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NOT AS SAFE AS HOUSES: EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN

Cathy McIlwaine

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that international migration processes can profoundly shape and be shaped by intersectional gendered power relations (Herrera 2013). Negotiations around gender norms and practices play out transnationally and locally across multiple spheres from the state to labour markets but are crucially centred within households. Yet the nature of such negotiations varies intersectionally, but also according to whether women move independently or with partners, as workers or for marriage, or as victims/survivors of trafficking and smuggling (Yeoh and Ramdas, 2014). In destination contexts, migrant households can act as arenas of refuge from wider societal hostilities and discrimination as well as places where some re-negotiation of gender norms might occur (Boehm, 2008). Yet, they may also become domains where hierarchies of gendered power, wider forms of structural violence linked to migration regimes, and unfree labour relationships within households may lead to violence and abuse (Huang and Yeoh, 2007). Although migrant women are vulnerable to multiple forms of domestic violence, the incidence of abuse is not always routinely higher than for non-migrants. Indeed, there are dangers in assuming that domestic violence is higher among migrants as this is often linked with arguments that blame such violence on the cultures of the societies from where women migrate. This neglects the gendered, structural and institutional inequalities of immigration processes that contribute to the incidence of abuse that are experienced in intersectional ways (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). These wider structures of power and control influence whether and how women seek support as well as the nature of assistance available for survivors by the state and civil society (Erez et al., 2009). Bearing these issues in mind, this chapter explores a series of key debates around delineating domestic abuse among international migrants, also exploring its prevalence, its diversity and multidimensionality, the core drivers underlying its incidence, as well as barriers to reporting. While the discussion draws on debates among international migrants in a wide range of contexts, it also draws empirically where relevant on recent research with international migrant women in London.¹

¹ This research comprises two main projects. The first, referred to here as the 'Brazilian migrant project/study', entailed research exploring the nature, causes and responses to Violence Against Women and Girls among Brazilian migrant women in London and among women residing in the favela of Maré in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and conducted between 2016 and 2018 (the latter is not discussed here – see Krenzinger et al., 2018). In London, a survey with 175 Brazilian women was

Situating Domestic Violence Among International Migrant Women

According to the 1993 UN Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women, domestic violence is a specific form of gender-based violence against women and girls. Here, violence refers broadly to physical, sexual or psychological acts of harm including the threat of violence, coercion and arbitrary detention in private and public spheres that include the family, community and the state. The declaration also identifies dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women as well as violence related to exploitation (UN Women, 2015). Most domestic violence against women and girls takes psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional forms within the home perpetrated by male intimate partners. However, it can also be committed by other household members of different genders and sexualities including parents, siblings, grandparents, extended kin as well as employers. Femicide, which refers to the intentional murder of women because they are women, is also a key dimension of domestic violence. While femicides are often associated with the public sphere, the WHO (2012) also identifies 'intimate femicide' where a woman is killed by a former or current intimate partner; 'honour'-related murders relating to murders of a girl or woman by a family member because of an assumed transgression to family reputation; and dowry femicide where newly married women are killed over conflicts linked with dowries by family members.

Domestic violence, as a specific form of gender-based violence, can also be perpetrated against men or those with gender-nonconforming identities. However, most research focuses on heterosexual, cis-gender women as they disproportionately experience such violence at the hands of men. Yet it is important to be aware of heterosexism and to acknowledge that LGBTQI+ migrants also experience domestic violence, even if this is only recently being acknowledged and reported. Indeed, there is a lack of research on the experiences of domestic violence among these groups in general and especially among migrants, with most work focusing instead on the structural violence exercised by the state through immigration control that creates precarious legal status (Lee, 2019 on queer and trans migrants in Canada).

carried out, as well as 25 in-depth interviews, 6 focus groups (5 with women and 1 with men), and interviews with 12 service providers (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018; McIlwaine et al., 2020). The second, referred to here as the 'London migrant project/study', aimed to examine the lives of migrant women who had experienced gender-based violence and insecure immigration status as part of a wider campaign, Step Up Migrant Women. It involved a survey with 50 migrant women from 22 countries, most of whom used services of specialist migrant organisations, semi-structured interviews with 11 migrant women, and a further 10 with representatives from organisations supporting them, together with 2 focus groups (1 with representatives and 1 with service users) (McIlwaine et al., 2019). I also make reference to another study, 'Towards Visibility' which explored the experiences of Latin American (female and male) migrants who had migrated to London from Latin America via other countries and mainly from Spain. This entailed a survey with 250 migrants from a range of Latin American countries and 20 in-depth interviews (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; 2019; McIlwaine, 2020).

