

# Imaging Resistance among Migrant Women

Intergenerational Trauma,  
Care and Activism

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# Introduction

This report forms part of ESRC-funded research that uses Visual and Embodied Methodologies (VEM) to explore different dimensions of Intersectional Gendered Violence'. It focuses specifically on a project on 'Imaging Resistance among Migrant Women' that examines how migrant women from the Global Majority living in London have developed resistance and activist practices to challenge and cope with multiple forms of direct and indirect gendered violence. The latter range from intimate partner violence experienced both in origins and destinations, to gendered structural violence of negotiating borders and discrimination. The project also assesses how VEM intersects with more 'traditional' social science methods and evaluates how such arts-based approaches can reveal and generate resistance, activism and care. The project works with 22 minoritised women from nine countries and from different socio-economic, occupational, racial and generational backgrounds. It is led by community drama organisation, Migrants in Action as part of a long-standing set of engagements between them and director of the project, Cathy McIlwaine (see Migrants in Action, 2023; McIlwaine et al., 2022; McIlwaine et al., 2024; Women Resisting Violence, 2022).<sup>1</sup>

This report provides a critical review of relevant literature on intergenerational trauma, care and activism in general and among migrant women. It begins with an assessment of how attitudes towards gender-based violence are transmitted across generations in general, including the role of technological and digital platforms before discussing the experiences of minoritised migrant women. The discussion then addresses the role of activism and

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<sup>1</sup> See also Arts Cabinet 'Incubating Imaging Resistance': <https://www.artscabinet.org/imaging-gendered-violence/incubating-imaging-resistance> (accessed 5/10/24).

intergenerational trauma including formal and informal forms of activism before evaluating the role of the arts and care within activism.

## **Transmission of gender-based violence attitudes across generations**

To understand how attitudes towards gendered violence are transmitted across generations of women, it is crucial to examine first the concept of intergenerational trauma and its mechanisms of transfer. Intergenerational trauma refers to the ways in which traumatic experiences, both psychological and emotional, are transmitted through generations, affecting well-being (Cerdeña, Rivera and Spak, 2021). Research has highlighted how trauma experienced by previous generations contributes to shaping family practices and dynamics of future generations (Doornbos and Dragojlovic, 2021). This transmission often manifests in the form of ‘intergenerational hauntings’ within home environments, where the unspoken traumas of the past create palpable atmospheres which influence social relations and behaviours (ibid). The home environment therefore becomes a space where children often need to adapt to the suffering and silent grievances of their parents, leading to a shift in their roles as adults with a pervasive sense of vigilance (ibid). The silence around these past traumas creates what Dragojlovic (2011) terms a ‘zone of unspeakability’ which in turn become the grounds for the perpetuation of intergenerational trauma (ibid). Furthermore, the physical spaces of homes often contain material traces of past traumas that act as conduits for remembering these past traumas. This interplay between the emotional and physical aspects of home environments highlights the complex ways in which intergenerational trauma is embedded within the fabric of everyday life and family dynamics (ibid). Here, Veena Das’s perspective on violent events and the ways in which they become embedded into the daily lives of the affected communities can be applied (Das, 2007). Das argues that despite events passing, they continue to live on through

memories, narratives and emotions which shape social relationships and collective consciousness (ibid). Hence, these events in both explicit and implicit ways, impact the trajectory of identity and life through the concept of 'poisonous knowledge' (Das, 2007). This refers to the long-term and potentially invisible effects an event can have on a community which interrupts not only the ways of living but the understanding of the world that they live in (ibid). Das's focus on memories and narratives can be helpful in explaining how attitudes towards gendered violence are communicated and preserved within communities. These 'critical events' were seen as vital in shaping the ways individuals would position themselves in the present (Das, 1995; Dragojlovic, 2011).

Whilst the transmission of trauma across generations provides insight into the persistence of intersectional and patriarchal attitudes, it is also crucial to examine how these are reinforced and perpetuated through cultural mechanisms. The intergenerational transmission of attitudes towards gendered violence are not only limited to the silent long-term effects of trauma but can also occur through active socialisation processes that shape gender norms and expectations across generations. The Social Learning Theory (SLT) provides a framework for understanding how attitudes and behaviours related to gender-based violence are learnt and perpetuated through generations. The SLT posits that individuals learn behaviours through three main stages: observation, imitation, and modelling (Bandura, 1971). This suggests that individuals' behaviours are influenced and shaped by their exposure to the models around them, including family members, peers, and societal figures (ibid). Within the context of gendered violence, the SLT argues that violent behaviour can be the result of socialisation processes, where cultural and social expectations of men influence the way boys are brought up to think and act in relation to women (Sylva et al., 2011). This behaviour can be transmitted across generations as they are endorsed by varying agents of socialisation such as family members, peers, and social institutions (ibid).

