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Women on the move: theorising the geographies of domestic violence journeys in England

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Abstract

This article draws on a mixed-methods research project which mapped and quantified women's journeys to escape domestic violence in England, and builds on the empirical findings to theorise about the nature of such journeys. Identifying a process of gendered migration within the United Kingdom it explores these journeys using concepts of forced exile from international migration research; and Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concepts of rhizomic and dendriform movement within space. Tens of thousands of women and children within the UK are forced to relocate due to domestic violence every year, yet their journeys have been under-recognised in policy and practice, and under-theorised in terms of their relationship to other migrations. Using administrative data from housing-related support services to which women and children travel, and interview, survey and creative groupwork data from women who have relocated, the research enabled conceptualisation of both the individual and aggregated nature of the journeys.

Empirically the journeys are found to be very individual and complex, with multiple segments; but including the possibility of women understanding the individual violation of their human rights within a more collective and structural context. The research therefore conceptualises these domestic violence journeys as moving from forced individual exiles, via complex, fragmented and rhizomic lines of flight, towards diasporic connections and processes of resettlement and belonging. Focusing on the early stages of such journeys, this article provides a theoretical framework which enables both a greater understanding of women's actions to escape violence, and an underpinning for preventative and service responses.

Keywords: forced migration; exile; diaspora; rhizome; relocation

Introduction

Tens of thousands of women and children within the UK are forced to relocate due to domestic violence every year, yet their journeys have been under-recognised in policy and practice, and under-theorised in terms of their relationship to other migrations. This article draws on a mixed-methods research project which mapped and quantified women's journeys to escape domestic violence in England, and builds on the empirical findings to theorise about the nature of such journeys. The research evidence of the extent, patterns and processes of this internal migration enables conceptualisation in relation to other migrations. As a result, theories more familiar from international migration research can be applied to these journeys within the United Kingdom; and conceptualisations of movement within space can be applied to social issues with policy and practice implications.

The overall policy context for responses to domestic violence in the UK is provided by the Government's strategy on 'Ending Violence against Women and Girls' (Home Office 2016). Having the Home Office lead on this has ensured a focus on the legislative framework and criminal justice responses, with a lesser focus on other service responses, such as health, support, housing and education. Many of these such services are increasingly devolved to the constituent nations of the UK, and to local authorities and private sector providers, creating a complex context for both policy and practice responses, which is beyond the scope of this article. For further detail, Ishkanian (2014) provides a discussion of some of the implications of this context for local domestic violence services in England, and Towers and Walby (2012) quantify some of the impacts of cuts on local services to prevent violence against women and girls. Of particular relevance to this article is the acknowledgement that there are specific geographies to policy, provision and service responses and cuts, with Towers and Walby (2012, 3) concluding that 'The effect [of cuts in public expenditure] on local services is both dramatic and uneven across localities'. Geography, therefore, matters; and this article

presents empirical findings of the geographies of domestic violence journeys, and explores the role of theory in building new understandings from such findings.

The structure of this article is that a theoretical vocabulary is explored, followed by an outline of the research methodology to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. The theoretical and empirical are then brought together to discuss insights into understanding women's journeys. In the conclusion, the value of theoretical engagement is reiterated in looking towards the implications of such an approach.

Theoretical Context

In researching the literal as well as emotional journeys away from abuse, women's journeys were conceptualised three dimensionally over time (and stages), space (distances and places), and scale; incorporating both the individual scale and aggregation into local and national scales. Such theorising of sociospatial relations (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008) aims to provide a multidimensional approach to concrete social and policy issues of domestic violence. Domestic violence has been widely researched, but there have been limited studies focusing on the geographies, with Pain (2014a) arguing that there has been disproportionate focus on global, rather than everyday, terrorisms.

Whilst there is recognition of women's relocation and housing instability being strongly associated with domestic violence, studies such as Dillon *et al* in Australia (2016) and Ponc *et al* in Canada (2011) do not focus on the form, nature and geographies of these relocation journeys. Numerous studies on domestic violence help-seeking highlight the intersection of individual and structural barriers that prevent or exacerbate women's options to leave an abusive relationship, and access formal or informal resources (for example, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005; Barrett and St. Pierre 2011). In addition, some studies, such as Crisafi and Jasinski in Florida (2015) further examine the impact of relocation and length of

time in an area. However, these studies are few internationally, and all are outside the UK. The specific role of domestic violence in residential mobility and internal migration has been underexplored in the UK, with the studies that exist being on women from domestic violence refuges or in particular communities (for example, Warrington 2001; Wilcox 2000; Wilcox 2006). The scope for theorisations from such samples is therefore limited, in comparison to the England-wide administrative data of this study, and the additional survey, group and interview research in a range of areas in the Midlands, London and Southern England¹.

