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Citizenisation in the Aftermath of Domestic Violence: The Role of Family, Community and Social Networks

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Abstract

Domestic violence impedes women's exercise of full participatory citizenship. This article explicates the role of family, community and social networks in the aftermath of an abusive relationship as both an indicator of intimate citizenship as an achieved status and as a facilitator of the process of their citizenisation in private and public spheres. Based on life-history interviews with 26 South Asian women in Britain, the findings reveal the myriad ways in which denial of citizenship continues long after, and in part due to, the end of the abusive relationship, and outline women's efforts to regain a sense of identity, belongingness and membership within their intimate, family and community lives. In doing so, this article advances conceptual understandings of lived practice of citizenship. It also problematises the binary construction of 'victims' vs 'survivors' which is premised on a linear and successful journey towards citizenisation following the end of the abusive relationship.

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This article explicates the role of family, social networks and communities in the journeys that South Asian women in Britain make towards greater inclusion, belonging and participation in private and public life in the aftermath of domestic violence. Given the role of domestic violence in inhibiting women's full membership of their family and community and in the exercise of citizenship in relation to intimate, civic and public life, this article conceptualizes their journey to rebuild their lives following exit from the abusive relationship as a process of citizenisation. By focusing on the specificities in South Asian women's experiences in the medium to longer term after the end of the abusive relationship, I reflect on how intersecting social relations of power shape the trajectory of their journey towards citizenisation. Alongside a feminist intersectional perspective, this article deploys an ecological model (Heise 1998) to explore the interplay between the micro and macro factors, occurring at personal, relationships, community, society and state levels.

The role of social networks in the context of domestic violence

Domestic violence includes psychological, physical, sexual, economic and emotional abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour by (former) intimate partners or family members, and includes specific forms of abuse such as forced marriage and honour-based violence. There is now a wide body of scholarship which demonstrates how such violence takes place in specific social contexts formed by family, friends and neighbours (Klein 2012). This research documents that most victims/survivors turn to their informal social network before, alongside or instead of seeking support from formal domestic violence services (Rose et al. 2000; Sylaska and Edwards 2014). These networks play a critical role in providing ongoing emotional and practical support (Goodkind et al. 2003; Rose et al. 2000; Trotter and Allen 2009), in facilitating disclosure and access to formal sources of support (Wilcox 2006), and in helping victims/survivors to leave and in enhancing their emotional well-being and physical safety (Bybee and Sullivan 2005; Hyden 2015; Klein 2012). Social networks are a potential source of both protection and victimization because network members can assume very different roles:

as allies of the victim, but also as perpetrators or allies of perpetrators (Klein 2012; Trotter and Allen 2009).

Compared to the extensive body of scholarship on the role of relational networks during and in the immediate aftermath of the abusive relationship, there is a smaller body of research on their role in facilitating women's journeys towards rebuilding their lives and growing their 'space for action' (Kelly et al, 2004: 4) in the medium to longer term and the (for exceptions, see Abrahams, 2010; Kelly et al. 2014). In a context where domestic violence research commonly utilises service providers to access research participants, this gap in existing scholarship can be partly explained by the nature of services such as refuges, which are geared towards providing crisis intervention and lack the resources to follow up clients in the years following their rehousing. A small body of scholarship on the role of social networks in the aftermath of the abusive relationship documents the importance of social support in mitigating the harmful effects of domestic violence (Hyden 2015; Wilcox 2006) and in reducing the rates of re-victimisation (Bybee and Sullivan 2005).

Hyden (2015) calls for future research on how communities manage and respond to their knowledge of the violence and the implications of their engagement in the aftermath of violence. However, there is scant research about the experiences of survivors outside the demographic category of white or black women (the latter primarily in the US context), a gap that this article addresses.

Understanding South Asian women's experiences of domestic violence in Britain: Intersecting inequalities

Not all women experience domestic violence in the same way or face the same risks. Understanding minoritised women's experiences of violence requires an approach that can take account of how gender intersects with other social relations of power such as those based on ethnicity, race, (dis)ability, class, immigration status and state policies (Crenshaw 1989). For instance, South Asian women in the UK and elsewhere are more likely to suffer abuse not only

at the hands of their partners, but also from multiple family members including in-laws (Mirza, 2017; Soglin et al. 2020) and from their natal kin in the form of forced marriage and violence in the context of women's decisions to end an abusive marriage. In South Asian communities, patriarchal attitudes reflected in culturally-specific norms mean that a bride commonly leaves her family and moves into her in-laws' home following marriage, thus limiting access to support when subjected to abuse (Mirza 2017). Similarly, notions of honour and shame may impede disclosure and help-seeking (Gill 2004).

