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Feminised precarity among onward migrants in Europe: reflections from Latin

Americans in London

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Abstract

Increasingly turbulent forms of mobilities are emerging in Europe as diverse groups of migrants arrive, settle and move on. This paper explores this phenomenon of onward migration arguing that this is underpinned by various forms of feminised precarity.

Challenging existing work on the feminisation of precarity and migration that usually focuses on specific workers in situ, this paper explores the experiences of onward Latin American migrants (OLAs) who have moved to London from Southern Europe in a holistic manner. It develops the notion of “feminised onward precarity” to capture how female and male migrants experience precarious living and working conditions that reflect devaluation and exploitation in intersectional ways. In highlighting the interdependence of in/mobility and feminised precarity enacted through the relational lens of onward migration, the paper provides important insights into the increasingly complex and feminised lives of migrants as they move (or not) across diverse spatio-temporal contexts.

Keywords: onward migration, feminisation, precarity, Latin Americans, London, Southern Europe

Introduction

Increasingly turbulent forms of mobilities are emerging in Europe as diverse groups of migrants arrive, settle and move on. Precarity lies at the heart of these mobilities and immobilities which are underpinned by labour exploitation of migrants which is itself feminized. Such exploitation intensifies when gender is further mediated intersectionally through class, race, ethnicity, nationality and other precarious migrant identities (Vallejo and Canizales 2016; Waite 2009). Precarity is not just a condition of labour, but rather a wider process of precarious life with important gendered dimensions (Butler 2009). Examination of the feminisation of precarity and migration, however, tends to focus on the experiences of specific groups of female migrant workers, such as domestic and/or care workers, many of whom have temporary and/or insecure immigration status, but often to the neglect of male migrants (Goldring and Landolt 2013; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014). In turn, precarious migrant lives are often explored *in situ* rather than as part of wider processes of mobilities. However, precarity not only underpins mobility as a cause or an outcome of it, but it is also enacted through it (Rojas Wiesner and Winton 2018). As mobilities and immobilities become ever more complex as people engage in various forms of entrapment, transit, secondary and onward migration, it is especially important to consider how precarity travels and transforms across spatio-temporal contexts within and beyond labour markets from a gendered perspective that includes women's and men's experiences. Indeed, despite a huge body of work on the ways in which gender norms and identities transfigure in complex ways as people move (Pessar and Mahler 2006), there remains little work on the links with precarity.

In addressing these issues in relation to Latin Americans migrating onwards (denoted as Onward Latin Americans or OLAs) from their homelands, to Southern Europe and then to

the United Kingdom (UK), I argue that precarity is itself deeply feminised in intersectional ways that affect women's (and men's) lives and work in different places along their onward journey. This draws on the complex ways that the "feminisation" of labour, reflecting the shift towards insecure, devalued and exploitative forms of work for women and men (Vosko 2010), can also be linked with migrant precarity (Casas-Cortés 2014; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014) and intersections with other social identities, especially among Latin Americans (Valdez 2016; Wilson 2016). Yet, it is essential to conceptualise feminised precarity as fundamentally relational and processual in how it is embedded in all aspects of migrants' lives across multiple spaces and places as they move onwards, rather than as a static condition associated purely with labour market experiences. Indeed, it is the focus on onward migration as it links with feminised precarity as an inherently dynamic and interdependent, if also fragmented, process that enables this conceptualisation.

The paper begins with a conceptual exploration of the feminised and intersectional nature of precarity and precariousness in relation to migration and relational mobilities and immobilities. It then situates the research empirically through an outline of the situation of these issues among onward Latin Americans (OLAs) moving from Southern Europe to London as well as the methodological framework. The paper continues with a discussion of "feminised onward precarity" across the fragmented migrant journey from Latin America, to Southern Europe, and onwards to the UK. It concludes by outlining how the paper contributes to debates around emerging notions of onward precarities, mobilities/immobilities and the feminisation of work and life through the notion of "feminised onward precarity".