Theorisations of domestic violence outside geography have tended to focus on the social, and neglected the spatial dimensions (Burke et al. 2001; Stark 2007; Walby, Towers, and Francis 2014), and spatial theorisations of migration have not examined forced and gendered processes in the United Kingdom (Smith and King 2012; Fielding 2012). The theoretical context for this research therefore brings concepts to bear across disciplines, specifically in two aspects of journeys – the initial leaving and the early stages of relocating – which will be briefly examined in this section. Firstly, concepts of force and agency in mobilities and migration are discussed, leading to the idea of journeys of exile in displacement and forced migration; and, secondly, the characterisations of such movement as rhizomic and dendriform are explored.

Force, agency and exile

There is an extensive literature engaging with debates about force and agency in mobilities and migration (for example, Turton 2003; Tunstall 2006; van Liempt 2011; Gill, Caletrio, and Mason 2011), with King concluding that ‘The distinctions between forced and voluntary [...] remain heuristically useful to define the opposite poles of spectra along which individual, and changing, migratory situations can be positioned’ (King 2012, 137). Dyck and McLaren (2004) discuss how migrant women’s accounts are framed and constructed, and authors such

as Lawson (1998) and Donato *et al.* (2006) highlight that decisions to migrate are made within a larger context of gendered interactions; including power relationships within families. Such gendered interactions have been theorised by Mahler and Pessar (2001; 2006) in their conceptual model of ‘gendered geographies of power’ incorporating geographical scale, social location, personal agency and mind work in understanding transnationalism. They extend an analysis of social location, which tends to use gender, class, race and ethnicity to imply low degrees of agency of women in transnational spaces, and emphasise instead women’s ‘corporal and cognitive’ agency, ‘given their own initiative as well as their positioning within multiple hierarchies of power’ (Mahler and Pessar 2001, 447). As Massey has discussed (1994, 149) the issue is not just about movement, but ‘about power in relation to the flows and the movement’. Identifying women’s domestic violence journeys as a process of gendered forced migration within the United Kingdom does not, therefore, deny degrees of agency in how women use space to achieve safety, or deny how finding some sense of control of place is important in recovering from trauma (Willis, Prior, and Canavan 2016). However, it also recognises that the ‘sticky geography of economic and social injustice consigns certain bodies to certain places, and then makes it hard for them to get out’ (Tonkiss 2011, 85), highlighting women’s structural positioning which ensures that their mobility is not in frictionless space (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Cresswell 2010). An understanding of how gender-based violence can entrap women (Stark 2007) highlights both the resources needed to escape the force of abusive control, and that women may be forced to relocate. Other women may never escape, including over one woman a week in England and Wales killed by a partner or ex-partner (Office for National Statistics 2015); and others leave and later return, for a wide range of practical reasons, and emotions ranging from fear to hope (Glass 1995).

Within migration research, forced movement and the impossibility of safe return leads to concepts of exiled populations, and the creation of diaspora, which have been widely conceptualised (for example, Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Blunt 2007). Brah (1996) specifically contrasts exile with more collective notions of diaspora. She characterises exile as journeys of an individual away from somewhere, whereas diasporic journeys are about going to somewhere and settling down to some extent, whether or not an ideology of return is sustained. Whilst a diaspora may not travel en masse, ‘multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a *confluence of narratives*’ (Brah 1996, 183) as these narratives are lived and re-lived; so that a diaspora is produced, reproduced and transformed by shared group narratives. In the research discussed here, analysis of the narratives of interviewees enabled consideration of difference and confluence between individual experiences, as well as the specific trajectories of women’s journeys – the characteristics of their movement from place to place

Rhizomic and dendriform movement

Whilst the administrative data in this research were only generated when women accessed formal services for support or accommodation, the surveys and interviews provided a more complete picture of women’s journeys before, after, and in between their use of services. Such relocation in space is often so secret and hidden for women escaping domestic violence that it has not been theorised; however there is potential for consideration of a widely used metaphor of movement: Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) rhizome. They distinguish rhizomes, whereby relationships and interconnections are made via lines of flow and flight, from dendriform (arborescent) trees which spread out from central origins or axes. They characterise rhizomes as open adventurous networks, starting up again after a rupture, and forming ceaseless and unpredictable new connections in contrast to the linearity and

inflexibility of roots, travelling along predictable routes. The metaphor of a rhizome has been used in a varied literature (for example, Grosz 1994; Corner 1999; Woods et al. 2013) and of particular relevance here is how Amit (2012) has used the related concept of ruptures in studies of mobility, emphasising that disjunctures and discontinuities are routinely involved, and may even be an actively desired goal of relocation.