Copp et al. (2016) discuss the relationship between experienced violence in a family and later spousal victimisation arguing that the exposure leads to an internalisation of behavioural scripts that accept intimate partner violence. This highlights the cyclical nature of violence and how early exposure to it can result in shaping long-term attitudes and behaviours (Copp et al., 2016).

Patriarchal ideologies further highlight the beliefs that underpin violence against women. Through socialisation processes, beliefs about superiority to women can be transmitted, leading to individuals endorsing traditional gender roles and maintaining a hierarchy of power where they view themselves as superior (Sylva et al., 2011). It is argued that socialisation processes significantly contribute to the justification and perpetuation of these deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs, resulting in them being passed through generations and being particularly challenging to address. Research has particularly discussed the concept of men feeling pressured to 'be a man' due to this gender socialisation (Anheier, Kaldor and Glasius, 2006). This refers to the pressure felt by men to conform to 'traditional' masculine norms that they are exposed to, further perpetuating attitudes towards gendered violence (ibid). It is argued that the way male and female identities have been constructed in society has, on the one hand, fostered aggression and violence, and submission on the other (ibid).

Hence, these binary constructions of gendered expectations and roles contribute to the persistence of gender-based violence attitudes across generations.

## **The role of technology and digital platforms**

In considering the transmission of attitudes across generations, it is vital to also acknowledge the evolving landscape of socialisation, particularly with the developments of technology and digital platforms (Zhao and Wang, 2023). This shift necessitates an evaluation of digital

technologies and the ways in which they shape social structures and social relations. Zhao and Wang (2023) state that digital sociology can be used as a lens to explore the relationship of digital technology and the social changes that can arise from this, arguing that digital technology shapes life and production of knowledge. Similarly, research has highlighted the ways the media can act as a powerful agent, one that can overshadow the traditional influence of the family (Forma and Bożena Matyjas, 2015). Here, we can explore the concept of ‘shifted socialisation’ where the media takes on a more significant role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of children (Forma and Bożena Matyjas, 2015, p. 991). This shift is particularly important in considering the intergenerational differences present in engagement with the media and its potential impact on attitudes towards gender-based violence (Forma and Bożena Matyjas, 2015). Similarly, ‘networked publics’ can be a useful framework to understand the interactions within digital spaces (Boyd, 2010). For Boyd (2010) these are defined as cultural and social arenas that are influenced by digital networks, influencing the ways people communicate, socialise, and engage in their day-to-day life. In this way, it can be seen how digital spaces may act as a domain where attitudes towards gender-based violence can be both reinforced and challenged, potentially altering the intergenerational transmission of these attitudes. However, it is important to note that accessibility to these digital spaces is not uniform across generations or socioeconomic groups. This is highlighted through the concept of the ‘digital divide’ which could lead to generational differences in attitudes towards gendered violence due to varying levels of exposure and engagement with digital content and discussions (Robinson, et al., 2015). Hence, these developments in digital sociology and media suggest that the ‘models’ as discussed in the SLT may significantly vary across different generations. The increased accessibility of diverse media may shape ideas about gender-based violence in ways that differ from the traditional intergenerational transmission, potentially resulting in new forms of resistance or reinforcement of existing attitudes.

Despite the valuable insight of socialisation theories, they have been critiqued for their potential in overlooking structural factors that can contribute to the perpetration of violence. The concept of intersectionality, as introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) provides a crucial framework for this analysis. The term intersectionality signifies the ways in which multiple forms of identities such as race, gender and class can intersect to create unique experiences of oppression across different sociocultural and economic contexts (Crenshaw, 1991). Hence, intersectionality reflects how these identities are connected at the macro level and by structures of power (ibid). This means that in the context of attitudes towards gender- based violence, we cannot consider gender in isolation but need to examine how it can interact with other aspects of identity, experiences and structural inequalities in wider society. This is because these intersecting factors shape not only personal experiences with violence but also attitudes about how they are formed and transmitted across generations.

The digital divide as discussed earlier, takes on new significance when examined through an intersectional lens. This is because the digital divide is not just a matter of generational differences, but also influenced heavily by factors such as cultural context, socioeconomic status, and geographical location (Robinson, et al., 2015). This unequal access can result in variations in exposure to diverse perspectives on gender-based violence, potentially reinforcing or challenging existing attitudes in differing ways across different intersectional groups. The compound effect of these intersecting identities on the experiences of gender-based violence and then how these experiences are transmitted across generations add another complex layer to our understanding of intergenerational attitude transmission. For example, a minority ethnic woman might pass down not only attitudes shaped by gender, but also those that are influenced by her experiences of racial discrimination and its intersection with

gender-based violence. This highlights the need for a nuanced approach to research that considers the varied experiences and contexts that could shape attitudes to gender-based violence, especially for migrant women and the distinct landscape created for intergenerational transmission of attitudes.