Feminising precarity and onward migration in conceptual perspective

Precarity has been subject to multiple delineations and critique for several decades revolving around insecurity, uncertainty and risk. While it has been invoked in a range of settings historically and across space (Betti 2018), two camps of thinking have emerged distinguishing between ‘precarious work and precarious lives’ (Lewis et al. 2015; Strauss 2018). The former is often associated with Bourdieu’s research on workers in Algeria in the 1960s and extrapolated to the casualization of work in 1990s France (Millar 2017). Precarity has since been closely linked with specific labour conditions underpinning neoliberal restructuring (Kalleberg 2009), as well as with Standing’s (2011) evocation of the “precariat” as a class. Yet there have been critiques of these positions around how precarity is not a specific outcome of post-Fordist labour relations (Waite 2009), that the precariat is not an undifferentiated class, and that precarity has long been associated with marginality in the global South (Munck 2013).

Of importance here have been criticisms from feminist scholarship highlighting how labour markets have become more feminised in contexts of neoliberalization and where such feminisation has become emblematic of exploitative and precarious labour conditions in general (Casas-Cortés 2014; Federici 2006). Precarious jobs that deviate from so-called ‘Standard Employment Relations’ (SER) and characterised by low pay, lack of social protection and exploitation are viewed as feminised even if undertaken by men (Vosko 2010). These processes also reflect the elision of productive and reproductive realms whereby paid work is viewed as becoming more feminised, in part taking on more affective-relational components associated with women’s unpaid reproductive roles (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014).

Central to these debates is the ways in which precarization links not only with the feminisation of employment and the inherent devaluation of such work but also the

emergence of “migrant divisions of labour”. This is where migrants are employed on a flexible and exploitative basis when required by capital (Wills et al. 2010) often in conditions perceived as “unfree” (Strauss 2018) and which are themselves feminised even if undertaken by men. Such “precarious labour relations” (Chan et al. 2019), intensify when migrants have insecure immigration status and where sexism, racism and other forms of intersectional oppressions interrelate to create “hyper-precarity” (Lewis et al. 2015). Most research on precarity among migrants focuses on women’s experiences in domestic and care work highlighting how the invisible and irregular nature of these feminised occupations engenders exploitative working conditions, as well as deep-seated racialisation and essentialisation (Goldring and Landolt 2013). Yet there remains much scope to explore how female *and* male migrants negotiate feminising labour processes and how these intersect with their other identities.

Analyses of the wider implications of precarious employment relate to the second camp of conceptualisations of precarity. Derived from an explicitly feminist poststructuralist stance, it revolves around Butler’s (2009) delineation of a precarious life as suffering from diminishing networks of support and a bodily exposure to injury, violence and death. It also moves analyses beyond labour markets to focus on vulnerabilities and the inability to predict (Ettlinger 2007). This approach is thus inherently relational and ontological with vulnerabilities differentially played out across time, space and place mediated by various social identities including gender, race, class, sexuality and so on (Johnston 2018). The explicit ways that precarity is feminised therefore has resonance for migrants who are especially vulnerable to discrimination in all realms of their precarious lives.

Migration and mobilities also disrupt and/or reinforce gendered power relations in ways that are relevant to understanding feminised processes of precarity. While there is some evidence that migration can challenge gender divisions in the domestic sphere and generate some individual empowerment through accessing independent incomes, the concentrations of migrant women in feminised and exploitative occupations undermines lasting transformation (Herrera 2013; Pessar and Mahler 2006). Yet men's roles in reconstructing gender asymmetries are also central to understanding these processes especially when men end-up working in feminised jobs and living in precarious conditions (Datta et al. 2009; McIlwaine 2010). It is also essential to acknowledge that various forms of patriarchies back home may themselves be the product of sexist and racist colonial legacies which end-up being reproduced as people migrate (Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou 2015; Gutierrez-Rodriguez 2014). Mobilities and immobilities can therefore disrupt and reinforce such colonial and pre-colonial power geometries.