In the same way as a simplistic binary between forced and voluntary migration is rejected above, Amit (2012) highlights the risk of overstating either the continuities or the breaks of migration. She discusses the rejection of a linear notion of emigration/immigration in the 1990s, with the conceptualisation of transnationalism and the maintenance of links with both here and there. However, she also argues that this may have resulted in downplaying of the social ruptures – both unintended and desired – in relocation. In her work on students and mobile professionals she highlights how people may ‘want to escape some circumstances or relationships but to maintain others’, whilst also emphasising the ‘unplanned turns and consequences, which can undo the most carefully worked out plans and intentions’ (2012, 507).

Within migration research, the tensions between what is desired and what is achieved, and between continuities and ruptures, have therefore been explored through rhizomic metaphors. Such concepts of achieving rhizomic ruptures away from roots and routes can also help illuminate the nature of the domestic violence journeys identified through the mixed methods of this study; which will now be briefly outlined.

Methodology for theorising on women’s domestic violence journeys

The research on which this article is based is a mixed-methods research project in which the author carried out statistical analysis and GIS mapping (Hanson 2002; Kwan 2002) of six years of administrative data (2003-9) from women accessing housing-related support services

in England (ODPM 2002) due to domestic violence, giving a total of approximately 19,000 cases per year. This provided distances and locations for segments of women's journeys that involved accessing services, but the anonymised data did not allow linkages to enable mapping of women's overall journeys. Interviews were therefore carried out with a purposive non-probability sample of 20 women in seven locations in the Midlands, London and Southern England, whilst they were in refuges, and at the stage of rehousing, to generate evidence of more complete journeys over time and space. Further evidence of the stages of initial help-seeking was generated from surveys with 34 women in domestic violence services and on 267 calls to the National Domestic Violence Helpline; and of later stages of resettlement from creative groupwork with nine women in the Midlands and Southern England, and interviews with workers in services in eight locations.

The range of data sources was brought together in analysis using an 'integrative logic' (Mason 2006, 6) to explore the nature of women's journeys at a range of scales from individual to national; aiming to 'integrate macro and micro components' (D'Andrea, Ciolfi, and Gray 2011, 156). The mixed methods approach provided depth and breadth of empirical analysis (for further details see Bowstead 2015a; Bowstead 2015b), enabling generalisations on gender and mobility (Hanson 2010), as well as a rich basis for the use and development of theory which is explored in this article. Whilst the interviews provide quotations to exemplify the theoretical engagement, the points are grounded in the wider analysis and larger samples of the administrative, mapping and survey data. The following sections will discuss how the research findings enable two key understandings of women's domestic violence journeys, drawing on the earlier theoretical sources: the forced individual exile, and the rhizomic and segmented journeys towards later stages of resettlement.

Journeys of forced individual exile

From the large-scale quantitative data to the interviewed women's accounts, the domestic violence journeys are found to be very individual and isolated. Mapping the journeys to access services as straight flow lines between local authority centroids generates nearly two-thirds as unique within a twelve month period (65.9% in 2008-9) and over eighty per cent (81.8% in 2008-9) were travelled by only one or two women. Women are travelling from everywhere to everywhere, in individual, isolated journeys, which tend to cancel each other out in terms of net effect (see Bowstead 2015a for further details).

All types of women were travelling from all types of places to all types of places. Women aged from 15 to 88, with or without children, and from all ethnic origins (using the Census categories) were making the journeys. See Figures 1 and 2 for demographic categories, and a comparison of the administrative data sample with the sample of women interviewed.