Certain types of migrant women have been identified as especially vulnerable to gender-based violence such as refugees and migrant workers and especially domestic workers according to the Beijing Platform for Action, with child, early and forced marriage as well as trafficking identified as specific forms of violence against women in themselves (UN Women 2015). Different forms of violence are also associated with specific migrant and minoritised groups as forms of 'culturally specific abuse'. For example, so-called 'honour-based violence' that is usually associated with families of South Asian origin is defined as violence perpetrated against women where the main justification 'is the protection of a value system predicated on norms and traditions concerned with 'honour'' (Gill and Brah, 2014: 73). The term itself is widely contested as a misnomer as it is deeply dishonourable to perpetrate violence and because of the culturally essentialist connotations. This relates to the fact that it is all too easy to blame an amorphous idea of 'culture' as a cause of gender-based violence when in reality it is often linked with the ways that gender inequalities intersect with structural exclusions and discrimination in cultural ways (see below).

Indeed, debates around what constitutes domestic violence vary across cultures and countries, often bolstered by prejudicial perceptions of migrants and minoritized groups (Gonçalves and Matos, 2017). It is important to acknowledge migrant women's experiences of domestic violence across a transnational continuum and across their lifecourse rather than focus only on their destination contexts. Experiences back home may influence how women delineate domestic violence, especially in relation to psychological violence and coercion. For example, research from my Brazilian migrant project in London has shown that women had been socialised into accepting certain types of abuse (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018). For example, Valentina, who was in her 50s and who had settled in London in 2007 noted: 'I didn't even realise that it was violence because as I was used to hearing the stories from my grandmother, from my mother, my cousins and my sisters who went through this; for me that wasn't even abuse, it was normal, for me it was part of every marriage.' It was often only through engagements with service providers when women sought help for other issues that they began to realise they were suffering from domestic violence (McIlwaine and Evans, 2020).

However, care must be taken in situating domestic violence as an individual behavioural issue and portraying women as helpless victims (Burman and Chantler, 2005). Indeed, an individualist approach entails a damaging tendency to naturalise and pathologise experiences of gendered violence against migrant and minoritized women as being inherent to their home and/or group cultures in religious, ethnic, racial and nationality terms (Erez et al., 2009). While there is an ongoing debate around the role of culture in explaining domestic violence, there is very limited evidence that certain ethnic or national cultures generate and facilitate intimate partner violence (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002). Of course, there are different social and cultural geographies of domestic violence rooted within

variations in gendered power inequalities and which influence experiences and help-seeking (Reina et al., 2013). In turn, understanding the cultures of migrant communities can be extremely valuable in supporting women (O'Neal and Beckman, 2016). However, 'blaming' certain cultures for being more prone to violence ignores how migrants and ethnic groups also experience systemic material inequalities, gender, racial and ethnic discrimination which contributes to its preponderance among certain groups. It can also further marginalise migrant women as 'victim others' while stigmatising migrant men as 'barbaric others'. Furthermore, the emphasis on certain types of violence, such as honour killings, can shift attention away from other forms of more commonly occurring types of gender-based violence, thus perpetuating their normalisation (Montoya and Rolandsen Agustín, 2013).

A culturally essentialist interpretation of domestic violence therefore underplays the complex challenges faced by migrant women through their location within a matrix of power from an intersectional viewpoint (Collins, 2009). Indeed, intersectionality has taken centre stage in many recent analyses of women migrants, such that they have been identified as potentially 'the new quintessential intersectional subject' (Bastia, 2014: 240). Crenshaw's (1991) classic work on intersectionality explicitly refers to immigration status as influencing experiences of domestic violence among African American women in the United States as part of their racial identity. In turn, this situates women's oppression at the intersections of racial, ethnic, class, sexual orientation, among other systems of power. Yet, while this work has been crucial in acknowledging the diversity of women's experiences of oppression and domestic violence, some have emphasised the need to separate immigration status and racial identity and to focus on social location over individual identities (Sokoloff, 2008). This has revolved around the importance of challenging the notion that immigration is a variable within constructing a racial identity, but rather is part of a complex process of subordination that fundamentally shapes domestic violence (Erez et al. 2009). Therefore, migrant women have diverse racial, ethnic, class and sexual orientation identities that are further affected by the ways in which migration itself can be a violent process. Indeed, domestic violence is part of a wider system of violence that shapes family life for migrant women who experience abuse within their communities and from wider society (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). In turn, while cultural differences should be acknowledged, they do not necessarily explain domestic violence among immigrant women who are situated within wider processes of colonialism, state power and global migration dynamics (Sokoloff, 2008) (as elaborated below).

Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among Migrant Women

Migrant women, like non-migrant women, experience domestic violence through an intersectional prism. While both groups of women may experience a range of diverse and overlapping types of domestic violence over their life-course, there remains considerable debate whether such violence is more prevalent among migrant communities compared with their non-migrant counterparts. Indeed, it is essential not to 'hyper-fixate on gendered

violence as representative of these communities' (Fluri and Piedalue 2017: 541). Meaningful comparisons between migrant and non-migrant communities are difficult to carry out in light of under-reporting and related data collection challenges. Also, many surveys among migrant communities focus only on intimate partner violence, are often small-scale, and do not systematically compare migrants' experiences with the population as a whole. Furthermore, there is much greater focus on migrants from various countries of the global South who have migrated to North America and Europe with much less attention paid to South-South and intra-regional movements. Given the challenges, it is not surprising that rates of prevalence reflect huge variations. For example, a systematic review of 24 studies between 2003 and 2013 on intimate partner violence victimisation among immigrant women in the United States and Europe reported prevalence ranging from between 17 percent and 70.5 percent (Gonçalves and Matos, 2016).

Within these broad patterns, there are also variations according to country and types of violence. For example, a study in Spain among 1607 migrant women from Ecuador, Morocco and Romania, showed that 16 percent of Ecuadorian, 11 percent of Moroccan and 9 percent of Romanian women experienced intimate partner violence in the previous year (Torrubiano-Dominguez and Vives-Cases 2013). In terms of types of violence, psychological intimate partner violence tends to be the most widely experienced among migrants. For instance, a study among 495 women of Korean descent in the United States, 27 percent reported psychological aggression by a partner over the past year, with 17 reporting sexual coercion, 2 percent experiencing physical assault, and 1 percent another injury (Liles et al. 2012). In my own research on the Brazilian migrant project in London with 175 women, 82 percent had experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime, with almost half suffering emotional/psychological violence, followed by physical (38 percent), and sexual violence (14 percent) (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018). Almost a third of this was domestic violence (30 percent), with a quarter perpetrated by an intimate partner (McIlwaine and Evans, 2020). In my London migrant project with 50 migrant women survivors with insecure immigration status in London from 22 different countries, 78 percent experienced psychological violence within the home, 68 percent suffered physical violence perpetrated by intimate partners, 62 percent reported financial abuse, and 46 percent sexual violence (McIlwaine et al., 2019).

However, the key debate is not so much about variances in prevalence among migrant women from different countries and nationalities, but whether they are more likely to experience domestic violence compared with those born in destination contexts. It is often claimed that migrant women are more vulnerable to domestic violence than non-migrants; for example, it has been reported in the European context that rates of gendered violence are higher among non-citizen women (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). However, the opposite is the case in other contexts. For example, Wright and Benson (2010) explore the notion of the 'immigrant or Latino paradox' at the neighbourhood level in Chicago, noting that those with higher concentrations of immigrants have lower incidence

of intimate partner violence. In another study comparing Mexican migrants across generations in El Paso, Texas, family violence was substantially lower among first generation Mexicans compared with 1.5, second and third generation Americans (Curry et al., 2018). Yet it is also important to note that although incidence is not necessarily higher, women's risks and vulnerabilities are exacerbated by inequalities inherent in the immigration system (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002). These are further compounded by a host of factors around language competencies, insecure immigration status, social isolation, institutional racism, lack of welfare support and fear of reporting that can make migrant women more unsafe vis-à-vis their non-migrant counterparts (O'Neill and Beckman, 2016). In addition, while the degree of violence may be similar among migrant and non-migrant groups, the severity and multiplicity of violence may be more marked (Sokoloff, 2008), and the intersections with other forms of structural and symbolic violence more intense (Dominguez and Menjívar, 2014).

Diversities of Domestic Violence Among Migrant Women

Turning to the diverse nature of domestic violence among migrant women, as noted above, domestic abuse extends beyond intimate partner violence to include that perpetrated by other household members and can occur beyond the confines of the home. Certain types of migration are themselves forms of gendered violence and/or create circumstances that make women migrants particularly vulnerable to domestic violence. While the discussion focuses on the multiplicity of the types of domestic violence experienced by migrant women, their multiple identities and social locations must also be taken into account in mutually intersecting ways from an intersectional perspective.

Focusing first on domestic violence experienced by migrant women in general who have moved either independently or as part of wider family migration processes among co-nationals, a key characteristic is its multiplicity. The incidence of domestic violence is rarely a one-off occurrence (Walby and Towers, 2017), and invariably entails a series of complex overlapping events and types that take place over space, across borders and over time. Returning to my Brazilian migrant project in London, a huge range of different types of gender-based violence were identified, much of which was based in the home. In five focus groups conducted with 15 women and 6 men, a total of 18 different types of gendered violence were identified, most of which was intimate partner violence. These included forced detention, jealousy, defamation, stalking, moral aggression, femicide, financial abuse and gender stereotyping. Interviews with women revealed similar diversity. One woman, Cristina, 37, originally from São Paulo and who arrived in London in 2009, spoke of how she had experienced 21 different types, including being kicked, slapped, throttled, controlled, defamed, stalked and threatened with a knife and scissors, all by her former partner (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018).