Also underpinning understandings of the dynamic and processual nature of onward precarity is a relational mobilities lens linked with the mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry 2006). Not only are mobilities now recognised as part of everyday life enacted across multiple scales, but they are deeply relational in terms of producing and reflecting power relations among individuals as well as being interdependent with wider structural inequalities (Adey 2010). Of relevance here is that exercising mobilities in relation to migration is not inherently celebratory but just as likely to generate precarity. Furthermore, immobilities and fixity are as important in understanding migrant's experiences of class, racial and gender inequalities (Rogaly 2015), especially when linked to economic crises (Bermúdez and Oso 2018). Onward, secondary and/or remigration can be understood as part of this relational mobilities approach whereby movements of people are multidirectional and often reactive to

wider structural economic exigencies (Mas Giralt 2017). While research on these movements has provided important insights into onward migration as a coping mechanism in contexts of precarity and across migrants' life course (Ahrens et al. 2016; Kelly and Hedman 2016; Ramos 2018), there is scope to explore the ways in which they are imbued with power relations in relation to feminised intersectionalities within a complex spatio-temporal context (McIlwaine and Bunge 2019) and across the life course (Findlay et al. 2015). More explicitly, I develop "feminised onward precarity" to encompass the ways in which the dynamics of in/mobility mediate precarity in the lives of many contemporary migrants alongside other conditions in societies of origin, reception and transnational spaces. It reflects how onward migrants move across borders in fractal ways over time, negotiating multiple and differentially exploitative structural migration and labour regimes. These processes can lead to a feminisation and devaluing of the labour and lives of both female and male migrants which contributes to precarity and which are underpinned by intersectional and gendered power inequalities. "Feminised onward precarity" does not entail uniformly negative processes (Waite 2009), in that there may be some constrained transformation among some migrants according to gender, race, nationality, class position, and sexuality, as they negotiate structural inequalities and their individual subjecthood in nuanced ways in order to challenge their oppression over space, time and life course (Bailey 2009; Rogaly 2015).

The Latin American community in London: background and methodological framework

This paper draws on my long-standing engagement since 2004 with the Latin American community in London which has entailed academic research and voluntary activities with three migrant organisations as a trustee and advisor since 2006. The research discussed here was carried out in partnership with the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS), a

feminist migrant organisation providing services for and promoting empowerment among Latin American women in London. It comprises two main studies; one which was the first large-scale project to provide population estimates and a socio-economic profile of Latin Americans living in London (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker, 2011); the other which focused on providing updates on the estimates and profile from the 2011 census, but also on the phenomenon of onward migration (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). The empirical data reported here is mainly derived from a survey conducted in 2014 and 2015 with 400 OLAs in London who had previously lived in another European country, together with 28 qualitative interviews with OLAs and 4 representatives from organisations serving the population, and an additional 10 interviews with onward migrants interviewed in 2010 as part of the first study (a total of 38 interviews with OLAs, 4 with informants and a survey with 400 OLAs). In addition to my participation, the survey and interviews in both studies were primarily conducted by Latin American researchers from a range of nationalities and with different networks. The interviews included 19 women and 19 men from Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Peru, Cuba, Guatemala, Uruguay and the Dominican Republic. The majority were aged in the 30s and 40s and worked in various occupations but with concentrations in office cleaning, chefs/cooks, porters and retail assistants. In terms of the profile of the OLAs in the survey, the main nationalities were Colombians (28 per cent), Ecuadorians (22 per cent), Brazilians (15 per cent) and Peruvians (9 per cent) with the remainder from a range of other nationalities. Among these, 80 per cent moved from Spain to the UK. They were less well-educated than the wider Latin American population although over a third had been educated at university-level even if half spoke little or no English. The vast majority were of working age (96 per cent) with two-thirds aged between 30 and 49 years old, and more than half of the survey sample were women (57 per cent).

The in-depth interviews were biographical and explored migration trajectories using an oral history approach (see also Wills et al. 2010). The questions addressed the reasons prompting people's migration in the different locations, the challenges and benefits they experienced at each stage, the ways they coped with these challenges, how their lives compared and how they felt their lives as women and men differed in each place. People were also asked to discuss their experiences of housing and their perceptions of home and belonging in Europe and the UK. In the survey and the OLA interviews, participants were asked to recall events that occurred in the past which by its nature is dependent on their memories. While migrant narratives of past events are open to multiple and differing interpretations, memory has long been viewed as central to thinking about diasporic communities. Memories are embedded in migrant identities individually and collectively and may be linked with nostalgia that is restorative and/or traumatic as well as evoking connections with home and community (Blunt 2007). For migrant women, it has been noted that recalling memories can facilitate resistance mechanisms in relation to self-discovery and community-building in positive and negative ways (Hua 2005). It is therefore important to recognise that the material from the survey and the interviews relates to a series of interpretative narratives of people's recall of their lives over time and space which are imbued by memories. While this epistemological approach is widely accepted in much work on migration, especially from a life course perspective and within the mobilities paradigm (Findlay et al. 2015), there is also potential to critique these views as biased or inaccurate when using a more positivist lens. The survey data was analysed using SPSS while the interviews were transcribed and coded based on deductive and inductive codes (coding software was not used given that the transcripts were in a mixture of English and Spanish).