Added to these factors are a range of barriers to accessing services, including: lack of understanding of their specific needs in relation to forms of domestic violence and abuse primarily seen in their communities; inappropriate professional responses from services on the basis of stereotypical notions about abuse being common—and even accepted—in certain groups; or essentialist perspectives about cultural norms, traditions and values that can lead professionals to pathologise families from minoritised groups (Burman et al. 2004). Lack of adequate welfare services, public housing and health services, as well as language barriers in the absence of adequate translation services and issues stemming from insecure immigration status for marriage migrants (Anitha 2011), are further complicating factors.

However, it is important to note that neither the heightened risk of experiencing domestic violence, nor the low rates of help-seeking, are inevitable features of minoritised communities. While it is important to reject essentialist constructions of domestic violence in particular communities that are racialised as 'other', it is also important to recognise and document specific and intersectional contexts to understand lived experiences of victims/survivors and to respond to them through more effective services.

Citizenship and Domestic Violence

Drawing attention to the role that gender-based violence plays in impeding women's participation, autonomy and agency in society, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo (2014) highlights how such violence is an obstacle

to exercising full participatory citizenship. Women's exit from an abusive relationship is expected to enable a process of thickening of political and civic belonging as the impediments to their full, inclusive and participatory citizenship created by the abusive relationship fall away. This article responds to Manjoo's (2014) call for understanding violence against women through a citizenship lens.

Citizenship, first conceptualised as the 'full membership of a community' (Marshall 1950), in relation to civic and political life has since been applied to the domestic sphere. Intimate citizenship (Plummer 2003) is an analytical concept that is concerned with the processes, practices, and discourses within/through the laws, policies, social relations and cultures that regulate and shape the exercise of agency and experiences in intimate and personal relationships. In much of the literature on intimate citizenship, the great emphasis has been placed on citizenship as *the right to choose*: to choose your partner, your sexual activities, whether you have a child or not, or what you do to your body (Evans 1992; Bell and Vinnie 2000). Corollary to this, the study of citizenship often attends to the absence of choice or rights, the lack of capacity to exercise choice, responsibility and agency, legal non-personhood, non-participation and exclusion, and subjective experiences of outsider status and non-belonging.

While citizenship was first conceptualised as an achieved status of full membership of a community and the rights associated with this membership, there has been increasing scholarly attention to the concept of citizenisation which instead explores the *processes* of participation, identity and belonging in relation to the state, civil society and family relationships (Lister 2003). Focusing on 'the behavioural aspects of individuals acting and conceiving of themselves as members of a collectivity' (Joppke 2007), this body of scholarship draws attention to the differential experiences and practices of citizenisation based on gender, sexuality, age, (dis)ability, class and other social divisions such as immigration status (Abraham et al. 2010). For example, research has demonstrated how women's immigration status, which is often linked to that of their husbands, shapes both their experiences

of domestic violence and their ability to leave the abusive relationship, thereby demonstrating how the role of the state influences family relationships as well as formal rights (Anitha 2011; Reina et al. 2014). In relation to domestic violence, scholars therefore argue that we need to pay more attention to how the domestic sphere conditions the status and processes of civic and political citizenship (García-Del Moral and Dersnah 2014: 662; Zufferey et al. 2016), and vice versa.

Lister (2003: 37) argues that there is a dynamic relationship between citizenship as an achieved status and as an ongoing practice, as the latter can be described as an 'expression of human agency' and the rights implied in the former status 'enables people to act as agents'. Domestic violence therefore results in a lack of citizenship as status and the rights associated with that status in relation to women's intimate relationships as well as civic rights; it also a creates a gendered obstacle to the process of citizenisation as it inhibits women's agency and equal participation in both intimate and public spheres. In the aftermath of domestic violence, women's social networks can facilitate the journey towards becoming full citizens as the barriers created by the abuser which prevented women from exercising full participatory citizenship are dismantled with the support of these social networks. However, research also documents how the post-exit expansion of the 'space for action' is far from a linear process (Kelly et al. 2014).