Even within one broad type of domestic violence such as psychological abuse, there are multiple forms among migrant women survivors from different contexts and backgrounds and nationalities (Erez et al. 2009; Pearce and Sokoloff, 2013). For example, in my London migrant project, a huge range of types of psychological domestic violence were identified, revolving mainly around coercive control and manipulation linked to imprisonment at home, domestic servitude, and verbal abuse. For example, Mona, 41, from Libya (with a Moroccan passport) was prevented by her husband from going out with her friends, speaking with her family and leaving home without the Islamic headscarf. These types of violence were often reinforced through 'tech abuse' where technologies are exploited to harass or control women such as inserting spyware into mobile phones (McIlwaine et al., 2019).

Psychological violence intersects with other forms of violence, especially economic and financial abuse, which was experienced by 62 percent of women in my London migrant study. This invariably entailed partners refusing to give any money to their wives and children for food and rent, controlling or refusing access to bank accounts or welfare benefits, as well as taking out loans in women's names without their knowledge. Estela, 31, from Mexico, for example, arrived in London with a domestic service visa but was coerced into marrying her boyfriend when she fell pregnant in order to remain in the country when her employers refused to renew her visa. Estela spoke of how he withheld welfare support earmarked for them as a family: 'He was being paid housing benefit at that time and spent all the money ... I had to pay all the rent and was frustrated with the fact that I have to pay all the expenses and have the baby' (McIlwaine et al., 2019: 8). Economic abuse and control of family finances as core dimensions of intimate partner violence were also reported among West African migrants in Australia (Ogunsiji et al., 2012).

Sexual violence is another important type of abuse perpetrated by intimate partners even if it is not always treated as rape by migrants themselves. For example, West African migrant women in the United States identified sexual abuse, but most accepted it as part of marriage (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013). In my London migrant study, although half of the women experienced sexual violence, several service providers noted that many only accepted this as violence after they had disclosed other forms. For example, a service provider stated:

'Because almost every single rape case is that we'll ask, 'Did you experience rape at the hands of this perpetrator?' They'll say 'No!' And then we'll say, 'Were you ever forced to have sex when you didn't want to?' 'Yes!' And then we say, 'That is rape!' and they [they say] 'No, no! Because he is my husband! It is part of my obligations to provide that for him! So, I don't see that something he did to me, that is just part of my job' (McIlwaine et al., 2019: 10).

Non-intimate partner domestic violence among migrants takes many different forms. One important form relates to ex-partners in situations where they continue to harass their partners after separation. In a study in Canada, prevalence of former partner violence was very high among both immigrants (61 percent) and non-immigrants (61.5 percent of women) (Du Mont et al., 2012). Drawing on my London migrant project, Estela (see above) recalled how her ex-husband continued to harass her after 18 months of separation: 'I didn't know what to do, I was so anxious I could hardly endure it, I cried all the time of anxiety. I felt that he would come back and that again it was going to be the same!' (McIlwaine et al., 2019: 10).

Other types of domestic violence are very explicitly linked with the immigration process itself. Indeed, it is now widely acknowledged that immigration status can become a powerful tool of manipulation and abuse on the part of intimate partners with secure status over those without (Erez et al., 2009; O'Neal and Beckman, 2016; Voolma, 2018). This means that state practices and immigration law closely interact to 'equip perpetrators with a powerful tool to oppress minoritized women further, but it also indicates how state structures thereby come to impact directly on women's distress' (Burman and Chantler, 2005: 59). This instrument of domination can be used by partners from the same and different backgrounds with the power differentials especially marked in the latter. Addressing the former, in my Brazilian migrant project in London, a service provider noted: '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' (McIlwaine and Evans, 2020: 106). In my London migrant study, this violence was sometimes referred to by service providers as 'status VAWG' (Violence against Women and Girls) or 'bureaucratic abuse'. For example, Aisha, 33, from India who had a spouse visa recalled how her husband (with British citizenship) threw her out of their house, telling her to return home and that he had only married her to appease his parents because he was gay: 'After he cancelled my [spouse] visa, he booked my ticket, he called me and said 'don't come to my house, I cancelled your visa, you are illegal in this country'' (McIlwaine et al., 2019: 7). Being on a spouse/partner visa, meant that Aisha and many others, had No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), meaning she could not access any state benefits or support (see Anitha, 2010; also Kim et al., 2017 for similar processes in the US).