In terms of the background of Latin Americans in London, they have resided in relatively large numbers since the 1970s. While the earliest arrived mainly as exiles, Colombians pioneered settlement via work permits in the 1970s. They were joined by Ecuadorians, Peruvians, Bolivians and Brazilians, especially after 2000. While the onward movement of Latin Americans has been noted since 2000, this increased after 2008 after the global recession took its toll in Southern Europe. In the UK, there were an estimated 250,000 in 2013, of which 60 per cent or 145,000 lived in London, making them the second fastest growing non-EU migrant population. The community is internally diverse along racial, class and nationality grounds, although Brazilians and Colombians are the two largest groups. Women comprised more than half of all Latin Americans in London (53 percent), were youthful, well-educated but struggled with speaking English according to the 2011 census. Despite high employment levels, this led to concentrations in elementary occupations, often in cleaning (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016).

Mapping feminised onward precarity among Latin American migrants

The transnational ties between Latin America and Europe have long reflected the exercise of intersectional power through multiple spatialities and temporalities. The diversity of contemporary migration flows to Europe is marked by the multiple routes undertaken but also the nationalities, motivations and social positions of migrants who are often at different stages of their migratory careers and life course (McIlwaine and Ryburn 2019). While the gendered nature of Latin American migration to Europe has been outlined in a range of contexts including among domestic workers (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014), through their political participation (Bermudez 2016; McIlwaine and Bermudez 2016), their experiences of gender-based violence (McIlwaine and Evans 2020) and inter-generational relations (Wright 2018), there remains scope to examine how onward migration journeys are feminised in

relation to precarity among women and men. The following analysis pays particular attention to the factors which mediate conditions of onward precarity across places as well as considering the different stages of the journeys to capture the processual and temporal dimensions.

Feminised precarious departures from Latin America

Precarious conditions related to complex interrelations between economic inequalities, social unrest and political violence have long prompted Latin Americans to leave, traditionally for the United States, but more recently for Europe. These flows have been increasingly feminised with women acting as the pioneers with men as husbands, partners and sons following (Bermudez and Oso 2018). Drawing on the empirical data, it emerged that economic precarity underpinned peoples' departure, especially among men (identified by 54 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women in the survey). Men tended to complain about economic precarity through job insecurity and low-pay, such as 43-year-old Tito from Bolivia who had worked as an accountant yet was never able to earn enough to ensure a stable lifestyle, thus prompting his move to Spain. Women's economic precarity was mostly linked with lack of social protection and discrimination such as 37-year-old Helena from Ecuador who worked in a machine-knitting workshop where she made sweaters for ten hours a day. Not only did she lack job insecurity, but she suffered ill-health during her pregnancy and threats from her boss that he would dismiss her once the baby was born, leading her to leave in search of a better life.

Economic precarity intersected with social vulnerabilities and networks for women and men in Latin America. Yet women were more likely to identify social factors in prompting them to leave (26 per cent compared to 17 per cent of men), and to discuss other

issues that were key to social precarity such as family conflict and gender-based violence which led them to flee abroad (McIlwaine and Evans 2020). For example, 60-year-old Mariana from Ecuador left her husband, six children and her own small trading business because of relationship conflicts: “I was the first to decide to leave my country to look for new horizons because my relationship with my husband was very bad and I had suffered a lot of mistreatment, infidelities on his part and so I decided to leave him, to go to another country”. Other women spoke of the need to escape societal restrictions which had made them feel insecure and socially precarious such as 46-year-old Miriam from Ecuador who faced social opprobrium from her conservative family on getting divorced twice by the age of 20. Despite her professional job as a social worker, she felt unable to “live comfortably ... in such a macho society” with so much social pressure.