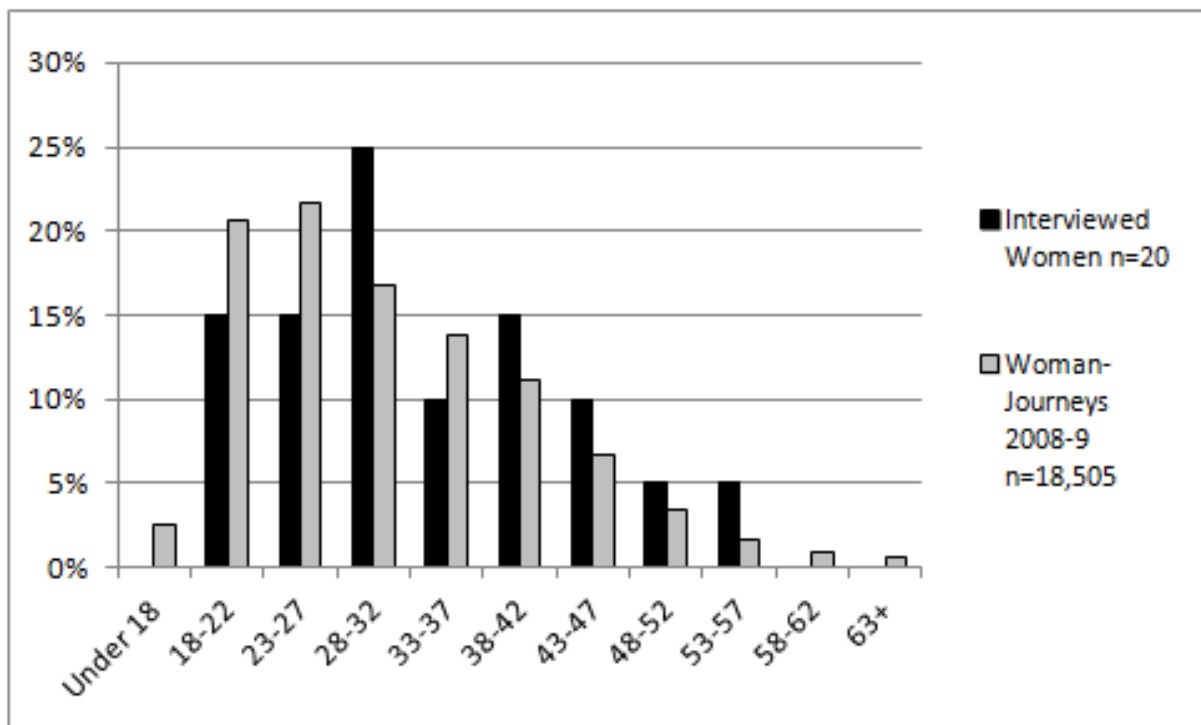


Figure 1: Graph of age of women who relocated 2008-9 and comparison with age of interviewed women

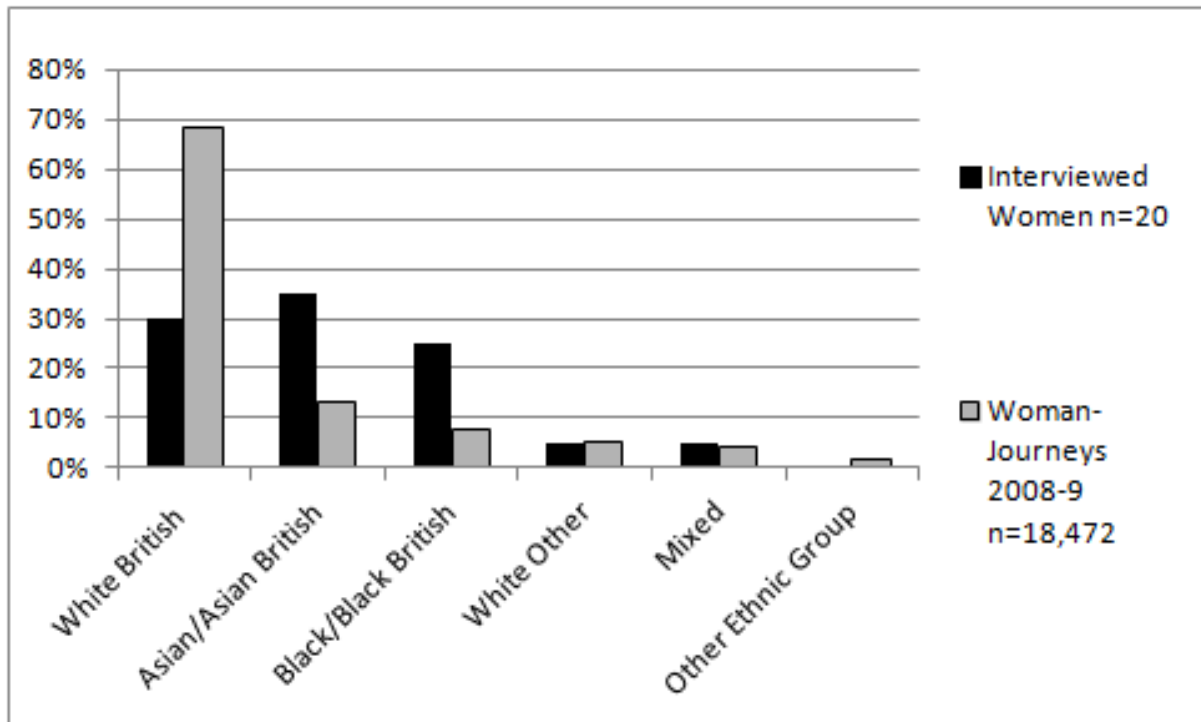


Figure 2: Graph of ethnic origin of women who relocated 2008-9 and comparison with ethnic origin of interviewed women

However, statistical analysis indicated only very weak associations between any of these demographic characteristics of women and whether or not they migrated across local authority boundaries, or how far they travelled. This suggests that factors such as individual circumstances, and a more complex intersectionality, are more important than broad demographic characteristics in determining such journeys. This is confirmed by interviewed women’s accounts indicating that where and how far they went were determined by a range of factors including their judgement of where they could be safe, the availability (or not) of refuge spaces, and the practicalities of travel. Women’s individual circumstances shaped their individual experiences, such as Deborah’s² lack of knowledge of her rights, and her legal status of having no right to access public funds (Anitha 2011).