Aisha's case also constitutes a form of 'transnational marriage abandonment' identified as a key dimension of domestic violence primarily but not exclusively among those of Asian origin. This involved women being maliciously ousted from their marital household in the destination context, as in Aisha's experience, or where they are deceived into visiting relatives back home and subsequently abandoned, or when a woman marries on the basis of a promise of sponsorship for migration that never materialises (Anitha et al., 2018). In my London migrant study, this was identified by half the service providers, primarily those working with South Asian, Middle Eastern, and North African women. In one case, a man

from Kurdistan took his wife back to her family, returning to London without her after taking her passport and belongings and subsequently cutting all ties and cancelling her visa on grounds that she had divorced him. These women are further stigmatised back home through rejection from their communities as they battle to seek recourse across two legal systems (McIlwaine et al. 2019).

Transnational marriage abandonment is also a specific form of so-called 'honour-based' violence linked to dowries, forced marriages, domestic servitude and other potentially harmful practices. These are especially complex as they are often perpetrated by extended family members with or without the complicity of the intimate partner (Abraham, 2002 on the US). In my London migrant study, several service providers reported the prevalence of domestic servitude by extended family and partners, as noted by a woman from India:

'My husband and in-laws were always controlling and they treated me like a slave ... [They were] always disrespectful and my in-laws behaviour was intolerable sometimes. Physically also they hit me. They threaten me if I said about reporting them to social services; they will deport me to my country and take my daughter from me' (McIlwaine et al., 2019: 10-11).

While these types of domestic violence are usually associated with South Asian migrants, they are also experienced by migrant women from a range of different backgrounds. For example, in London, a Latin American service provider spoke of forced abortions and marriages within their community, including young women being made homeless in cases where protecting the honour of the family was more important than the rights of the women (McIlwaine et al., 2019: 12). It is also important not to essentialise or over-state this type of violence. Montoya and Rolandsen Agustín (2013) note in relation to Europe that 'honour' killings among migrant and minoritized groups are subject to outrage and specific legislation despite the fact that 'everyday' domestic murders among all populations are much more widespread.

Much of this discussion on 'status VAWG' has focused on different aspects of 'marriage-related migration' and 'spousal migration' which refers to 'all situations where marriage plays a substantial role in an individual's migration' (Charsley et al., 2012: 864). Yet, as noted above, it is when female marriage migrants depend on their 'sponsor' for their immigration status where abuses are most marked (Erez et al., 2009). Even within this group, there are huge variations depending on nationality, citizenship status of sponsors and immigration policies of country of origin and destination. In relation to Indian migrants in the United States, for example, Kapur et al. (2017) note that abused marriage migrants sponsored by US citizens and permanent residents have more rights and safeguards than their more vulnerable counterparts sponsored with more insecure visas. Furthermore, when marriage migration entails partnerships between different nationalities, power asymmetries and

abuse are often intensified. This often refers to women migrating as part of what Constable (2005) calls 'marrying up' through heterosexual marriage as part of 'global spatial hypergamy' entailing movement from poorer to wealthier countries. Such marriages can result in intersectional abuses undergirded by racism. In my London migrant study, Estela from Mexico, who ended up marrying her Portuguese boyfriend to secure her status discussed not only the physical violence, but also the racist tropes that he consistently used in verbal attacks, and especially when she reported him to the authorities. She said, 'he tells me "how is it possible that a small and ugly Third Worlder [sic] has done this to me?" He thinks he's of the first world because he is Portuguese/I'm Third World because I come from Mexico.' However, it is also important to acknowledge that although marriage migrants, and especially dependents on sponsors, are vulnerable to multiple forms of domestic violence, they also have agency (Kim, 2010). Indeed, exercising agency is important in relation to all types of migration for marriage regardless of nationality (see Abrahams, 2002; Chaudhuri et al. 2014 on South Asians in the US) (see below).

Examining domestic violence among marriage migrants also highlights the debate around the blurred boundaries between domestic servitude and migrant domestic workers where the latter are paid to carry out reproductive tasks in the home and the former are not (Kim, 2010; Piper and Roces, 2003). This leads to a consideration of domestic violence by non-family members that occurs within the space of the home. There is a huge literature on the nature of exploitative working practices among female migrant domestic workers globally that documents the myriad abuses they experience in their workplaces (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Parreñas, 2015; Yeoh et al, 1999). Much research has focused on abuse at the hands of employers and by receiving states with the latter being conceived as structural violence, or what Parreñas et al. (2020) call 'slow violence' in relation to precarious work and unfree labour. As live-in migrant domestic workers occupy the liminal space between the workplace and their home, direct forms of violence against them perpetrated by male and female employers constitutes domestic violence. While this violence is invariably gendered, it is also deeply intersectional across racial, class and nationality grounds, reflecting insidious micro- and macro-level power relations and perpetrated under the guise of being 'one of the family' (Huang and Yeoh, 2007). Indeed, the femicide or 'femicide' (where the state is actively involved in producing and maintaining the killing) of migrant domestic workers is gaining increasing attention around the world. With reference to Lebanon and Bahrain, Al-Hindi (2020) discusses the increasing deaths of migrant domestic workers, mainly from Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines linked with the *kafala* (sponsorship) system and where the murders are often passed off as suicides.