Political instability also underpinned precarity, especially among Colombians and among men, who often spoke of the armed conflict as making their lives untenable back home such as 42-year-old Nicolás whose fruit and vegetable trading business was impossible run where he had lived and where he feared for his life: “I worked in a conflict zone where the armed groups and government were fighting; I decided to move to Spain to find another environment that was more tranquil.” Overall, the multiple and multidimensional precarities that contributed to women and men’s departures from Latin America were rooted in a range of vulnerabilities that led to the devaluing of labour and social and political lives in ways that can be described as feminised. While precarious economic circumstances and insecurities often lay at the root of why women and men decided to leave Latin America, social vulnerabilities were more likely to prompt women to leave and political exigencies more likely to encourage men to leave. These intersected with people’s life courses with many beginning their journeys in their late 20s and 30s when they

realised that they needed enhanced economic and social opportunities for themselves and their families.

Feminised precarious journeys to Southern Europe

As Latin Americans move to Southern Europe their feminised precarity takes different forms as they negotiate downward occupational mobility, immigration status, and housing problems (Mas Giralt 2017; Ramos 2018). Migrants face new challenges where race, nationality and class exploitation compound their feminised precarity in more intersectional ways through becoming inserted into hierarchies of citizenship. While Spain was the most common destination among OLAs surveyed (80 per cent) and favoured by Colombians, Bolivians, Ecuadorians and Peruvians, 9 per cent went to Italy with 5 per cent moving to Portugal, mainly Brazilians. In Spain, Latin Americans tended to concentrate in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, facilitated by labour demand for men in construction and domestic and elder care for women, together with ease of entry through being able to claim ancestral citizenship rights and various bilateral immigration policies (McIlwaine 2012, 2015).

Economic precarity among Latin Americans was widespread on arrival in Southern Europe related to downward occupational mobility (Stanek and Veira 2012). Despite high education levels and the fact that many had professional jobs in Latin America (32 per cent of women and 27 per cent of men), most ended-up working in heavily gender and racially segregated low-status jobs because of their inability to transfer qualifications and racism. Indeed, only 15 per cent of men and 14 percent of women worked in professional jobs in Europe. In contrast, and reflecting marked gender divisions of labour, a third of women worked in cleaning (20 per cent) and caring (12 per cent) with men concentrated in construction (22 per cent). Much of this work was precarious with few opportunities for

improvement until settled status was attained and not always even then. For example, 38-year-old Jimena from Brazil who worked as a nursery teacher back home, was only able to get a part-time and poorly paid job as a babysitter on arrival. After working as a maid for four years, she found a higher status clerical job only once she obtained her Spanish documents. However, she could not work as a teacher because her Brazilian qualifications were not recognised and because of racism: “the Spanish discriminate a lot against immigrants, and especially, if you don’t speak their language, it’s as if you did not even exist”. She also reported a specific aspect of feminised precarity experienced by Brazilian women who were often perceived as hyper-sexualized linked with colonial racialized and gendered exoticization of identities among the Spanish who “have this paradigm, Brazilian women, they see us as, well always as sexual objects ... you have to be careful not to dress sensually” (Malheiros and Padilla 2015). Sexualised racism was also identified among other Latin Americans. Esmeralda, 39, from Colombia had also been a teacher prior to moving to Spain and worked in various cleaning and factory jobs before securing legal status in 2002. While she was able to obtain a job in a cafeteria, it was impossible to get white-collar work because of persistent racialization of Latin Americans as manual workers.

“For the Spanish, we are not educated and are only manual labour to clean, to work in factories ... Once I went to a factory to leave my CV for a receptionist job and they said the cleaning job interviews were the day before.”

Race, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality also converged to exclude LGBTQ+ migrants. One such case was that of 34-year-old Juan who had been an agro-industrialist in Venezuela where he had a partner and two children. He had worked in a confectionary factory in Spain and although reported feeling welcomed, also experienced racism: “there

was a lot of xenophobia against us; people believed that in Latin America we walk with loincloth”. Juan also came out as gay in Spain where he met and married his partner; he said he was treated much better than he would have been in Venezuela where same-sex marriage is still illegal, but that he still felt that his identity as queer *and* Venezuelan led to ostracism in Spain (although attitudes to homosexuality in Latin American are themselves a product of colonial relations and power geometries - Wieringa and Sívori 2013).