## **Intergenerational transmission among minoritised and migrant women**

The transmission of attitudes towards gender-based violence among generations of migrant women is a complex phenomenon that intersects with cultural adaptation, transnational identities, legal frameworks, and systemic inequalities. Therefore, it requires a nuanced analysis, one that considers both the micro level (family dynamics) and macro level (societal structures) that shape these attitudes. It is also crucial to consider the negotiations that occur with migrant women navigating between different cultural frameworks. For example, Bui's (2006) study on Vietnamese Americans provides insight into these processes, revealing there was a disconnect between acknowledging the unacceptability of violence and understanding the legal ramifications of these actions. This disconnect highlights the interplay between cultural norms and legal awareness, emphasising the importance of not merely adopting new values, but also understanding how to navigate the new systems of justice, social norms and inequalities.

Intergenerational trauma encompasses the scars left by events affecting individuals or collective groups, as well as how these experiences shape family practices and dynamics in subsequent generations (Doornbos and Dragojlovic, 2021; Fassin and Rechtman, 2024). Again, through their ethnographic research, Dragojlovic offers insight into the complex relationship between past violence and trauma and its present-day expression, stating that



trauma transmission often occurs indirectly through conspicuous silence surrounding traumatic events, rather than through direct knowledge. This lack of open discussion creates these zones of 'unspeakability', significantly impacting family dynamics. As discussed earlier, theories of socialisation can be used to understand the mechanisms of how and why attitudes are shared and transmitted amongst groups (Bandura, 1971). This is also particularly relevant to understanding how these attitudes are transmitted – or fail to be transmitted – across generations of women from marginalised immigrant communities. Recent research has explored the specific manifestations of intergenerational trauma in migrant communities. For example, Olivo et al., (2023) examine how intergenerational trauma affects family dynamics and is transmitted and negotiated among second-generation Central American women growing up in Canada. Their study highlights the complex interplay between cultural heritage, trauma, and identity formation in migrant families, highlighting the burden of caretaking placed on their daughters (Olivo et al., 2023). This highlights the reality of these roles being heavily gendered, with the care taking and emotional responsibility being placed on daughters rather than sons, even if this had implications for their personal and social lives (ibid).

The impact of intergenerational trauma extends beyond psychological realms to shape both material and metaphorical spaces of home, significantly affecting family dynamics (Dragojlovic, 2011). Here, memories play a vital role in shaping these spaces, with traumatic experiences and their related emotions influencing both physical and immaterial 'home' environments (Doornbos and Dragojlovic, 2021). These spaces become imbued with intergenerational hauntings of the past, influencing the transmission of attitudes among generations of migrant women. Doornbos and Dragojlovic (2021) investigate the burdens of intergenerational gendered family dynamics within home environments, examining various

forms of home and how past trauma is expressed and negotiated across different generations of women. Their analysis of participants' narratives reveals that different forms of violence were deeply ingrained in the dynamics of home environments and family life. The concept of invisible and 'silent' grievances of the past significantly shapes the dynamics of both physical and emotional representations of home (Das, 2000).

Recent scholarship has introduced new concepts to further our understanding of intergenerational trauma. Pain (2021) proposes the concept of 'geotrauma' to explore the geographical dimensions of trauma transmission and its impact on communities across generations. This concept offers a novel spatial approach to understanding intergenerational trauma, investigating how traumatic experiences are transmitted not only over time, but also in and through specific places and landscapes. Pain (2021) contends that trauma can be written into physical spaces, influencing how future generations interact and perceive these environments. Although there is limited work on this, geotrauma is relevant to migrant communities and can manifest in a variety of ways. For example, the trauma associated with the physical act of being displaced can result in a long-lasting sense of loss or disconnection that is passed onto subsequent generations (Pain, 2021; Van der Kolk, 2015). Furthermore, the new geographical contexts in which migrant communities settle may be infused with the traumas of adjustment and/or discrimination (ibid). Within the context of migrant women's experiences, geotrauma can be seen in how certain neighbourhoods or institutions become associated with marginalisation or violence. These spatial associations can be passed down to future generations of women, influencing how they navigate and perceive their surroundings. However, exploring geotrauma also provides opportunities for healing and resilience.