This notion of a journey is implicit in the terms first used by feminists and now more commonly by women's organisations, policy documents and some media for those who have experienced domestic and sexual violence: 'survivor' rather than 'victim'. This terminology was first used to signal hope and agency rather than the despair and helplessness inflicted by the violence and abuse (Gupta 2014). Commonly used for women who have left an abusive relationship, it arguably signals a journey towards rebuilding their lives and selves from a victim to a survivor (Brosi and Rolling 2010), and implies a process of citizenisation or the recovery of citizenship as status. This article reflects on the utility of such binary characterizations of victim and survivor by drawing upon women's narratives to present a complex picture of the aftermath of

domestic violence. The term used in this article is 'victim/survivor' to signal the co-articulations between these two characterisations, whereby the "/" unites and separates them at the same time.

Research Methods

This study collected the life-histories of a convenience sample of 26 victims/survivors of domestic violence who were of South Asian origin. Twelve of the research participants' country of origin was India, seven were from Pakistan, four from Bangladesh, 2 from Sri Lanka and one originated in Nepal. The youngest research participant, who had escaped a forced marriage at the age of 16, was aged 21, while the oldest research participant was 60. Six research participants were aged 20-29, ten were aged 30-39 and five each were in their 40s or over 50. The nature of abuse they experienced ranged from domestic violence by intimate partner and/or his relatives, forced marriage and honour-based violence; a significant minority experienced more than one form of violence.

Four specialist refuges catering to South Asian women in England were used to contact women who had accessed their services having left the abusive relationship between 3-14 years prior to the interviews in 2014-16. At the time of the interview 23 women were resident in England; two were living in Scotland while one woman was in Wales. The refuges were in contact with or had contact details for many of their ex-residents and sought permission from them to pass on their details to the researcher for the study. Given the time that had elapsed, many of the contact details had changed but this initial sample was bolstered during the interview process when further research participants were recruited through snowballing technique, as they were often in touch with other ex-residents from their time in the refuge.

The aims of the research and the framework of analysis is shaped by the goals and values of feminist research. Life-history method was chosen because it enables research participants to tell the story of their lives as a whole and in their own voice, and thereby foregrounds personal life stories within their wider socio-cultural, historical and material contexts, including the

social dynamics of power, oppression and resistance relayed in these narratives (van Niekerk and Boonzaier 2019). The life history approach is thereby an appropriate feminist method as it enables analysis of the intersections between different social relations of power that shape people's lived experiences and social constructions of their selves (Crenshaw 1989). Women's narratives centered on their childhood and early life; the nature and patterns of abuse they experienced; the strategies, sources of support and services they utilised to leave the abusive relationship; and their experiences as they sought to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of the violence. From this broader research, the findings explored in this article relate to the role of their social networks in the aftermath of their exit from the abusive relationship.

The interviews, which lasted between one to three hours, were conducted between 2014-2016 and digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee at the University of Lincoln, UK. Given the time that had elapsed since leaving the abusive relationship, many of the research participants found it painful to talk about their past. The research participants were given the contact for services, including in-house mental health services at their previous refuges as well as generic services accessible from their current location, should they need support. Despite the trauma that talking about violence can evoke, many respondents welcomed the opportunity to 'have their say'.

A limitation of the study relates to its reach—the sample comprises of women who had accessed refuge services. Subsequent research needs to examine the medium to long-term outcomes for victims/survivors who have not utilised refuges to leave abusive relationships.

Data Analysis

Data analysis integrated principles of narrative analysis (Reissman 2008) with those of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), whereby each life-story was summarised, the main features identified, and categorised according to its content (e.g., nature and patterns of abuse, patterns of help-seeking, etc.). An inductive approach to analysis entailed a process of continuous coding to capture significant concepts within each narrative, following which the concepts were compared across different narratives to reveal emerging common and divergent

themes which were the basis for the creation of higher level categories. For example, exploring the concept of citizenship or the process of citizenisation was not an objective of the original research. Within their broader narrative, the process of and impediments to becoming full members of their family and community emerged as a recurring theme. The use of grounded theory enabled this theme to emerge inductively from the data analysis. Utilizing a process of constant comparative analysis—a hallmark of grounded theory—between and within texts as well as between categories enabled the development of the theoretical concept of citizenisation to understand this process.

Despite the time that has elapsed since the data was collected, the findings remain relevant as the contexts of the family, social relationships and networks in relation to South Asian communities has not changed significantly in this period. The formal resettlement support has been adversely effected by the shrinking funding for domestic violence services in Britain, and the role of social media and new technologies has evolved over this period, and would be a useful area for further exploration.

Research Findings

The following sections explore the role of family and wider community in women's journey towards citizenisation, as well as in relation to their full membership—which signifies citizenship as an achieved status—of their families and community.