While largely beyond the scope of this chapter, it is also important to recognise that various forms of forced labour, servitude and slavery which entails and overlaps with the trafficking of women into domestic and sex work in particular, make women extremely vulnerable to domestic (and other forms of) violence. Violence among migrant domestic and sex workers

is largely produced through exploitative labour relations that play out within the household sphere (Zimmerman et al., 2011). In my London migrant project, a former trans woman sex worker, Nina, from Brazil spoke of physical and sexual abuse on the part of clients and her boyfriend within her home (McIlwaine, et al., 2019). In my Brazilian migrant research, Sabrina, 44 from Ceará, was brought to London by a Brazilian family to work as a nanny. Although they paid for flights, Sabrina entered on a tourist visa which subsequently expired and her bosses confiscated her passport. In addition to working as a nanny, she was expected to clean their house, and work for their cleaning business, all for £100 per week. As well as being imprisoned in the house only allowed out only to work, she was sexually abused by her male boss (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018). As with the governance of migrant domestic work, state migration regimes are primary drivers of violence among these workers, and among migrants more broadly.

Drivers of Domestic Violence among Migrant Women

While the root causes of gender-based violence are deep-seated gendered power inequalities based on patriarchal hierarchies (McIlwaine, 2013), these strongly interrelate with structural and symbolic violence (Dominguez and Menjivar, 2014). These play out in multiscalar ways at individual, local, national and transnational scales as part of unequal global systems that situate migrant women in the lowest echelons (Fluri and Piedalue, 2017; McIlwaine et al., 2020). Not only is the migration process inherently violent, but violence is a major driver of migration across a 'spatial continuum of violence' (Menjivar and Walsh, 2019). This feeds into feminist interpretations of how gendered violence must be understood across a continuum of types where indirect forms of routinised gendered exploitation and discrimination bolster direct types of physical, sexual and psychological gendered violence (Kelly, 1988). It should also be noted that while a multiscalar and geopolitical approach has been developed in relation to understanding gendered and especially domestic violence from the scale of the body to the global power structure (Pain, 2014), there has been less work among migrant women. It is therefore important to understand the transnational continuum of gender-based violence in relation to migrant women (McIlwaine and Evans, 2020). This must entail acknowledgement of how the migrant journey incorporates multiple forms of direct and indirect gendered violence that should be understood through an intersectional prism, foregrounding the structural and symbolic violence of immigration regimes and wider processes of racism and discrimination as part of a challenge to culturally essentialist arguments.

Indeed, it is now commonplace to conceptualise the consequences of immigration laws as forms of structural and symbolic violence, with the gendered nature of these being increasingly acknowledged (Dominguez and Menjivar, 2014). Following Galtung and others, structural violence encompasses historically embedded inequalities and exploitation in labour markets, education systems that result in poverty and discrimination, while symbolic violence, following Bourdieu, denotes the actions that have negative consequences based

on internalised and legitimised expressions of sexism, racism and class power (Bourgois, 2001). While structural and symbolic violence are inherently gendered, they underpin and bolster direct gender-based violence against female migrants. However, most analyses from this perspective focus on women's experiences after migration with much less research on how such violence plays out across the migration trajectory.

It is essential to acknowledge that gender-based violence can initiate women's migration in the first place (Menjívar and Walsh, 2019). This might refer to the specific reasons why women migrate such as the symbolic violence generated due to stigma following divorce, or the gendered structural violence of exploitative labour processes (Menjívar and Walsh, 2019). Drawing on the notion of 'feminised onward precarity' which captures the spatio-temporal precarious circumstances embedded across the migrant journey, I have explored these processes in my earlier study (*Towards Visibility*) conducted with Latin American migrants who have ended-up in London after migrating via Spain (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; 2019). For example, 46-year-old Miriam from Ecuador spoke of how social and familial opprobrium she faced after divorcing twice by the age of 20 led her to migrate to Spain. Another Ecuadorian woman, Helena, discussed widespread labour discrimination in her job in a machine-knitting workshop and that lack of social protection that led her to move to Spain (McIlwaine, 2020). In what Pearce and Sokoloff (2013) refer to as 'contexts of exit', the political, economic and social circumstances that women leave fundamentally shape their departure, which are in turn, influenced by the specificities of women's identity positions.