My son was ten days old and he [husband] hit me and injured my right ear. And I phoned the police, but he scared me not to open the door. He said – you can’t get help in this

country. But I saw the police, and the policewoman saw that I was bleeding so asked if I needed help. So they sent him to a friend's house and they admitted me to hospital. The Social Worker asked if I wanted to go back – and I didn't know what I could do – so I came back home and he continued to abuse me. [...]

I had No Recourse to public funds so [West London] Council said they were not allowed to help, and so the only option was to go back to Sri Lanka. But my husband is my first cousin, and both my parents had died, so I couldn't go back home.

So then he thought that he could do anything he liked.

[Deborah – age 29, of Asian Sri Lankan ethnic origin with a 5 year old son and 3 year old daughter. Living in a Midlands town at the time.]

Women explained how the abuser controlled and isolated them and their children in the relationship, and how they tried to seek informal and statutory help, including civil and criminal law, to stop the abuse. However, all had found it necessary to escape. Whether they were forced at a point of fear and crisis (Pain 2014b), or had been able to think and plan a bit more, they went wherever they could find a place. Amongst the interviewed women, even those who had the opportunity to plan their escapes had little choice about where they went initially, and in recent years service provision has been cut back around the UK (Towers and Walby 2012) increasing the friction against which women are travelling. Jenny was concerned that she and her daughter would have to go to a completely different type of area than they had ever experienced.

I didn't have a clue where I was going – first of all they offered me a place in Hertfordshire and it was just totally out of my comfort zone. I'm used to being in the city – I've been living in London all my life – so it was just like – Hertfordshire – wow – I'm not going down there! It was really scary! [...] I felt that I'm going to be even more isolated down there than I am now.

[Jenny – age 21, of Mixed White/Black Caribbean ethnic origin with a 3 year old daughter, living in East London at the time]

Women felt forced away from their homes, but also forced to break contact with friends, work and family, because their abusive partner knew all those connections. Safety required them to travel in secret.

Friends like mums from school, I've had to cut off, because it's so easy to slip up. I just think – they don't need to know – if they were true friends they'll wait till I'm settled and then maybe, if I want to, I might say – look, I'm OK. But, I just don't want anyone to know.

When I went to join the doctor's I was worried about giving my old address – you just think – say they find out this, or that - you know it makes you very very paranoid. I mean even though I've been here a long time I'm still not – what's that word when you feel – I've not let my barriers down; I'm still very cautious what I say to anyone.

[Violet – age 35, of White British ethnic origin with a 6 year old son, living in a rural area near the South Coast at the time]

Even beyond the initial exile, many women feared they would be pursued by the abuser, so that they had to remain in hiding. They also had lost possessions, given up jobs, and often reduced their housing rights by travelling to another local authority.

I was panicking to leave London; because this was my life, and it was the place that I know... it's the worst thing that I lose my home, I lose my job, I don't have money, I don't have anybody... I have to travel and – oh my god – where am I?

[Anna – age 42, of White Polish ethnic origin, with an adult daughter. Living in a town in a rural area on the South Coast.

The journeys therefore have the characteristics of very individual exile (Brah 1996, 183) as women (and their children) were forced to leave their home, sever all contacts, and go to wherever they could safely stay. Over the time of the research, some women had begun to remake some contacts with family and friends, whilst not disclosing their location, but at the point of leaving most had felt very isolated and alone. Even if a relocation journey made them safe from the abuser, they often spoke of their support needs both to undo the harm of the abuse, and to counteract the isolation of now being in an unknown place.

You've gone into refuge, but what's going to happen after that? Because people look at it this way – you're going into a refuge, and then you have to go into your own place – fine! But what about the broken person who's in a refuge? For her to move out and to be confident, and talk about it to people – it's not easy when you've been broken. It's not easy to get your confidence back – your self-esteem has been destroyed – it's not easy. So I don't know how they're going to help people who've been abused to move on with life – it's difficult – really really difficult. I think if there are like places where women can go – women who've been abused – to go and just talk about it; it helps to talk. But if you can't talk it just builds roots inside you – destroying you.

[Gloria – age 41, of Black African ethnic origin with a 1 year old son, living in a South Coast town at the time]

Understanding these journeys as exile helps clarify the isolation of individuals, and therefore their support needs, over and above the safety that relocation can achieve. However, it also conceptually highlights the possibility of exile even within one's own country, and via journeys of relatively short distance. Such isolation and secrecy in leaving are distinctively different from other internal migration in the UK (Nowok et al. 2013), and the distinctiveness continues in the ongoing form of the journeys that continue this exile; as discussed next.

