, I think in Brazil it happens much more frequently; women are not as respected.

However, there were also transnational links between VAWG in Brazil and the UK, with women's migration trajectories reflecting different paths into and out of violence, especially intimate partner violence, with continuities and discontinuities playing out transnationally. One common pattern was women fleeing Brazil to escape violence perpetrated by partners, even if this did not always guarantee freedom from violence. For example, Juliana, 36, moved to London in 2007 to escape her abusive husband in Brazil. While she managed to work and save enough to apply for Italian citizenship and subsequently divorce him, she then met another Brazilian man in London who was also physically and emotionally abusive ending in Juliana obtaining a non-molestation order banning him from going near her or their baby.

In other cases, VAWG intensified as a result of migrating *with* the perpetrator as in Cristina's case. Cristina, 37 and from São Paulo had experienced emotional abuse throughout her marriage in Brazil where her intensely jealous husband restricted her movement and threatened her with death. In 2009, they moved to London in a bid to save their marriage but the violence worsened as he throttled her, threatened her with knives and attempted to sexually assault her. After receiving support from British social services, they separated and were going through divorce proceedings and a custody battle.

Some migrant women also experienced VAWG for the first time after migrating. Flavia, 34, moved to London in 2003 in search of work after which she met an Italian man in 2004 and they married in Brazil in 2005. After moving briefly to Italy to open a bar which subsequently failed, on return, her husband worked long hours in a restaurant and began an affair with a Brazilian woman working as an escort accompanied by years of verbal abuse which ended in divorce in 2015.

Another key aspect of transnational VAWG that emerged among Brazilian migrants in London was human trafficking and modern slavery. The 2015 Modern Slavery Act in the UK defines it as slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking.

While trafficking can entail movement across borders, this is not always the case; a person becomes a victim of trafficking not because of the journey they undertake but because of the exploitation they experience during or at the end of that journey. They can therefore end-up in a trafficked situation even if they do not enter the country against their will.

Many of the cases uncovered in the current research were exploitation within the Brazilian community. For example, Sabrina, 45 from Northeast Brazil had secured a job as a nanny with a Brazilian family in London through a relative. While the family organised her paperwork and travel, on arrival, Sabrina discovered that she not only had to care for the two children, do housework, but also to work alongside her boss who was employed as a cleaner and a courier for a restaurant every day, cleaning from 5-9am and in the restaurant 7-10pm, earning only £100 per week. Sabrina was initially trapped as the family had confiscated her passport and her visa had long expired. To make this worse, her boss started to sexually harass her, leading to her escape eventually with the help of friends. Indeed, while these experiences show how VAWG occurs across various scales and types of violence

that blur and overlap, the examples also illustrate how women also resist, however small or large these acts might be; they leave partners, they leave their country, they report to the police, they escape, albeit often in difficult circumstances (Pain, 2014; Faria, 2017; see also below).

### **Travelling patriarchies and transnational migration as causes and risks of VAWG among Brazilians in London**

The underlying causal and risk mechanisms that lead to VAWG underpin the transnational continuum of urban VAWG. On one hand, we concur that patriarchal relations and deep-seated gender inequalities undergird the perpetration of VAWG which intersect and operate at different levels (UN Women, 2015). Yet on the other, we argue that it is essential to include the transnational scale when considering international migrants given that patriarchal relations travel, persist and transform across borders (McIlwaine 2010). GBV is therefore rooted in patriarchal ideologies that revolve around socio-cultural valorisations of the hegemonic power of men manifested through male superiority coupled with women being attributed lower status, privilege and access to resources than men. These are ensured through various processes that reinforce these norms such as crises of masculinity and relationship conflict which are further exacerbated by a range of risk factors (Jewkes 2002; UN Women 2015). Yet these gender ideologies change as migrants move across different cultures, societies and economies (Reina et al 2013). Existing research on the nature of gender identities and ideologies among Latin Americans in London reveals a complex picture where on one hand, Latin American women's lives have improved as they have gained economic independence through entering the labour market, often on an equal footing with their male counterparts, yet this can create problems and precipitate GBV

(McIlwaine 2010; also Menjívar and Salcido 2002). Among Brazilians in London and as noted in the cases of Cristina and Flavia above, similar issues emerged as a service provider noted:

Women manage to get work here much more easily. And they earn a lot more. So, that makes them independent, and the man is at home. Then she asks why he is not working, and he asks for her money, and that is the beginning of the violence.