Relations with Natal Family: A Complex Picture

Women's accounts of their feelings in the first few days and weeks at the refuge were complex and sometimes contradictory. While the relief at their removal from immediate control of the abusive partner/family members was overwhelming, coming to the refuge was also remembered as a period of shock, sadness and mixed emotions, partly on account of the fear of a negative reaction from their natal family, which other research also documents (Goodkind et al. 2003**;** Sandberg 2016).

A few women recounted the important role of familial networks in enabling them to leave the abusive relationship. Following marriage migration, Kamalpreet[1], 31, from a middle-class family in Punjab, faced domestic violence from her husband and mother-in-law who wanted to send her back to India but keep her child in the UK. After enduring months of escalating violence, she managed to disclose to her sister, who was also in the UK as a marriage migrant. Kamalpreet recalled what occurred when her sister called the police:

> *When the police arrived and they [in-laws] told them that I was an illegal person living under their roof because my visa had expired. The police replied by saying that they could help me by having me removed from their house but they said that they could only take me and not the child [as the child was British]. I wasn't going to leave without my child. (Kamalpreet, 31)*

Despite the lack of help by the police—a denial of rights due to her insecure immigration status which itself was an aspect of her abuse whereby her husband deliberately neglected to apply for her indefinite leave to remain in the UK—she eventually managed to leave with her sister's help. Kamalpreet relied on the emotional and practical support provided by her sister as well as her advocacy to persuade their parents of the validity of her actions.

However, family support was not forthcoming for many women as they tried to rebuild their lives. Men deployed community perceptions of shame and family honour, whereby speaking out about violence as well as leaving the abusive relationship is seen to bring dishonour to the family and damage marriage prospects of younger sisters (Gill 2004). Anjum, a well-educated marriage migrant from Pakistan, who had no family connections in the UK, hid the full extent of the abuse from her family when tentative and partial disclosures met with minimization of the abuse and victim-blaming. When she eventually fled the marital home in fear of her life, she recounted how her husband turned her family against her:

> *They (husband and in-laws) called my family—that's how they found out that I had left him. My family were obviously worried, it was a matter of their honour and respect. My unsuccessful marriage would end up reflecting badly on them, bringing them shame. But*

nobody looked at it from my point of view, what I was going through, the struggles I was facing. They were telling me to go back. I felt terrible, like I had committed a grave error by leaving him. (Anjum, 33)

Despite belonging to an upper middle-class family in Pakistan, Anjum had to face severe financial difficulties as she could not take any of her belongings when she left the abusive relationship, and had all her savings appropriated by his family. She could not rely on any emotional or financial support from her family due to their disapproval. This exclusion from her natal family also had implications for her citizenship as an achieved status. Though she was eligible for a British passport, Anjum could not afford the fees required to apply and worried about the future implications for her rights. Other marriage migrants also reported a long wait before they could accumulate the fees to apply for their citizenship.

Once re-housed following their stay in the refuge, some women sought to re-establish relationships with select family members but this provided some perpetrators with the means to locate them. Bidisha, a Bandladeshi marriage migrant from a poor family, who had an extensive network of relatives from both her natal and affinal family in the UK, recounted:

When I got re-housed, he heard about it from a relative of mine. So he turned up at my door one day, shouting and screaming outside my house. When I refused to see him, he convened a meeting of my relatives at my aunt's place without my knowledge, and they all asked me to reconsider and give him a second chance, for the sake of our child. I was under so much pressure. I wasn't convinced but I let him visit. When he came over, he refused to leave and tried to force me to have (sexual) relations with him. I eventually filed a charge of sexual harassment with the police. (Bidisha, 32)

The attitude of her natal family facilitated the resumption of the abuse, as well as signaled her lack of belonging within her natal family. Once in council accommodation, her options for moving was limited, and Bidisha had to endure months of harassment before her ex-husband stopped due to the threat of police action. Such alliances between perpetrators and victims'/survivors' close kin who subscribed to marriage ideologies that require women to stick

it out with their husbands is not unique to South Asian communities, as documented elsewhere (Kelly et al. 2014; Trotter et al. 2009: 226), but may create additional vulnerabilities within some communities.

Some women reported that their parents were supportive, but the awareness of the impact their divorce would have on their standing in their community and their sister's marriages was enough to dissuade women from visiting their home country or maintaining regular communication with their family, at least in the short term.