Rhizomic segmented lines of flight

After the initial move of exile from home, most women have complex journeys of multiple stages over time and space before achieving a relatively settled place of safety. The interviewed women had made up to ten moves, giving a total of over eighty moves by the twenty women so far. Their journeys included considerable stays in interim places – from months to over a year – as well as considerable travelling; and the total time from first leaving the abuser to relatively settled rehousing ranged from seven months to five years, with an average of two years and two months (see Figure 3).

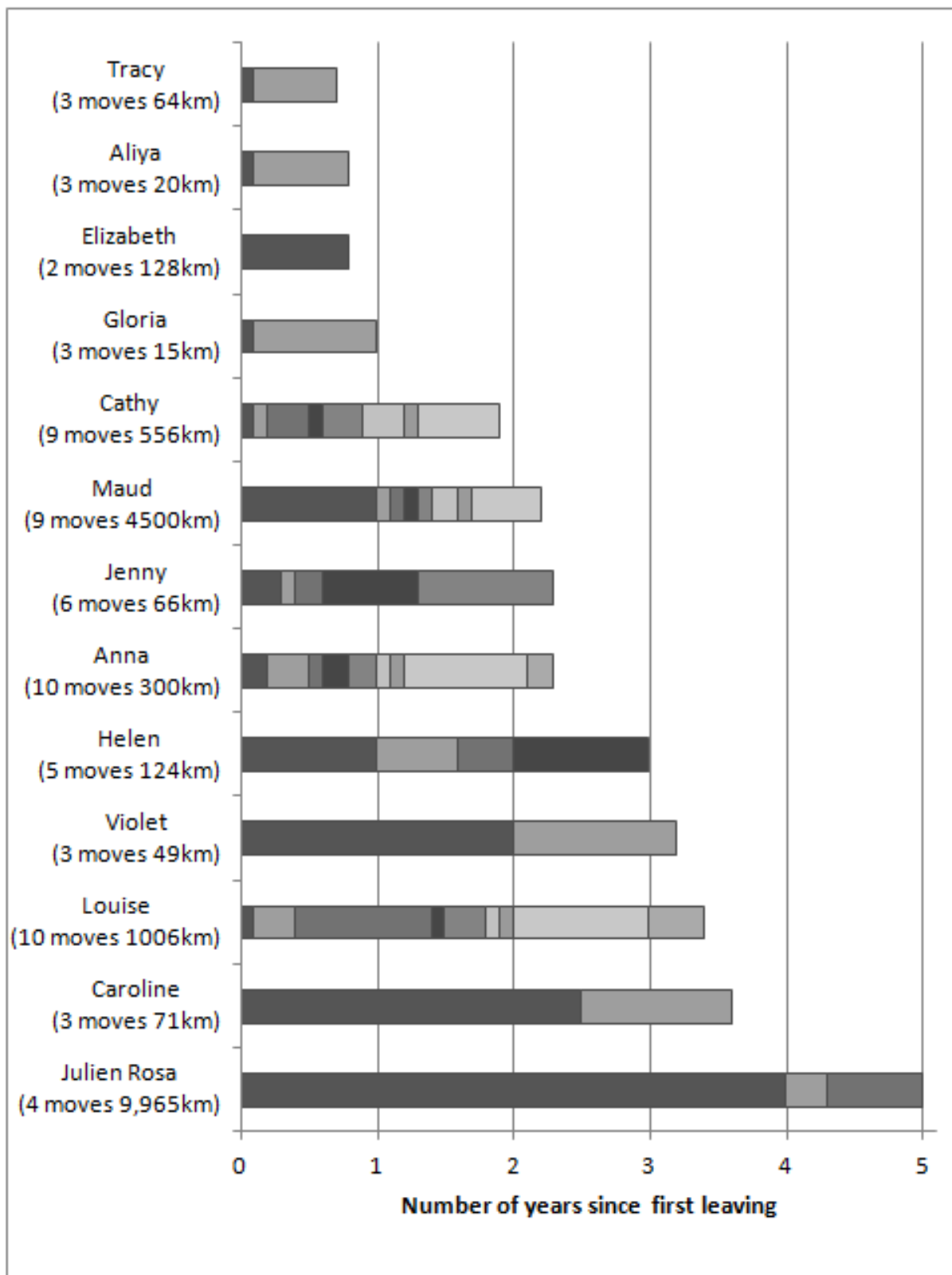


Figure 3: Graph of journey length in time for women who had resettled in independent accommodation – showing number of moves and estimate of distance travelled

Women experienced both forced mobility and forced immobility (Conlon 2011) – including waiting in refuges and other temporary accommodation. They experienced the emotions of investing in a place, an area, and then being forced to move on (Davidson and Bondi 2004). For some women, multiple moves were caused by the abuser continuing to track them down, such as for Helen whose ex-partner harassed her after they had separated, and despite her reporting him to the police. Her language includes elements of self-blaming, which are common in women’s accounts (Towns and Adams 2016).