Intersectional racism that underpinned feminised precarity was exacerbated by the economic recession which affected Southern Europe and migrants especially hard (McIlwaine 2012; Ramos 2018). While some Latin Americans returned home, many decided to stay. Although their onward movement was not planned, especially among women (only 4 per cent intended to move on when they first arrived compared with 9 per cent of men), fragile economic conditions back home led many to remain in Europe but to move to other countries less affected by the crisis. These movements relate to wider outflows from Spain to Northern European countries as a result of the crisis forming part of renewed intra-EU flows from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘core’. Decisions to move onwards to London were again prompted mainly by economic precarity, especially among men (72 per cent of men and 67 per cent of women), but was also associated with joining family and friends in London, particularly among women (49 per cent of women and 36 per cent of men). Housing precarity was also precipitated by recession and the collapse in the mortgage market (Mas Giralt 2017), as Teodora, 32, from the Dominican Republic noted:

“Everything was bankrupt; there was no construction work, no jobs and no way out of the ruin ... when his [husband] state benefits ran out we had no choice, we were

desperate, we came to London. We couldn't go home as it was worse and we'd lost our flat in Spain."

While the crisis affected all migrants, men were especially affected by the collapse of the construction sector with women experiencing more precarious working conditions in their existing jobs (Bermudez and Oso, 2018). Reflecting feminised tropes around gendered expectations, women were more likely to discuss how they made decisions as a way of ensuring the future security of their families and linked with life course factors. For instance, Valeria, 32, who was Peruvian and whose three green grocer shops went bankrupt in Spain, decided not to return home but to go to London: "so that my children could learn more English ... become bilingual, to improve their prospects".

Feminised precarity in Spain was therefore mainly characterised by labour market insecurity where "migrant divisions of labour" reflected an intensification of intersectional exploitation along gender, racial and class and nationality grounds linked to occupational deskilling underpinned by racism (Stanek and Veira 2012). Yet Latin Americans in Spain also managed to negotiate their new lives through changing jobs, securing Spanish citizenship and "staying put" rather than returning home (Bermudez and Oso 2018). While migration brought hardships, it also had benefits, especially among women. On one hand, some women managed to improve earning power and access to resources compared with back home; yet on the other, their restricted gendered and racialized occupational options entailed downward occupational mobility exacerbated by systemic sexualized racism. For some men too, migration to Spain represented economic opportunities provided through improved income generation even if their status was compromised or, as in the case of Juan, being able to express their sexual orientation freely. For women, life in Spain tended to

ensure greater personal freedoms even if structural transformations in gender norms were limited (see Moser and Horn 2015). Yet migrants' lives were again disrupted with their move to London to which the discussion now turns.

Onwards and downwards: intensification of feminised precarity in London

Feminised precarity among OLAs became ever more complex and intersectional as they moved to London. While mobility reflected important efforts to confront their precarity, usually facilitated by possession of an EU passport (held by 87 per cent of men and 85 per cent of women according to the survey) which conferred residence and workers' rights, other challenges emerged. Even with an EU passport, the move to London often entailed further deterioration in occupational mobility, coupled with difficulties in speaking English and housing problems (Mas Giralt 2017; Ramos 2018). Compared to Spain where some social mobility was possible, the move was often a shock as noted by 46-year-old Miriam from Ecuador: "It was a total reversal, I felt like I had migrated for the first time, I felt deaf and mute because of the language and was unable to get a professional job".

Precarious working conditions were the norm for OLAs on arrival in London with two-thirds working in cleaning, especially men (67 per cent compared with 63 per cent of women). Much of this was contract cleaning of offices for large multinational companies dominated by sub-contracted working relations characterised by exploitative conditions, low-pay and fragmented working hours (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker 2011; Wills et al. 2010). These precarious conditions meant that more than a third had more than one job to make ends meet, especially women; half of all women had more than two jobs (compared with 39 per cent of men). For example, 32-year-old Helena from Ecuador spoke of how she managed multiple jobs:

“I worked in lots of houses. And I also got a job in a pizzeria from Monday to Saturday until 2 in the morning. During the week I worked in houses until 5pm. I went to another restaurant from 6pm until closing sometimes ... at 5 I usually had to go to work again in offices. I rarely saw my daughter, but I had debts to pay [linked with a mortgage default]”.