Therefore, many men perceive these transformations as challenges to hegemonic masculinity regimes that they aspired to prior to migrating, reacting violently when challenged (Datta and McIlwaine, 2014). Male migrants also often struggle to deal with working in catering and cleaning which they see as transgressive, as well as resenting the support that some women secure from the British state (Datta et al, 2009). Brazilian women spoke of how this was rooted in patriarchal relations and the specific form it takes within Latin American cultures through machismo which reflects male ideological and physical control over women with historical foundations in colonialism (Chant, 1991; Reina et al 2013). One woman in a focus group reflected on machismo and violence among Brazilians:

Women as property. Men think they are the authority at home so they won't accept that the women rebel against them, so they treat them as an object 'Shut up, I am boss here', 'I command, you obey!'... And intolerance, because if I don't accept it, he won't put up with it and then becomes violent.

Although some women commented that gender inequalities were more marked in Brazil than in London, others said there was little difference. Another woman from a focus group

noted: 'Men remain very much *machista* in this respect. Over there and here. It is the same'.

And another discussed how *machismo* and misogyny become disguised in London:

In Brazil, it is all out in the open. It is common to see men humiliating and swearing at women everywhere. It is a cultural thing, the disrespect for women. It happens here too, of course, but this disrespect is disguised.

Patriarchal relations therefore provided the bedrock for precipitating VAWG, but these also intersect with other risk factors experienced by migrants that are both structural and individual. One of the main structural risk factors was insecure immigration status that was often used as a form of gendered manipulation (McIlwaine 2015; Menjívar and Salcido 2002; O'Neal and Beckman 2016; Reina et al 2013). Several service providers noted, for example, that reporting to immigration authorities becomes a tool of abuse as one reported: 'if the woman is in this country illegally, and the husband is legal, he will do whatever he wants with her, because she is at his mercy.' Another transnational aspect of these processes was women ending up in abusive relationships because of marrying for immigration documents. One woman, Miriam, who had been undocumented in London for five years when she met a Portuguese man whom she married partly for immigration security but who subsequently abused her:

So, if you think for whatever reason you will marry someone who has documents, you need to be aware, because at the beginning it's a fairy tale, and after while they start to crush you.

In the context where levels of reporting and disclosure of VAWG are low among Brazilians (56% do not disclose to anyone), insecure immigration status makes this much less likely, exacerbated further by lack of English language proficiency. Valentina explained how being a migrant who did not speak English made her experiences of VAWG much worse than in Brazil:

‘We are far from our country, don't speak the language, don't have the professions that we would have in our country, we don't belong to society, we're very much on the margins.’

While migrant status is an important dimension of the intersectional risk of experiencing VAWG, this is also exacerbated by race and ethnicity (Imkaan, 2017). For example, women of mixed race were more likely to experience violence (64%) than white women (44%) (few black and Asian women were included in the survey). This was linked with other structural risks manifest in the insidious stereotyping of Brazilian women in London who were subject to complex racialization and sexualisation of their identities (see also Beserra, 2005; Margolis, 2013). Many felt that such intersectional essentialising, mainly by British men (not exclusively), made VAWG more likely to occur. One survey respondent viewed sexual stereotyping as underpinning the verbal abuse she experienced:

What I feel, and Brazilian women whom I know also tell the same, is that when a [man] asks where we are from, and we say that we are Brazilian, the looks and attitudes change. It has happened to me that I was measured up from head to toe and thought to be 'easy', 'sexy', or a 'sex worker'.

Such intersectional exploitation often manifests in the workplace, especially when migrants have insecure immigration status. This leads to their concentration in certain sectors of the economy such as domestic and sex work where GBV is widespread as noted by a service provider:

[undocumented women] are far more vulnerable to further exploitation ... for example, if they work cash-in-hand ... [they] are not going to be paid Minimum Wage, if somebody knows that they can get away with exploiting; ... those women are far more vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, domestic exploitation, sexual slavery.