Recognising the spatial aspects of trauma allows communities to engage in healing practices that reclaim and transform spaces associated with traumatic histories (Pain, 2021). This

approach may be especially empowering for migrant women, allowing them to actively reshape their relationships with both their ancestral homelands and their new geographical contexts.

The concept of transnational families further complicates this discussion. Here, Levitt and Schiller's (2004) theory of social remittance are especially relevant. Social remittances are the ideas, behaviours, and social capital that transfer from receiving to sending country communities (Levitt, 1998). In terms of attitudes towards gender-based violence, this could imply that shifting perspectives in the host country may influence attitudes in the country of origin, resulting in a dynamic, bidirectional flow of ideas across generations and national borders. The previously discussed impact of the digital divide takes on new significance in this transnational context, with the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities in attitudes shared and validated across generations. This is because digital platforms not only facilitate communication, but act as conduits for the transmission of both attitudes and values.

However, it is important to examine the power dynamics inherent within these digital spaces regarding who has access to these platforms and which voices are actively silenced or amplified. The interplay of different legal systems further complicates the transmission of attitudes towards gender-based violence among migrant women. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) contend that immigrant women's experiences with domestic violence are frequently exacerbated by their status as migrants. This position is influenced not only by their personal circumstances but also the intersection of immigration laws and social service provisions in the host country (see also McIlwaine and Evans, 2020; McIlwaine et al. 2019; McIlwaine et al., 2024; McIlwaine et al., 2024). It is therefore crucial to consider how these legal frameworks may unintentionally reinforce or challenge current attitudes towards gender-based violence. For example, immigration policies that link a woman's residency

status to her spouse may trap women in abusive relationships, implicitly condoning such violence. In the UK context, migrant women with insecure immigration status have no access to state welfare support, known as the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) regulation. This means that they are excluded from support and experience 'gendered infrastructural violence' (McIlwaine and Evans, 2023). This leaves women vulnerable to manipulation by perpetrators of violence who use threats of reporting to authorities as a tool of control. This control is bolstered by the police and judicial system who often do not believe women when they report gender-based violence and/or report them as having insecure immigration status resulting in their deportation (McIlwaine et al., 2019). Despite this, it cannot be assumed that legal changes will automatically result in attitudinal shifts. For example, Htun and Weldon's (2012) study on policies addressing violence against women reminds us that legal reforms are necessary but insufficient for changing deeply ingrained social norms and systems of power that reproduce patriarchal and intersectional violence. However, more recent work has been more positive in highlighting how anti-gender-based violence legislation can engender positive social change (Htun & Jensenius, 2022) especially when policy reforms result from feminist advocacy (Ellsberg, Quintanilla & Ugarte, 2022; Women Resisting Violence Collective, 2022).

Kelly's (1988) concept of a continuum of violence provides an effective framework for understanding migrant women's experiences. This approach allows us to see how different types of violence, from intimate partner violence to state-sanctioned discrimination as well as war and conflict, are linked by gendered power structures and oppressions. For migrant women, this continuum includes experiences with structural and symbolic violence in both their home and host country (McIlwaine and Evans, 2020; McIlwaine et al., 2024). Once again, Das's concept of how violent events become embedded within the daily lives of affected communities is useful, particularly in the context of migrant women (Das, 2007).

This is closely related to Hirsch's (2008) concept of 'postmemory' which outlines how memories and experiences from one generation can be so powerfully transmitted to the next that they become memories in their own right. Therefore, second-generation migrant women's understanding and attitudes towards gender-based violence may be influenced, by not only their personal experiences, but also by inherited memories of their ancestors' experiences of violence, displacement, and adaptation.

However, it is crucial to avoid assuming homogeneity with these experiences and migrant communities. Education level, socioeconomic status, and individual family dynamics all have an impact on how attitudes towards gender-based violence develop and spread. Furthermore, it is important to be wary of narratives that portray migrant communities as inherently more vulnerable to gender-based violence, as such discourses may reinforce harmful stereotypes whilst obscuring structural factors that contribute to violence. Indeed, culturally essentialist interpretations of gender-based violence among minoritised and migrant women assume that they experience disproportionate gendered violence due to their culture which is erroneous (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Instead, it is these women's location within structural processes of oppression and discrimination that underlies such violence (Sokoloff, 2008; also McIlwaine et al., 2024).

## **The role of activism and intergenerational trauma**

Whilst cultural memory, trauma, and lived experiences have a significant impact on the transmission of attitudes towards gender-based violence across generations of migrant women, it is important to recognise that women are not merely passive recipients of inherited attitudes. Instead, many people work actively to reshape these narratives through various forms of activism. The role of activism among different generations of migrant women offers a compelling lens through which to investigate how attitudes towards gender-

based violence are not only shared, but also challenged and transformed. This shift from transmission to active engagement enables us to investigate how migrant women, across generations, become agents of change within their communities and in wider society.