However, direct forms of gender-based and especially domestic violence are also important in driving migration. In the context of Central America, femicides have been identified as forcing women, especially from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador which have the highest rates in the region, to attempt to migrate to the United States (Parish, 2017). While gang violence is often blamed for femicides, other forms of gender-based violence have also led women to flee north. The structural violence of post-conflict poverty, inequality and institutional neglect, combined with symbolic violence of patriarchal and racial subjugation, has created a toxic situation where domestic violence is endemic and perpetrated with impunity (Obinna, 2020). Tragically, these women migrants then face more gendered violence on their journeys by intimate partners and others as they traverse north (Menjívar and Walsh, 2019). Similarly, Calderón-Jaramillo et al. (2020) note that Venezuelan migrants who have fled the humanitarian crisis back home and crossed the border into Colombia cite high levels of domestic violence prompting their migration. They then experienced further gender-based violence on the journey and when they arrived in Colombia. In my Brazilian migrant study London, the vast majority (77 percent) reported having experienced gender-based violence prior to migration of which a third was perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members, with a further 20 percent by friends (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018).

On arrival in the 'context of reception' (Pearce and Sokoloff, 2013), some migrant women experience an intensification in domestic violence. Recognising that migrant women do not necessarily experience more gendered violence than non-migrants, the challenges faced by many due to their insecure immigration status, labour exploitation and widespread precarity, can lead to escalations in domestic violence. In my Brazilian migrant study in London, more than half of women who suffered gender-based violence in Brazil also experienced it again in the UK. For some, this was at the hands of their existing partner with whom they had migrated while for others, the violence was perpetrated by men they met after settling in London. For example, Juliana, from Paraná, fled her violent and alcoholic husband in Brazil, only to meet another Brazilian man in London who subjected her to various forms of emotional, physical and sexual violence, including attempts to kill her following their marriage (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018). Gender roles often become destabilised during migration and settlement as female and male migrants change their occupational status, providing fertile ground for domestic violence to take place as hegemonic masculinities come under threat (Bui and Morash, 2008 on Vietnamese in the US; also McIlwaine, 2010). This must also be understood within the wider context of uneven global development as Kim et al. (2017: 635) note in relation to Mexicans in the US: 'the challenges faced by female migrants are not *caused* by migration, but rather are the result of global systems of inequity'. This also relates to increasing calls for a decolonial perspective to acknowledge how racialised, gendered and classed forms of oppression in colonial systems undergird migration processes and the resulting forms of gender-based violence that emerge (Lopes-Heimer, forthcoming). In relation to Maria Lugones' (2010) 'coloniality of gender', Mayblin and Turner (2021: 193) note how this 'shows alternative ways of considering how heteropatriarchal systems of gender and sexuality continue to be imposed and structure dispossession and violence globally'. These relations of power are also fundamental in understanding the nature of reporting among migrant women survivors of domestic violence as discussed below.

Reporting Domestic Violence among Migrant Women

The large literature on the multiple barriers faced by migrant women in disclosing and reporting domestic violence focuses mainly on issues such as lack of information, isolation, immigration status, language competencies, and exclusion from criminal justice systems (Erez et al. 2009; O'Neal and Beckman, 2016). While there is a tendency within some of this literature to focus on individual barriers, it is important to also give weight to the role of immigration laws, welfare provision and domestic violence policies (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002; Voolma, 2018). Generally speaking, the immigration context in many countries of the global North is inherently hostile and based on the principle that migrants are a cheap source of labour to be used when required by capital and neglected when they are no longer useful (Wills et al., 2010). In this context, while some provisions have been made for migrant women survivors in several countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the

United States and the UK, the burden of proof when seeking help is often so onerous that migrant women are actively dissuaded from reporting (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002). Thus, informal reporting or disclosure, especially to friends and family, is more common than formal reporting (Rahmanipour et al., 2019) which is used as a last resort when women feel unable to cope with the abuse or have experienced multiple incidences of abuse (Vidales, 2010). In my Brazilian migrant study in London, more than half of women survivors did not report formally, stating that they thought nothing would be done (27 percent); that they did not know how to report (15 percent); because they felt community opprobrium (20 percent); or as a result of feeling ashamed (9 percent) (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018). Many aspects of women's reluctance are bound up in 'victim-shaming' which can be more intense among some migrant groups (Abraham, 2002; Rahmanipour et al., 2019). The notion of the 'home country as a frame of reference' (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002: 910) also plays an important role, particularly in the case of women who come from contexts where domestic violence is not taken seriously and where impunity for perpetrators is widespread. For example, in the Brazilian migrant research, Carolina spoke of not reporting her abusive partner because:

'... the shame of it! I felt so bad, so humiliated! ... I didn't know how I was going to be treated here, because given that in my own country, in my own language, nobody had ever done anything to help me, here I thought, "I'm nothing, I'm no one. They won't help me at all"' (McIlwaine and Evans, 2018: 26).