Although most OLAs earned more than the minimum wage, women were more likely to identify problems in the workplace (48 per cent of women and 41 per cent of men). This was mainly having to do the work of others for no pay as well as being denied sick and holiday leave/pay. Soraya, 26, from Bolivia who worked in office cleaning jobs summed this up: “I think Latinos are discriminated against in work. Some bosses treat us like slaves, they always put so much pressure on us in the workplace, to do more for less”. These conditions reflect how OLAs faced a series of “unfreedoms” in their work (Strauss and McGrath 2017), but also how discourses of decoloniality underpin their experiences of feminised precarity as migrant women are often forced to work in exploitative conditions that are akin to those created by colonisation processes (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014). Men also experienced feminised and dehumanising precarity in their cleaning work exacerbated by their struggle to work in what they viewed as transgressively feminised spaces (Datta et al. 2009); Danilo, 44 from Ecuador spoke of his four office cleaning jobs that only allowed him to survive and pay off his debts in Spain where his wife and daughter still lived: “I feel that I’m worked like a slave sometimes; and the cleaning is worse than my construction work in Spain in the eyes of society, it’s inferior”. It was also not just the jobs in the lowest echelons of the labour market which were precarious as discussed by Luciana from Argentina who was a waitress in a hotel:

“I signed a contract for 45 hours per week but then they gave me my rota which had 12 and 14 hour days, which were double days ... when I received my wages, they hadn’t added the extra hours ... When I complained, they told me that’s how it works in all restaurants in London”.

This begs the question as to why these conditions in London were more precarious than those experienced in Spain even though most OLAs had legal rights to work through their EU citizenship and because they had accumulated resources and skills over time since they left Latin America. The answer lies primarily in lack of English language competence meaning that OLAs had few choices but to work in cleaning and other elementary jobs where English was not required (Berg 2018). Although learning English was an important reason to move to London (to learn “*el inglés puro*” or “pure English”—McIlwaine 2012), it then severely undermined their quality of life contributing fundamentally to their precarity, especially among women who were less likely to speak no English at all (26 per cent compared with 18 per cent of men). Although the availability of jobs that did not require English meant that OLAs could secure work easily, facilitated by co-ethnic networks, once in the workplace or when they tried to move into more public-facing jobs, they encountered severe problems. For example, 26-year-old Karla from Brazil who had moved from Italy, worked in a fast food restaurant even though her English was limited. While at first she was pleased to get the job, she soon realised that her English language competency exposed her to abuse: “I think, when you don't know the local language, I was blamed for much that went wrong at work, like: ‘Blame it on the newcomer here who does not know what she is saying’”. Not surprisingly, almost 90 per cent of OLAs identified lack of English language as the main problem affecting them in London.

The dynamics of feminised onward precarity thus partly reflect similar processes identified among Latin Americans in Spain where their essentialization as manual workers was linked with their limited “institutional cultural capital” normally accumulated through using educational qualifications, or other embodied capital linked with gender, race or ethnicity (McIlwaine 2012 drawing on Bourdieu). Yet in Spain there were more options to overcome this over time whereas in London, precarity intensified, in effect replacing one form of precarity (insecure immigration status) for another (language proficiency) further exacerbated by indebtedness (McIlwaine and Bunge 2019). In effect, “occupational mobility power” (Alberti 2014) entailing moving from one job to another was limited. Yet it was not absent, with women more likely than men to move out of cleaning over time even if both found it difficult to secure jobs reflecting their qualifications (according to the in-depth interviews). Often the only option was to establish their own business although this was affected by access to financial capital and indebtedness (more than 35 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women were still paying off debts accrued in Spain). Only 10 per cent of women and 5 percent of men were self-employed, with most running small retail outlets in shopping centres catering to Latin Americans such as Elephant and Castle and Seven Sisters markets (Román-Velázquez and Hill 2015), which have now been earmarked for demolition and regeneration, thus putting the livelihoods of many Latin Americans at risk.