The role of activism among generations of migrant women in tackling gender-based violence has emerged as a critical area of research in recent years. This intergenerational approach reveals the complex dynamics of continuity and changes in strategies, perspectives, and outcomes. The diversity of experiences that are shared by generations of migrant women creates a complex tapestry of activist practices that challenges as well as reinforce traditional approaches to combating gender-based violence. These intergenerational traumas can result in novel ways of thinking about one's identity and agency. Hach (2020) explores how collective traumas travel across space and time, becoming embodied by migrant women, examining the role these embodied traumas play in shaping social justice movements.

The concept of intergenerational trauma provides a useful perspective for understanding the rise of activism among migrant women. Hirsch's (2012) theory of postmemory highlights how traumatic experiences are passed down and reinterpreted by subsequent generations, even in the absence of direct exposure. This inherited trauma frequently serves as a powerful motivator for activism, as younger generations seek to address and correct injustices (ibid). Hence, for subsequent generations, their activism may stem from the traumatic experiences of their parents and grandparents; whilst they may not have directly witnessed these traumas, the sharing of memories, and unresolved grief can shape their worldview and inspire them to action (Bahar Başer and Toivanen, 2023). Danieli, Norris and Engdahl (2016) expand on this

understanding of intergenerational trauma transmission, highlighting how traumas can shape collective consciousness that can in turn catalyse resistance movements. Their research provides empirical evidence for the long-term impact on both survivors and descendants of the holocaust, demonstrating the far-reaching effects of historical trauma across generations (Danieli, Norris and Engdahl, 2016) Their study further demonstrates how traumatic experiences can affect not only individual psychological well-being, but also broader social dynamics such as group identity formation and political activism (ibid).

Activism across generations is deeply influenced by memory, transnational ties, and identity, which play a complex and nuanced role in shaping immigrant activism (Levitt and Waters, 2002). Féron (2023) examines how the memories of violent pasts are reinterpreted and embodied by the younger diasporic generations and what the consequences of these are on their identities. In the case of the Rwandan diaspora in Belgium, Féron (2023) observed that cultural memories evolve over time and place. For instance, second-generation Rwandan Belgians often reframe the narratives of the genocide, emphasising resilience and reconciliation. This shift highlights the ways memories are not static and can be actively reshaped by new contexts and generational perspectives. The intergenerational transmission of trauma shapes the mobilisation of second-generation diasporans as well as shifting the temporality of memories which influences new forms of engagement with memories of violence (ibid). This phenomenon is not unique to the Rwandan diaspora; similar patterns have been observed in other communities with histories of conflict, such as the Armenian and Jewish diasporas (Bahar Başer and Toivanen, 2023). Research indicates that a shift is seen in forms of activism, with more creative approaches emerging through mediums like the arts, theatre, or digital activism (ibid). These new modes of engagement differ from the more traditional methods used by first-generation activists. For example, young Armenian

Americans have used social media campaigns and digital storytelling to raise awareness about the Armenian Genocide, reaching audiences that perhaps traditional forms of protest may not have reached (ibid; Chernobrov and Wilmers, 2019).

It is argued that these memories are reframed in these ways to resonate in the host country and to wider audiences residing in these countries, as well as diasporas in similar positionalities as themselves (ibid). With the intergenerational transmission of memory being a common practice amongst diaspora communities as a strategy to preserve identities and culture, new forms of activism within the younger generations can be vital in the remembering among diaspora communities (Bahar Başer and Toivanen, 2023). Levenson (2021) highlights the dynamic nature of memories and identity. This is because, these shared recollections are continually discussed, confirmed, and reproduced within communities, while being intrinsically linked to specific times, identities, and spaces. The 'passing on the torch of memory' is vital in the transfer of diaspora identity, as well as in transnational justice through various forms of resistance and activism (Orjuela, 2020). For the diaspora to continue to exist, this collective consciousness needs to extend across both space and time, with subsequent generations needing to continue memory-making (ibid). This means that younger generations remain aware of past memories which is the first step in ensuring both change and resistance for the future. Several scholars have highlighted the potential of younger generations to engage in discourse and resistance in new and creative ways, for example, through bridging the gaps between generations through the use of technology (Orjuela, 2020). Digital platforms, in particular, have emerged as effective tools for migrant activism, facilitating the formation of transnational networks and the rapid dissemination of information (Nick, 2010).