For young women fleeing (a threat of) forced marriage, having to part from a beloved sibling was remembered as particularly traumatic, as Alia—who left home at 17—remembered:

> *If I could take my youngest brother, I would have, because I loved him so much. I really, really missed him. And it was strange because only now as an adult, you know, I've been told that he developed a speech impairment when I left. He stopped talking, and to this day he speaks with a stutter. (Alia, 32)*

Eight women in the sample had left their home following (a threat of) forced marriage. Forced marriage, a marriage without the consent of one or both parties, creates particular challenges for its predominantly female victims, as escaping forced marriage often entails a break from their entire family and kinship networks in a context where the pressure to marry may be exercised not just by parents and close relatives, but may take place within a context where the wider community may condone what they construct as justifiable parental control of a daughter's sexuality (Anitha and Gill 2009).

Most of the women who escape a forced marriage recounted their sadness at having to sever ties with their siblings or mother in the immediate aftermath of leaving, and how they tried to restore these relationships by working around the presence of the perpetrator(s).

Research in the context of cross-regional marriages in India demonstrates how geographic distance cuts women off from vital structures of support; however, relative proximity does not guarantee support from natal family either, as factors such as poverty, the gender of children, notions of honour and shame, and stage in the life-course intersect in complex ways to

determine the duration and kind of support available for women experiencing domestic violence (Chaudhry 2019). These patterns were replicated for the women who participated in this study. A majority of the research participants derived financial, practical and/or emotional support from at least one member of their family—commonly, a sibling, an aunt or their mother. However, not all women who left an abusive relationship managed to re-establish relationships with their families, because of the fear of the perpetrator or because of the stigma associated with their decision to leave.

For many research participants, leaving the abusive relationship did not result in citizenisation in their relationships with their natal family. Where abuse and enforced social isolation from their husband and his family had earlier curtailed the realization of intimate citizenship and constrained their full membership of their natal family, the stigma following their exit now cast them outside the ambit of their natal family, in some cases forever. This exclusion from their natal families and their practical support also impeded achieving formal citizenship status for some. In this context, the binaries between 'victim' and 'survivor' do not reflect some women's experiences, as seeking to end one form of victimisation—by their partner and/or his family—may indeed lead to another form of victimization or exclusion, in this case, by their natal family. It was in this context that some women emphasised the importance of their social and community networks, which is explored in the following section.

Community and Social Networks: Negotiating a Stigmatised Identity

The enabling role of women's wider social networks in the aftermath of domestic violence is explored in literature (Hyden 2015; Klein 2012), but as Kelly, et al. (2014) note, this is a somewhat neglected theme given the greater focus on the role of the family in facilitating disclosure and enabling women to leave abusive relationships.

Taking stock of their journey thus far, many women who had come to this country as marriage migrants reflected on the impossibility of living as full citizens in their countries of origin, given their status as a divorcee:

I would never be able to live by myself in India. In my small town, everyone would talk about me and end up ostracizing me and my family members. You'd be disgraced in your whole community. "Look at her", they would say. (Meeta, 39)

Though aware of the relative freedom to live independently as a single woman in the UK, Meeta, who originated from a small town in Nepal, also noted the constraints that continued to shape her social and community life in the UK. In a context where marriage/relationship remains a primary marker of social status and identity for women more broadly but has specific connotations for South Asian women within the diaspora, being divorced carried a lasting stigma that research participants were left to manage through careful strategizing to minimise contact with those who they suspected would be unsupportive. A decade after leaving her abusive husband, Meeta still continued to avoid social gatherings:

I want to avoid our community. Sometimes, when I am alone, I end up thinking about what they are saying about me and I tend to get upset. So I just make excuses to the people from our community. I tell them I'm busy with this or that and shy away from their company. I have come to prefer solitude now. (Meeta, 39)

Experiences of being judged for having left have been documented in research with other communities (Kelly et al 2014), as has the stigma of living in a refuge (Warrington 2001: 376) and hence is not unique to South Asian women. However, for many women who participated in this research, such attitudes were not marginal but rather the dominant discourse within their communities, the knowledge of which framed their everyday social interactions, and hence their capacity to belong to and participate fully in social and community life. For women like Meeta, full and equal membership of her community—a central facet of citizenship—seemed unachievable years after the end of the abusive relationship.