Erez et al. (2009: 48) refer to this as the 'abuse tolerant-intolerant continuum' in home cultures where at one end, communities refuse to believe that domestic violence exists and at the other, that it is treated as an unacceptable crime. They note that 65 percent of women migrants in their sample in the United States stated that domestic violence was not treated as a crime. This continuum is further compounded by 'abuse-tolerant and privacy-affirmative perspectives' (p.49) linked with shame and stigma where women are expected to keep domestic violence either a secret or private and not to disclose to anyone informally or formally.

As noted above, insecure immigration status plays a fundamental role in whether women report their experiences as this question is linked with the fear of immigration enforcement. For example, in Los Angeles, United States, analysis of calls to the police department and of Google searches found a 'chilling effect' resulting from the potential threat of immigration enforcement on Latino immigrant populations who were less likely to report domestic violence (Muchow and Amuedo-Dorantes, 2020). This also emerges in qualitative research around the world from the perspective of migrant women who discuss being afraid of being deported, or because their intimate partner perpetrator has told them that they will be deported (Erez et al., 2009; Reina et al., 2013; Voolma, 2018). The same processes occur among migrant domestic workers where survivors of abuse are unlikely to report abuse,

both direct and indirect, because of their restricted immigration status and the 'extreme power of the employer' (Poinasamy, 2011: 97). In my London migrant study, a quarter of women cited fear of deportation as the main reason preventing reporting, followed by lack of access to information (18 percent) and not knowing where to go (18 percent). This was compounded by language barriers, fear of losing custody of their children, and fear of losing their home and/or income. Interactions with the police, while not uniformly negative, were characterised as favouring perpetrators while migrant women were not believed, often as a result of language barriers the women confronted (McIlwaine et al., 2019). In my Brazilian migrant study in London, for example, Maria spoke of ending up in a police cell overnight after reporting her husband's domestic abuse. As she did not speak English and had insecure status, he managed to persuade the police that she was the perpetrator (McIlwaine and Evans, 2020). Even when women do report, various legal barriers prevent them from securing welfare and judicial assistance, creating other forms of violence identified by Menjívar and Abrego (2012) as 'legal violence' where the state becomes complicit in the exclusion of migrants from support. Such 'legal violence' can also be conceptualised as a form of 'infrastructural violence' where much statutory support infrastructure actively and passively alienates migrants, and especially women survivors, of gender-based violence (McIlwaine et al., 2021). These processes are inherently racialised, classed and gendered (Erez et al. 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the key issues that have emerged in research on the nature of domestic violence among international migrants in relation to identifying its prevalence, the diverse nature of such abuse, the main drivers that lead to its perpetration and the challenges faced by migrant women in reporting it. Understanding of domestic violence must be situated within wider processes of the continuities and disruptions in gendered power relations, norms and practices among migrants, with abuse often constituting a key dimension of their family lives (Erez et al., 2009; McIlwaine, 2010; Sokoloff, 2008). However, domestic violence must also be positioned beyond the individual and household levels, and within multiscale local and global structural relations (Fluri and Piedalue, 2017; Pain, 2014). In turn, explanations for the incidence of domestic violence among international migrants need to challenge culturally essentialist interpretations of 'other' migrant women and men while laying the blame for abuse on the cultures of countries where migrants come from (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Instead, the structural and symbolic violence experienced by women migrants across their migration trajectories fundamentally intersect with hierarchies of gendered power that lead to the perpetration of domestic abuse in multiple ways (Menjívar and Walsh, 2019). Domestic violence can lead women to migrate in the first place, they may experience abuse on their onward journeys, and this may intensify when they settle elsewhere. This abuse might be within the context of familial relations committed by intimate partners and other household members, as well as through exploitative and violent working relations especially when immigration status is

insecure and/or dependent on the perpetrators. Migrant women therefore often bear the brunt of geopolitical gendered relations of power, as seen in the ways in which these intersect with structural and symbolic violence to intensify domestic violence, even if the incidence is not routinely higher than among non-migrants. Yet seeking and securing support as victims/survivors of domestic violence, while extremely challenging for all women, is exacerbated for migrant women by insecure immigration status, language competencies, lack of information and social networks. This situation often allows perpetrators to act within impunity, sometimes conjoined to institutional racism on the part of the criminal justice system and welfare agencies (O’Neal and Beckman, 2016; Vidales, 2010). However, although they might not always have been recognised, migrant women do have rights even if only in the eyes of international law rather than the legislative environments of individual destination countries. Furthermore, migrant women and migrant support organisations are fighting for the rights of these women to be upheld, such as the Step Up Migrant Women campaign¹ in the UK, of which my London migrant study discussed in this chapter was part. In the words of one of the migrants in this research who inspired the title of the report, they have ‘the right to be believed’ (McIlwaine et al., 2019).

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ⁱ See <https://stepupmigrantwomen.org/> (accessed 13 February 2021).