## Formal activism

For migrant women, shared experiences and collective consciousness can become one's identity and inspire activist strategies. Muszel (2020) highlights the persisting issues with both studying migrants' activities as well as addressing any challenges they may face. As migrants often get treated as a homogenous group, issues related to intersections of gender, race and class can be minimised or dismissed (Muszel, 2020). Recent research has highlighted the inherent gendered nature of migration and how the status of migrant women being women, may overshadow the significance of other identities (Pojmann, 2017). This is consistent with Crenshaw's (1989) work on intersectionality, which emphasises the need to consider multiple, intersecting forms of oppression and identity (Bastia et al, 2023; McIlwaine, 2010). This intersectional approach to migrant women's activism demonstrates how factors such as race, class, and cultural background interact with gender to shape unique experiences and therefore forms of resistance. Examples of this can be seen through self- organisation activist movements such as the 'Wandering Woman Foundation' of female migrants and refugees in Poland and the Latin American Women's Rights Service in the UK (Muszel, 2020; LAWRS, 2024; see also McIlwaine et al., 2019, McIlwaine et al., 2024 on working with LAWRS and with Latin Americans in the UK). These organisations show how migrant women are active participants in shaping their own narratives and fighting for their rights, rather than passive recipients of aid.

## Everyday activism

Everyday forms of activism among migrant women can manifest as subtle practices that challenge dominant narratives, preserve cultural identity, and promote intergenerational healing. While not always recognised as overt political action, these forms of activism are critical to maintaining community resilience and fostering empowerment across generations.

One way this can be done is through storytelling, as among migrant women this can act as a bridge between generations, as well as a means of navigating complex histories of trauma and cultural identity. Research has emphasised the importance of storytelling in investigating intergenerational dynamics within migrant communities, particularly among women (Smith, 2015). Smith (2015) discusses how women's narratives and stories of their experiences seeking asylum, can become a means of resistance. Within research, refugee narratives are predominantly framed around male experiences, with women's stories often being marginalised (Smith, 2015). When women refugees are discussed in policy, they are frequently portrayed as vulnerable victims, particularly through narratives of sexual violence. Women's own accounts are seldom represented in public or policy discourse, hence feminist scholars have increasingly turned to narrative approaches to challenge and disrupt these dominant depictions (ibid). In this way, particularly with stories of migration which may have narratives of trauma, the act of storytelling can act to reshape their social worlds and wider understanding (Erwin, 2020).

However, storytelling is not only used as a means of political activism but also to show the ways in which generations of migrant women preserve their culture, history, and experiences. In this context, storytelling becomes a healing method and way of asserting agency and reclaiming identity (Hunter, 2020). This is because storytelling not only serves as a tool for understanding human behaviour, but it also functions as a way of resisting oppression and thus fostering healing (ibid). Storytelling within communities is especially effective because of its ability to create a sense of community and restore cultural identities, as well as serve as way to refute negative stereotypes about marginalised groups (ibid). This is done through collective memory, a community's shared understanding of the past, which is vital for healing historical trauma and challenging systematic oppression (ibid). It provides a means to reclaim erased or marginalised histories, contributing to both

psychological well-being and cultural identity (Ainslie, 2013; Zaromb et al., 2014).

Storytelling within safe environments enhances trust, allowing individuals to challenge dominant cultural narratives and resist internalised oppression (Comas-Díaz, 2016; Case & Hunter, 2012). By co-creating digital stories, testimonies, or other shared narratives, individuals not only validate their experiences but also collectively reflect on their histories, which strengthens interpersonal bonds and encourages critical consciousness (ibid). This heightened awareness empowers communities to organise, resists oppressive structure, and enact social change (Hunter, 2020). Through these acts of storytelling and reflection, collective memory becomes a tool for justice, helping communities reimagine their futures.

## **Activism within the Arts**

Arguably, activism through the arts is important due to the way it transcends the traditional boundaries of activism and is therefore important for the new generation activists (Shank and Zinn, 2004). Through utilising new mediums like the arts, and applying them to activism, it is possible to move beyond conventional boundaries and perhaps propose alternative models of advocacy (ibid). Particularly in recent years, arts practices, ranging from photography, film, visual arts, and digital media are being used in a variety of disciplines to identify and represent data (Nunn, 2017). Arts-based approaches are particularly popular for researching marginalised groups such as forced migrants and offer a unique opportunity for addressing gaps in research on intergenerational relationships between migrants and their descendants (McIlwaine and Ryburn, 2024). The value of arts-based research is that it often involves participatory processes, whereby the research participants become co-researchers (ibid). This means that within a collaborative environment, inherent power hierarchies and binaries that are present in the research process are disrupted, allowing for more agency for the participant in the research process (Walker and Oliveira, 2020). In this way, arts-based methodologies can contribute to the

production and dissemination of knowledge about generational changes in migrant heritage communities (Nunn, 2017).