Victims/survivors of domestic violence often endure high level of forced residential mobility as they relocate to access refuges. In the context of the UK, it has been noted that this profile of forced migrations includes a higher proportion of ethnic minorities than the general population (Bowstead 2015: 310-11), which may serve to isolate immigrant women from pre-

existing social networks (Goodman et al. 2016: 75-77). Having been rehoused in an area she was unfamiliar with, Anjum longed to become a part of the local South Asian community and have meaningful social interactions beyond the limited conversations with other parents at the school gates, but did not feel able to initiate such relationships:

> *My friends are those from the refuge, I am in touch with three of them, we are all in different cities, and we do get together once in a while, and chat on WhatsApp, Facebook. But I do feel lonely because I have never told anyone here about my past. I normally keep my distance—my heart wants to socialise, call people home for dinner, but then if they become a part of my life, they would know about my past. [...] Our society is very biased and people who have been divorced—at least women who are—people look down on them. (Anjum, 33)*

Most women socialised within the constraints imposed by their stigmatised identity; some managed to craft new friendships with other women who had similar experiences, which sustained them and proved to be an invaluable source of support. Others sought to develop alternate communities of friendships and solidarity with other victims/survivors who they had shared the refuge with, as documented elsewhere (Bennett 2006; Henderson 1995; Warrington 2001: 375-6), often through mobile technologies and social media (Kelly 2014: 76-77). Several years after leaving the refuge, most women still perceived themselves as part of the refuge and valued links with this community. One woman showed me her mobile, pointing to a text message about an event at her previous refuge— "They still invite me, see". Though financial constraints prevented her from attending any event as this would entail a long journey and travel expenses, she valued being invited as that represented a tangible way in which she still belonged to that community. Sustaining these online or offline communities with co-residents of their refuges proved rather more difficult for older women who felt less able to navigate digital technologies.

For one woman who had left home to escape a forced marriage and then experienced domestic violence in her subsequent self-chosen marriage, her son's disability was one of the contexts

for the abuse she had experienced and a factor that curtailed her subsequent efforts to become a full citizen of the community where she was eventually rehoused. The vicissitudes of citizenisation that she narrated can be attributed to her location at the intersection of several disadvantages:

> *I'm lonely—there is an element of something missing, you know what, I miss adult companionship, my son is very anti-social because of his Asperger's. […] So I'm in the house. I've have got no choice, and I'm on my own. (Aisha, 30)*

Social networks and relationships played a key role in sustaining women on their journeys towards rebuilding their lives, and in their absence, left a deep feeling of loneliness and isolation. In the absence of full membership of their communities, many women created alternate communities of victims/survivors. But for some women, the promise of citizenisation remained unfulfilled. These experiences of exclusion very much shaped how research participants viewed themselves—as victims, survivors or as both.

New Intimate Relationships: A Second Chance For a Family of One's Own?

Subsequent intimate relationships featured prominently in many women's accounts. For some women, the stigma associated with their divorce was curtailed (to varying degrees) through their subsequent marriages. All women who lived in the UK, away from their natal families in South Asia, recounted the pressure exerted by their family who did not consider it acceptable for a woman to live alone. While some women cited this pressure as the reason they married again, others had to overcome the resistance of their family with regard to the choice of a subsequent marriage partner and exercise their citizenship, the right to choose their intimate lives. Bina, who grew up in a poor family in India and came to the UK as a child, recalled:

> *When I told them, dad was unhappy because he's a Muslim. I told him, 'I don't care about whether you're happy or not. I'm happy and through all these tough times, I've suffered alone. You didn't come to me, you were not there to ask me, did I eat or did I drink, do I have money, no. So I'm going to go for it, like it or not.' My younger brother supported me. (Bina, 26)*

Some survivors reflected on their journeys towards empowerment and their efforts to create spaces where they had more control over the nature, progression and the conduct of their subsequent intimate relationships:

> *We have a wonderful relationship… but I have already told him that I cannot let my (council) house go. He can move in with me, but I need to know that I have a place of my own till I know things are going to work out fine. […] I am scared, but I'm happy at the same time—at the moment he is perfect. In the past he was perfect. But when he proposed, I took three days to decide. (Anjum, 33)*

For Anjum, the security of a space of her own was a non-negotiable safeguard in case this relationship should run into difficulties. Similarly, Mona, a survivor of forced marriage who had subsequently attended university and obtained a professional job, also spoke about the explicit negotiations about an equitable division of domestic labour before agreeing to the marriage proposal—a far cry from the kind of relations her parents had:

> *I told him I'm going to be working, so don't expect food on table every day […] don't be like my dad. Don't start arguments about the food [that it] is not ready when I'm home from work because I'm going to be coming home from work too, so like, we'll have to divide the housework, chores, cooking, to do it together, it's a partnership, it's not, you know, dominating me. (Mona, 24)*

In most cases women had to overcome initial resistance from their husband's family due to the stigma attached to their status as a divorcee, particularly where women had children from their previous relationships. Many women talked about the support they derived from these new intimate relationships for themselves and their children, and how this support was crucial to the process of rebuilding their lives.