I shouldn’t have messed about trying to get away from him; going from one place to the other, keeping moving – trying to keep one step ahead of him all the time. I should have gone straight to a refuge – I shouldn’t have messed about. I should have left him sooner and I should have gone straight to a refuge; and – do you know what – I would be two/three years down the line now.

[Helen – age 52, of White British ethnic origin with adult children. Living in a small town in Southern England at the time.]

For some women, multiple moves include a reconciliation with the partner, especially if they have children together; but often – such as for Louise and her daughter – further abuse forces further moves.

I brought him [partner] back to the house with me. And after – well about three months the violence started again; so I fled again. And he was arrested; and he’s now waiting for trial or whatever. And now I’ve been put in another refuge again; and I’m just waiting to be rehoused.

[Louise – age 28, of White British ethnic origin with 7 year old daughter. Living in a small town in Southern England at the time.]

Both Helen’s and Louise’s journeys were over three years since first leaving their abusive partners, but represent very different strategies spatially: Helen made several fairly local moves whilst she attempted to stay in her job and keep in contact with friends and family, whereas Louise travelled initially from Wales to London, and ended up travelling

much further in distance. Figure 3 highlights the multiple stages and wide variety of time/distance strategies amongst the sample of women who had achieved relatively settled independent accommodation (i.e. were not still in a refuge).

Women also experienced very variable service responses which significantly affected the trajectories of their journeys, or even whether they were able to escape at all. Such lack of consistency of service support and standards is reflected time and again in policy and practice reports, such as the inspection of police responses in 2014 which found similar failings to a decade earlier (HMIC 2014; HMIC/CPSI 2004). Services' effectively blocking a woman's journey at a crucial stage, such as by failing to provide a timely response or accessible information, was a feature of interviewed women's narratives. Examples were not just about policy, but also about chance encounters with professionals who did or did not understand or help. For example, Violet and her son experienced one police officer telling her there was nowhere she could go, and then another arranging for her to go to a women's refuge.

I said to them [the police] – well, look I've got some money – I never had a huge amount, but I had about a hundred pound – look, can you just put me in a hotel anywhere? I've just got to go. And then the policeman was like – no, there's nowhere you can go.

And then the lady officer, she got on the phone, and she said – right, just grab what you can quickly – because they arrested my partner – and they said, grab what you can and then we're going to take you to the station. So I literally had like my sort of trolley and the rucksack – just put everything that I could. I left so much behind – car, animals, etc – and got in the [police] car, went to the police station; and there they were really kind, they said where I could go. They said I could go to a refuge.

[Violet – age 35, of White British ethnic origin with a 6 year old son, living in a rural area near the South Coast at the time]

After over a year in a women's refuge, Violet and her son moved on to a rented flat, and she reflected on what being able to escape the abuse meant for her.

I've come back to my old self. I can go to the shop and not be on a time limit; or just walk around and take in nature. Before I was just like – this, this, this – I was existing and not living; and that's the God's honest truth – that's how I felt.

I look in the mirror and – obviously I've aged – but I'm not so drained; I was really drained and ill and depressed. And that's all gone now. You know, I wake up and – I haven't got no money in my pocket – but what I've got! It's like being on a free drug – being happy! [laughs]

Women had not planned stages of their journeys in advance, but each rupture developed out of particular responses – negative and positive – from agencies, or particular risks from the abuser. As Amit (2012) discussed, discontinuities and ruptures can make journeys less easy to trace – a desired goal for women escaping an abusive partner who is trying to track them down. Women had to continue to keep their whereabouts secret, and behave unpredictably – even deceitfully – for the sake of their (and their children's) safety.

I've just been running between France, Spain and Britain. So he didn't know where I was; and I was lying to my family, my friends – because I didn't want anybody else to be in trouble because of me.

[Maud – age 42, of White British ethnic origin with a 14 year old daughter and adult son. Living in a South Coast large town at the time.]

Conceptualising how women use space to escape domestic violence can therefore bring together the literal and social maps (Ardener 1993) of their journeys. Women are escaping a regime of disciplinary power – an abuser who knows her contacts – so power does not simply weaken as a function of distance. MacCannell and MacCannell argue that 'the isolation of the victim increases as her social distance from the perpetrator and the scene of the crime decreases' (1993, 209). They use Foucault's notion of capillary power (Foucault 1991), whereby power penetrates into even the furthest extremities of life, to argue that such

power is accompanied by capillary violence which can spread through networks of relationships. If a woman travels to a known location, even a distant location, for example to family or friends, an abusive man will be easily able to trace her route. Predictable routes (roots of a dendriform nature) are therefore not just inflexible, they are dangerous, as capillary power traps women, however far they travel.