This participatory approach aligns strongly with the principles of the ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’, a methodology developed by Augusto Boal (Forcer et al., 2022; also McIlwaine et al., 2024). This seeks to challenge existing power dynamics through participant led social change, focusing on the value of co-creation and shared participation (ibid). In this way, through various performances and workshops, Boal used theatre as a tool for transforming the way oppression is viewed and challenged (Makepeace, 2022). This approach was influenced by Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which contributed to the idea of the ‘oppressed’ being reimagined as participants that can contribute to the process that they are taking part in (ibid). Forcer et al., (2022) state that using these methods, which may on the surface seem to address harsh realities in a playful approach, can allow a more nuanced understanding of these serious issues, like violence. Hence, the use of the arts to tackle social issues can take varying but intersecting forms and names. However, they all share the commonality in the way they utilise performance spaces and focus on the subjects being active participants, engaging them through the entire process (McIlwaine et al., 2022). In this way, arts-based methods can serve as a powerful tool for articulating experiences of oppression and fostering intergenerational dialogue.

## **Care as activism**

Care as a form of activism represents a shift seen in both the understanding of the nature of what constitutes care, as well as the potential for social change. This conceptualisation emerges at an intersection of several discourses and disciplines within contemporary social

science: the ethics of care within feminist theory and the role of care and creative practices in social engagement and resistance. Through an examination of these intersections, we can gather a nuanced understanding of how existing and inherent power structures can be challenged through care practices and result in transformative social change, particularly within the context of immigration (Mendelin, 2024). Darling (2011) provides a crucial starting point for this analysis through the exploration of the spatial dimensions of care. Darling's ethnographic research in Sheffield, United Kingdom, demonstrates how the establishment of specific venues, such as the 'talking shop' can embody care as an active activity (Darling, 2011). These spaces go beyond being mere physical locations, becoming places where care is expressed through everyday gestures and interactions (ibid). This is consistent with the wider trend in urban geographical research that investigates how care is involved in the creation of social spaces (Power and Williams, 2019). The relevance of this spatial approach stems from its ability to materialise care, transforming it from an abstract idea to a tangible, observable experience (Darling, 2011; Power and Williams, 2019).

However, Darling (2011) highlights that such spaces are not without their own complexities, with them having the potential to reinforce asymmetric power relations due to the inherent dynamics present between caregivers and receivers. This critique highlights a critical and recurrent theme in activism research: how to provide support, whether through research or care, without perpetuating existing power imbalances (ibid). Here, the concept of 'radical care' can be useful in offering a resolution (Clark-Kazak, 2023). This approach advocates for dismantling these harmful power structures within research through demanding a reflexive stance from researchers. This means researchers and those in positions of power are urged to critically examine their own positionality within these power relations in order to then address them (ibid). This approach aligns closely with Crenshaw's feminist intersectional theory, providing a useful framework to understand how

varying forms of privilege and oppression can overlap in the context of migration (Clark-Kazak, 2023; Crenshaw, 1991). The materiality of care, as explored by several urban geographers in recent literature, provides another layer to this analysis (Power and Williams, 2019). Through examining how instances of care can interact with tangible objects and the environment, these studies reveal the embodied nature of care (ibid). This materialist perspective enriches our understanding of care as activism by highlighting how everyday objects and spaces can become tools for challenging existing power structures. It also echoes the prior arts-based approaches, implying a link between creative practices and care-based activism.

The incorporation of care within creative work, offers another perspective on how care can be created through activism (Alacovska, 2020). Alacovska (2020) challenges the ideas of creative work being purely individualistic, stating that these artistic practices can embody a form of care that extends beyond the individual to the community. This conceptualisation of the arts and creative work as a “labour of care and compassion” provides a bridge between the earlier discussion of arts-based activism and care (Alacovska p.1, 2020).

Hence, creative practices, care, and activism can intersect to address both immediate needs and foster long- term empowerment. With the amalgamation of these various perspectives, care emerges as a form of engagement that is spatial, material, and relational.