But for two women in transnational relationships, their financial circumstances prevented them from establishing new intimate relationships because of the UK government sponsorship regulations for spouse visa. Located at the axes of discrimination and disadvantage based on gender, disability and ethnicity, Mira, who had an impoverished childhood in a small town in

India and was selected for marriage for the explicit purpose of exploitation and servitude, juggled three low-paid jobs including two jobs that paid well below the statutory national minimum wage. She still did not meet the income threshold:

> *There's someone in India, I know him from when I was in school. We want to get married, and I now have British passport. But he can't get a visa because of my earnings. It's not enough. (Mira, 31)*

Her lack of proficiency in English—having never learn the language in the few years of schooling that she had—and her migrant background intersected with a visible disability to disadvantage her in the labour market. Due to the socio-economic criteria that are now applied through a minimum income requirement to marriage migration policies in the UK, class has come to play an increasingly significant role in stratifying the right to family migration and hence intimate citizenship. Mira's experiences demonstrate how gender, disability and ethnicity interact with and reinforce the effects of class-based inequalities due to racial and gender pay gaps in the labour market, while a lack of cultural capital and financial resources for marriage migrants who are survivors of domestic violence (including financial abuse) prevents any effective evasion of these restrictions (Kofman 2018). Many years after fleeing an abusive relationship, the gendered and racialised effects of purportedly neutral state immigration policies prevented Mira from regaining a capacity to exercise her choice in matters of intimate and family life. As documented elsewhere (Griffiths 2021) immigration controls in relation to family migration produce and discipline citizens, as well as migrants, exposing the internal hierarchies and conditionalities of citizenship.

For two women, the patterns of abusive and controlling behavior were repeated by their new partner. Even though the new relationship did not work out as hoped for, they recounted how they were actively thinking through their options.

> *I need to get him out of my life. It will be hard, but I know how things work, and I know about how to get help, what to do. (Puneet, 39)*

For these women, the experience of living in a refuge, the process of empowerment and the knowledge and skills they had gained as well as their engagement in paid work helped them to seek support and find ways to end these abusive relationships. Despite subsequent experiences of abuse, theirs was a journey towards greater citizenisation.

Conclusion

This article documents the role of family and social networks in South Asian women's journey towards rebuilding their lives following the end of an abusive relationship. Bringing together an ecological model (Heise, 1998) and feminist theoretical framework of intersectionality enables an understanding of both enabling and constraining roles of social relations of power that operate at different levels—the personal (intrapersonal factors such as knowledge about services, education), the familial (location in the UK or South Asia, presence of unmarried sisters), community (prevalence of socio-cultural norms of honor and shame) and broader socio-economic factors such as class position of the family, and political factors such as (trans)national policy context, and legal-political frameworks including housing, welfare and immigration policy.

I argue that women's journeys following exit from the abusive relationship can be characterised as a process of citizenisation, whereby women seek to achieve full and equal participation in their intimate/family relationships and in civic/community life in the aftermath of the domestic violence—a journey that in some literature and practice contexts has been represented through the binary categories of 'victim' and 'survivor'. In doing so, it contributes to conceptual debates on citizenisation, which is a somewhat neglected theme in scholarship on domestic violence. It analyses the role of women's informal sources of support in relation to women's citizenship as an achieved status and the rights attached to this status, as well as in relation to the process of citizenisation. This paper documents how South Asian women who have experienced domestic violence exercise agency within and despite ongoing constraints in order to craft—with varying degrees of success—a life that matches the normative ideal of citizenship as the 'full

membership of a community' (Marshall 1950). For some women, leaving the abusive relationship triggered a process of citizenisation as their choices in relation to the practices and processes in their personal life expanded, and this in turn had an impact on their participation in community life. For others, while leaving opened up choices, inclusion and belonging in (some) personal relationships, this did not lead to process of citizenisation in the realm of their social relations and nor did it lead to full and equal membership of the wider community due to the gendered stigma attached to their decision to end the relationship or indeed the state, due to the exclusionary citizenship practices written into state policies. This paper sheds new light on marginalized women's struggles to forge an agentic sense of citizenship and belonging in adverse socio-political contexts. In doing so, it challenges simplistic assumptions that the end of an abusive relationship opens up routes to participation, identity and belonging in relation to state and civil society that was once impeded by the abuse. By drawing attention to the possibilities and vicissitudes in women's journey towards citizenisation, it advances our understanding of the relationship between subjective experience, relational and intersubjective dynamics and socio-historical processes and social relations of power (Roseneil 2013, p. 145) that constitute the lived practice of citizenship.