While these structural risk factors are directly linked with the migrant transnational experience, other triggers that have been identified elsewhere (Heise and Kotsadam 2015; McIlwaine 2013), also affected Brazilian women in London. Male substance abuse was commonly linked with the intensification of many types of GBV as noted by Paula who spoke of how alcohol and drugs were linked to the severe violence she suffered in Brazil and the UK; in London her partner would drink every day and routinely subject her to physical assault, emotional abuse and sexual violence (see also Flake and Forste, 2006). Pregnancy

and miscarriage also emerged as a trigger; Juliana discussed how when she was pregnant, her husband became progressively violent, starting with verbal abuse and culminating in physical assault after the baby was born. Finally, and returning to the transnational nature of VAWG, sexual abuse as a child and especially incestuous sexual violence emerged as central to the vulnerability of many women as migrants in London as women struggle to deal with the lifelong consequences.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has explored the nature of urban VAWG among Brazilian migrants in London from a transnational perspective. Through reclaiming the continuum approach to understanding VAWG pioneered by Kelly (1988), we argue for adapting this from a multi-scalar viewpoint (Glick-Schiller, 2015) in order to capture the experiences of migrants from the global South living in cities of the global North. We address this conceptually through developing a ‘transnational continuum of urban VAWG’ which highlights the diversity of types of GBV across multiple spaces and scales from the individual, intimate sphere of the home to the community and public spheres within cities and beyond transnationally. While types of VAWG interrelate in complex ways over space with one type not more or less severe than another, they also intersect over time as women can experience multiple types of GBV over their life course. In providing a critical multi-scalar and especially transnational perspective on understandings of VAWG in cities, this paper makes important contributions to existing scalar analyses that tend to ignore the transnational and the experiences of international migrants (Heise et al., 1999; UN Women, 2015). The experiences of VAWG among Brazilian migrants in London provide empirical insights into these processes. Brazilian women

experienced extremely high levels of endemic, overlapping and multi-dimensional types VAWG across private and public spheres over their life course. Furthermore, VAWG often prompted them to migrate, and there were marked continuities across space between Brazil and the UK with more than half of women experiencing GBV in both countries as well as types specific to migrant women such as trafficking and modern slavery.

Underpinning the VAWG continuum is recognition that a transnational lens is essential in understanding the underlying causes rooted in 'travelling' patriarchies and changing gender norms and risk factors. Among Brazilians, gender inequalities were found to be very resistant as well as taking different forms in London. While some of the risk factors that emerged as important have been identified more broadly, such as male substance and alcohol abuse, others were associated with the transnational migrant experience, especially insecure immigration status and language proficiency in London (see also O'Neal and Beckman 2016; Reina et al 2013). Other transnational risk factors that have emerged and which have been less acknowledged to date include incestuous sexual abuse experienced by women in childhood whose effects continued over their life course and transnationally. Therefore, in developing a transnational continuum for understanding VAWG in cities of the global North and South in today's world where urban transformations and international migration are increasingly interconnected, we have tried to capture the multiplicity and complexity of the phenomenon that is also endemic and universal while also being context-specific and occurring in multi-scalar ways.

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Table 1: Category and types of VAWG experienced by Brazilian women in London and in Brazil before migration

Main category of VAWG	% of category of VAWG identified		Specific type of VAWG	% of specific types of VAWG identified*	
	London (N=84)	Brazil (N=134)		London (N=84)	Brazil (N=134)
<b>Physical</b>	38	42	Unwanted physical contact	42	70
			Physical assault	33	35
			Throttling	4	5
			Burning	1	2
			Cutting/stabbing	1	1
<b>Emotional/ psychological</b>	48	36	Humiliating	36	31
			Commenting on appearance/character	29	34
			Threatening with death/injury	19	25
			Controlling	18	8
<b>Sexual</b>	14	22	Forced to participate in sexual act	9	25
	100	100	Unwelcome comments on sex	21	36

\* denotes multiple answers

Source: Authors' survey

Table 2: Type of gender-based violence by public/private sphere and specific place in London and in Brazil prior to migration

Public/private sphere	Specific place	Experienced GBV			
		London		Brazil	
		N = 84	%	N = 134	%
<b>Public sphere</b>					
	Cafés and bars	17	16	43	14
	Shops/markets	3	3	13	4
	School/University	2	2	27	9
	Public areas	11	10	56	18
	Transport	11	10	35	11
	Workplace	25	23	35	11
	Any other areas	6	6	24	8
<b>Private sphere</b>					
	Home	24	22	47	15
	Somebody's else home	9	8	37	12
<b>Total</b>		108*	100	317*	100

\* denotes multiple answers

Source: Authors' survey

<sup>i</sup> All the names used in the paper are pseudonyms. The women's names were not recorded at any point of the research process beyond the initial contact and setting-up of the interview.

<sup>ii</sup> This research was also conducted using a similar methodology in the favela of Maré in Rio de Janeiro. The findings of this research have been reported elsewhere (Krenzinger et al 2018).