Care as a form of resistance, particularly through the arts and community healing practices, serves as an impactful framework for understanding activism among migrant women who have experienced gender-based violence and intergenerational trauma. Drawing on the concepts of feminist care ethics and radical care, the formation of support networks and healing circles can serve as ways of resisting and challenging systemic oppression (Clark-

Kazak, 2023; Morales et al., 2023). These practices can be represented via artistic mediums and serve multiple purposes, providing emotional support, preserving culture and identity, and acting as a form of collective resistance to the isolating effects of both violence and the migration experience (ibid). Morales et al. (2023) explore the use of healing circles as a strategy to facilitate resistance and activism among an undocumented community in the United States (U.S). Their research echoes the findings within the literature with how these practices can create a sense of belonging and a way to honour their cultural identities and heritage (Morales et al., 2023). Particularly for undocumented communities, practices such as healing circles can become a powerful and culturally appropriate tool for people to join as a community and receive care from others, healing from trauma and creating a sense of hope for the future (ibid). Notably, despite their various backgrounds, many migrants frequently share common experiences and obstacles, which fosters a sense of togetherness and belonging that can be nurtured through community groups and artistic expression (ibid).

Through engagement with these activities, women can reclaim their agency and power and transform their personal healing into collective action. This type of care-based activism operates on several levels, including healing the individual, strengthening communal relationships, and challenging dominant narratives about immigrant women's agency and strength (Morales et al., 2023).

A final aspect of care that is relevant for working with participatory arts is 'collective care'. This is where the responsibility for generating care through workshops and events is developed and maintained by participants and not only by the facilitator and/or artist (Mayo, 2021). The facilitators/artists need to stand back while holding on and letting go at the same time to allow the participants to bond, to create bonds of solidarity and belonging, and to become confident in doing this. In summary, Mayo (2021: 194) notes that this

process can be potentially empowering and that 'The performance of collective care is emotional, practical, supportive, encouraging, protective, vocal, and tacit. It demonstrates solidarity with others, and a respect for difference. Collective care is revealed in an acceptance of one another, as well as in a striving for excellence' (see also Nunn, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, intergenerational transmission of attitudes toward gender-based violence among migrant women explored in this review, is complex and deeply set within the interaction of trauma, cultural adjustment, legal frameworks, and shifting forms of resistance. This analysis explores how history continues to shape the present, in silent yet influential ways, sometimes through very indirect and subtle means.

A central concept in this understanding is intergenerational trauma, as illustrated by Das's (2007) concept of 'poisonous knowledge' and Dragojlovic (2011) 'zones of unspeakability.' These frameworks reveal how traumatic experiences become woven into the fabric of everyday life, affecting subsequent generations even in the absence of direct exposure. However, the transmission of attitudes is not a straightforward, linear process. Rather, it was seen to be a constant emergent process in ongoing negotiations within dynamic host-country environments where the changing processes of integration, legal structures, and societal norms yield a complex, shifting landscape of influence.

Pain's (2021) notion of 'geotrauma' is useful in understanding this transmission, noting that physical environments themselves can become inscribed with traumatic associations, impacting the attitude and experience of future generations in profound and often overlooked ways. Furthermore, the developments of digital technologies embed new dimensions into this landscape, opening unparalleled opportunities for exposure to a



multiplicity of perspectives and transnational support networks. However, this threatens to reinforce the very inequalities it seeks to dispel by restricting access to crucial information and resources among the already marginalised.

Importantly, this review has underlined that such attitudes are not passively inherited by migrant women. Rather, they reimagine and contest this through various modes of activism, ranging from collective movements to everyday resistance and care. It is here that arts-based approaches and storytelling prove most effective; both are a means of articulation of lived experience and of fostering intergenerational dialogue. Both methods disrupt dominant narratives and reclaim agency in order for women to take ownership of their stories. Care as activism presents an interesting framework that informs how migrant women resist and change attitudes to gender-based violence. The creation of spaces for healing, mutual support, and collective empowerment speaks to immediate needs while cultivating short- and longer- term resilience and community-led transformation. Situated in feminist ethics and radical care, this model shows ways in which grassroots activism might produce change from within communities themselves. This review flags some key directions in which the future research and policy development need to go. First and foremost, there is a need for more intersectional approaches that take into account the complex interplay that shapes attitudes towards and experiences of violence. Future work should consider ways in which digital platforms are facilitating transnational activism and solidarity networks but grapple with the inequalities of those resources. The potential of arts-based and care-centred interventions in healing trauma and fostering intergenerational dialogue is further left largely unexplored.

Gender-based violence is both a consequence and a cause of deep historic trauma and structural inequity underlying intergenerational attitudes toward gender-based violence, while it is also a site of continued resistance and change. The wealth of accumulated agency and resilience among migrant women across generations provides a strong context within which to develop more holistic and culturally sensitive approaches in research and interventions that ensure more effective strategies are found for addressing gender-based violence and related empowerment. This review serves to reiterate the importance of migrant women not only as subjects of research or targets of aid but, rather, as active agents shaping their stories and destinies.

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