The analysis presented here requires us to re-examine a concern that is central to research, activism, and advocacy to end violence against women. A fundamental dilemma at the heart of the feminist engagement with power is to unmask and challenge domination without denying the capacity of oppressed subjects. The label of survivor rather than victim represents the political project of reclaiming agency and initiative for those who have experienced domestic violence through a rejection of assumptions of passivity and helplessness induced by the violence (Bohner 2017). However, the binary between victim and survivor poses important questions for how we understand the impact of domestic violence (also see Gupta 2014; Vera-Gray 2016), and for conceptualising the process of citizenisation in the aftermath of leaving an abusive relationship.

Two conceptual problems with prevailing binary constructions of victims and survivors of domestic violence can be explicated by this research. For those who have left an abusive relationship, the term 'survivor'—whilst signaling the after-life of the violence—seems to temporally narrow our focus through the construction of the abusive relationship as a discrete event and assumes that exit signals a transformative process of moving from victim to survivor, and hence a linear process of citizenisation. It also simultaneously narrows the lens to the dynamics of the abusive relationship itself, thereby eliding the broader social structures which are not only enmeshed with the violence by the perpetrator(s) but also implicated in other forms of social violence through the exclusion and marginalization that often follows in the months and years after the end of the abusive relationship. These elisions prevent us from understanding the myriad ways in which the shadow of the abuse in the form of disadvantages and denial of citizenship may continue long after the end of the abusive relationship, and in part *due to* the end of the relationship.

Given the importance of social networks in women's journeys towards rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of the abusive relationship, researchers have called for a shift in mainstream domestic violence services toward a more network-oriented approach (Goodman et al. 2016). This would require a shift in the focus of domestic violence services from neoliberal models that are geared towards producing individual-level change such as exit from abusive relationship and rehousing to models that recognise the socio-economic and political basis of violence against women. In relation to addressing the adverse impact of domestic abuse on mental health, research indicates that the services that *are* deemed helpful by South Asian victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence are those that are community based, focused on social justice and social change approaches, rather than individualistic ones (Inman and Rao, 2018; Ahmed et al., 2009). Research in Latin America, UK and US indicates that while imperatives to professionalise their service model may have increased the external legitimacy of and funding streams for women's organisations, a narrow focus on helping individuals risks losing sight of the structural and gendered dimensions of women's problems (Markowitz &

Tice, 2002; Mehrotra et al. 2016; Warrington 2003). The women who participated in this research indicated that the social networks they established with other victims/survivors helped them gain an insight into the broader structural basis of the domestic violence they had experienced and created alternate communities of belonging, support and solidarity during their time in the refuge and beyond. The constraints associated with donor discipline and funding scrutiny, and in the UK context, the impact of a decade of austerity-related funding cuts have reduced the scope for collective 'social justice' approaches that harness social networks and ongoing support following rehousing, which is commonly seen as the end goal of refuge provision. A re-orientation of refuges towards the goal of social change and community based approaches to empowerment and building networks of survivors would facilitate routes towards citizenisation following the end of the abusive relationship.

This investigation into the afterlife of the abusive relationship reinforces the need to think beyond the eventful characterization of violence and to conceptualise it as a process, engendering but also emerging from other social and political processes[2]. This requires attention to the histories and socioeconomic realities of recovering from acts of sublimated, as well as direct violence—and how this process is structured by gendered as well as other inequalities at the family, community, society and state levels. Marginalisation through informal and formal social, economic and political processes, including gender norms that operate at community and societal levels and systems of gendered discrimination that operate through state welfare, housing and immigration policies, help foster directly and indirectly the forms and ascriptive categories that may mark out the non-citizen, or those whose practice of citizenship has been thwarted. This paper points to the importance of addressing the consequences, but also the understandings of violence over time. In this regard, its focus is on the temporality of violence, as arising from events of (relatively) short duration, but with long and enduring consequences and afterlife.

Endnotes

1. All names have been changed to protect women's identities and a pseudonym has been allocated in accordance with the specific naming conventions associated with their country and religion.

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