As in Spain, feminised onward precarity in London included challenges in securing decent housing. Almost half of OLAs shared their accommodation with other families or individuals, especially men, and almost one-third reported that their housing was overcrowded, especially women, as Valeria from Peru stated: “We lived in one room the four of us [on arrival] ... We shared a bathroom and a kitchen with other families; there

were vermin, small rats and it was terrible.” Miguel, 49, from Ecuador blamed this on intersections between language difficulties and working conditions:

“When you arrive you don’t have anywhere to live and because of language problems you end-up having to live in over-crowded conditions in a room with all the family or with people that you don’t know ... There are many people who are trapped in cleaning jobs and they stay trapped because they work with other Latinos”.

Wider societal discrimination and exclusion were also commonly reported among OLAs in London, although less than in Spain contributing to precarity. A third felt there was discrimination against Latin Americans, especially women (37 per cent compared with 31 per cent of men) although, somewhat paradoxically, more than two-thirds spoke of being happy in London (compared with 59 per cent of men). With their transnational as well as temporal optic, OLAs repeatedly reflected that there was less racism in London than in Spain as Teodora stated: “I like London much more than Madrid because English people are not racist. Spanish people are racist; they push you in the buses and call you ‘black whore’.” Cesar, 27, from Bolivia similarly stated: ‘There [Spain], people don’t like Latinos, they think that we are the worst, that we are the ogres of the world’. The multiple and intersecting exclusions experienced by OLAs in London were also tempered by other, albeit constrained, benefits; although women faced significant problems in London beyond those identified above in terms of gender-based violence in both the home and public sphere (McIlwaine and Evans 2020), several also spoke of freedom from conservative societal mores compared with Spain and back home as Esmeralda who had been a teacher in Colombia stated:

“I could never have had my family and a job back home because of *machismo*, I couldn’t have put up with it ... but in Spain they don’t like pregnant women working either ... but here there is more equality, only cleaning jobs, but more equality”.

Yet it is also important not to essentialise gender norms in Latin America or in Spain as several OLAs spoke of always sharing their conjugal lives on a relatively equal basis regardless of where they lived such as Nicolás from Colombia:

“back home she worked, I worked, but we shared tasks. I’ve never agreed that a woman only does the house thing ... When people emigrate sometimes the macho feels bad because the woman says ‘no I’m not going to stay in the kitchen’ when she works, like in Colombia”.

Conclusions

Onward migration is becoming ever more important in Europe as diverse groups of migrants move or settle depending on the structural, institutional and familial pressures they face (Engbersen et al. 2017). This paper contributes to the debates around the nature of onward migration and the ways it is underpinned by various forms of precarity (Mas Giralt 2017). In contrast to previous work, it explored the nature of onward precarity from a specifically gendered and relational mobilities perspective to encompass not only how women *and* men experienced precarious living and working, but also how precarity has been feminised through a process of devaluation and exploitation of insecure forms of work and wider living conditions (Vosko 2010; Casas-Cortes 2014) across multiple places and over time. Focusing on Latin American migrants who have moved from their homelands to Southern Europe and

onwards to London, I developed the notion of “feminised onward precarity” which draws on previous work (McIlwaine and Bunge 2019) but places greater emphasis on the inherent feminisation processes embedded within these in/mobilities across diverse spatio-temporal contexts. “Feminised onward precarity” thus provides a relational analytical focus on how precarity is enacted through in/mobility and the gendered and feminised dimensions of these dynamics. It focuses on how certain structural and life course factors mediate onward precarity across place as well as considering the different stages of the journeys to capture the processual and temporal dimensions. While feminised onward precarity often intensifies as migrants move, this is not always uniformly negative in that there are some opportunities for improvements in their lives within wider structures of exploitation. For some Latin American onward migrant women and men, while “feminised onward precarity” was deeply imbued with gendered and racialized hierarchies of exploitation that devalued migrants (Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015), there was some rupturing of power geometries, even if it was only possible at the individual rather than structural or collective level. For OLAs in London, however, the future remains uncertain as the implications of Brexit loom large over their lives. On arrival in London, many at least felt secure in their EU citizenship which is now being fundamentally questioned. It may be that their precarity intensifies and further feminises as their immigration status as EU nationals is threatened.

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