However, by travelling to an unknown location, by making new connections, for example by using the network of women's refuges, a woman is more likely to be able to escape the operation of power over space. In their journeys to escape domestic violence, therefore, women travel what could be conceptualised as rhizomic lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari 1988) – segmented journeys of resistance. As Helen discovered, by staying local and staying at her job her ex-partner was able to continue to threaten and harass her. Because he knew her family, he was then able to track her down at her daughter's address, even though her daughter had recently moved. The risk was not just about known locations, but also about traceable routes and connections. It was only when Helen went to somewhere completely unpredictable that she became safe.

Women's active strategies are therefore rhizomic journeys into the unknown, with each stage rupturing out of the previous stage, rather than planned or even imagined from the start. However, such buried and hidden journeys tend to continue the isolation women experienced within the abusive relationship. The policy and practice implications of theorising the complex trajectories of women's journeys are therefore that improved service responses could assist women to navigate such difficult junctions and unknown routes, and professionals could be more understanding about why women might be secretive about past locations, and unpredictable in their patterns of accessing services. Professionals could also recognise how crucial their interventions could be in reducing the friction against which such domestic violence journeys are made – in helping women and children along their way.

Strategies for safety, such as the complex segmented journeys highlighted in this research, can also mitigate against the support that women and children need to recover from the abuse. Even in a place of safety, interviewed women talked about the long process of undoing the harm of the abuse for themselves and their children. In the earlier quote from Gloria she spoke of experiencing this as ongoing harmful roots, continuing to grow within her if she was not able to talk about the abuse and receive support to rebuild a positive sense of self. For the interviewed women, support services, particularly a stay at a women's refuge, were important in bringing them – often for the first time – into contact with other women who had experienced domestic violence. Such services are therefore not just places of accommodation, but potential places of women understanding the individual violation of their human rights within a more collective and structural context: of making sense of their journeys. Women talked about needing recognition of the labour of the journeys they were making, and of the interplay between their geographical and emotional journeys. As Louise explained it, she wouldn't be able to move on with her and her daughter's lives until she could stop literally moving.

I feel quite drained and really tired; I can't wait to just get in to a new place and just sit – not physically, but mentally. To be able to just – [sigh] – it's done; and just wake up and be all like – this is it – I'm going, I'm moving – not just plodding, plodding, plodding. [Louise – age 28, of White British ethnic origin with 7 year old daughter. Living in a small town in Southern England at the time.]

Conclusions

The empirical findings from the research into women's journeys to escape domestic violence have significant policy and practice implications, which are explored in detail in other articles (Bowstead 2015a; Bowstead 2015b). However, the theoretical approach to the data discussed in this article enables a richer understanding at a range of scales. An integrative approach ensures the realisation of women's domestic violence journeys as complex and disruptive

experiences for individuals – at the micro scale; but also as a distinctive migration process at the macro scale. Just as forms of violence can be interrelated, co-constitutive and mutually reinforcing, so can the processes of women’s journeys to escape such violence. The initial force from the abuser can be reinforced by service and state responses that do not understand or respond to the complexity and intersectionality of women’s experiences and actions as they attempt to navigate from abuse to safety and freedom. In contrast, an approach which maintains dialogue between different experiences, processes and scales can achieve stronger and richer insights, and more effective responses.

Such insights expand both the analytical and the intervention possibilities, allowing empirical comparisons with other migrations, but also more comprehensive conceptualisations. In this article, the geographies of everyday terrorisms (Pain 2014a) have been located in spatial journeys, exploring the tensions of force and agency in migration and the operation of power in relation to movement. Complex journey trajectories have been examined in relation to notions of exile, hiding, and the safety of being unpredictable and untraceable. Such hidden journeys have generally remained hidden from both academic literature across geography, sociology and migration, and from social policy. This research therefore uncovers evidence and concepts to contribute to diverse literatures of mobility and migration – both internal and international – as well as both the social and the spatial implications of violence against women.

This article has particularly focused on how journeys are embarked upon in secret and in isolation, as forced individual exiles, and have complex and fragmented trajectories which can be better understood by drawing on concepts of unpredictable rhizomic lines of flight. Service interventions, such as police responses or women’s refuges, are therefore a temporary exposure or coalescence of these complex trajectories, rather than typically either the first action, or the conclusion, of women’s journeys. The theoretical engagement therefore

enriches the empirical conclusions, and generates insights to inform aspects of policy and the nature of services. Thinking about domestic violence journeys in such ways also speaks back to the theory with how women's literal use of space opens up space for concepts of forced exile and rhizomic lines of flight to travel.

Note

1. The empirical analysis is discussed more fully elsewhere (Bowstead 2015a).
2. Direct quotations are referenced by the pseudonym and demographic categories chosen by the interviewee.

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