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Cathy McIlwaine

Department of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
Migrant machismos: exploring gender ideologies and practices among Latin American migrants in London from a multi-scalar perspective

Cathy McIlwaine*

Department of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, UK

This article examines the complex gendered migration experiences of Latin American women and men migrants in London, an under-studied yet increasingly important ‘new migrant group’ in the UK. Conceptually, it combines a typology of gendered outcomes of migration, together with the ‘gendered geographies of power’ framework that also incorporates intersectionality. This allows for a holistic analysis from a multi-scalar perspective across households, labour markets and the state to assess how and why gender identities transform as people move and how these intersect with class, nationality, and race and ethnicity. Drawing on qualitative research with almost 100 (mainly Colombian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian) migrants as well as participant observation, the article highlights the importance of moving beyond stereotyped migration trajectories that assume shifts from traditional gender regimes to so-called modern ones to emphasise a more nuanced picture. The article argues that while there were concrete changes in everyday gender practices or acts in ways that favoured women, this varied according to class and nationality. In addition, more deep-seated transformations in gender ideologies or scripts were much more resistant to change. Social disempowerment was critically important in tempering changes in femininities and masculinities, although the transformation of hegemonic masculinities into marginalised or subordinate masculinities reflected both the acceptances of changes in gender practices in households and labour markets as well as an exaggeration of masculinity in order to compensate for wider experiences of exclusion, although again this was differentiated by nationality and class.

Keywords: migration; machismo; masculinities; Latin America; London

Introduction

With the gendered nature of transnational migration now firmly, albeit rather belatedly, established as important (Donato et al. 2006), research has proliferated on how the mutability of gender has led to a questioning of how migration affects the lives of women and men. While early research tended to emphasise the benefits of migration for women, more recently the inconsistencies and contradictions for both women and men have been widely recognised (Gamburd 2000; Mahler 1999). While gains for women have been highlighted in the domestic realm and linked with their entry into the labour market, these have often been undermined in other spheres or in relation to other social cleavages (Fouron and Glick-Schiller 2001; Menjívar 2000; Zentgraf 2002). Yet in the case of Latin Americans in particular, many of these observations have been based on experiences of these migrants in North America (and to a lesser extent among Asian migrants within the continent and beyond). Conceptually, pinpointing exactly how and why the relationships

*Email: c.j.mcilwaine@qmul.ac.uk
between migration and women and men’s differential exercise of power remains elusive, further exacerbated by the tendency to sideline men from many analyses (although see Boehm 2008; Datta et al. 2009). Thus, much more research remains to be done on how different gender and migration regimes in different places create and are created by different gendered outcomes in the quotidian life of migrants as women and men also simultaneously negotiate the intersection with other social positions.

This article explores these debates through an empirical focus on Latin American women and men migrants in London, themselves an under-studied yet increasingly important ‘new migrant group’ in the UK. Conceptually, the article combines Pessar’s (2005) typology of outcomes of migration for gender regimes with Mahler and Pessar’s (2001) ‘gendered geographies of power’ framework to highlight how and why gender ideologies and practices transform as people move and the underlying global, national and local power inequalities that underpin this movement. It highlights the importance of moving beyond stereotyped notions of how migration entails shifts from traditional gender regimes to so-called modern ones to emphasise a more nuanced picture with reference to the everyday experiences of different migrants in the domestic domain, the labour market and in relation to the state (see also Gutmann 2004; Parrado et al. 2005; Zentgraf 2002). In exploring these nuances, the article also suggests that a consideration of recent theorisations of intersectionality from within feminism and feminist geography in particular can be fruitfully combined with Mahler and Pessar’s conceptualisations to show how an examination of how gender identities transform through mobility needs to acknowledge wider multiple and intersecting social relations, especially race, nationality and class (McDowell 2008; Valentine 2007). This also feeds into wider debates about the need to combine material approaches to understanding inequalities experienced by transnational migrants with those that emphasise ‘discursive understandings of multiple identities’ in multiscalar ways (McDowell 2008, 493).

The article argues that the processes and outcomes of migration and settlement are contradictory for women and men from nationality and social backgrounds. While there are concrete changes in everyday gender practices or what Butler (1990, 275) refers to as ‘gender acts’, more deep-seated transformations in gender ideologies or ‘gender scripts’ (ibid.) are much more resistant (acknowledging, of course, that these are intertwined). Both machismos or hegemonic masculinities and femininities mutate as they travel across and within different scales and domains, although the latter are more flexible than the former linked with particular configurations of employment and immigration regimes in home and host countries. In addition, class, nationality and concomitant immigration status play particularly important roles in influencing the gendered outcomes.

Conceptualising the gendered outcomes of international mobility

As international migration continues apace, so it continues to disrupt, change and reinforce the gender identities of those who move in fluid and diverse ways (Donato et al. 2006; Huang et al. 2000; Silvey and Lawson 1999; Yeoh and Huang 2000). It is now firmly established that migration is a gendered process imbued with hierarchies of power from the global to local scales embedded in the practices and ideologies of states, institutions, labour markets, households and individuals. As part of some recent attempts to conceptualise what these changes mean for women and men migrants, Patricia Pessar (2005) outlines a useful typology identifying three potential sets of outcomes. First, migration can challenge and renegotiate pre-migration gender ideologies and practices; second, it might result in a ‘wider acceptance and consolidation of counter-hegemonic
gender regimes which were available prior to departure’ (ibid., 6); and third, it can recreate and intensify gender beliefs and norms from the pre-migration stage. These types obviously vary according to place, social position, not to mention individual migrant agency, and can occur concurrently or at different stages in an individual’s life.

Pessar’s typology is especially helpful in structuring understandings of how gender practices, beliefs and ideologies ‘travel’ in relation to both home and destination countries (Datta et al. 2009; Menjívar 1999). It also contributes to recent challenges in relation to gendered migration processes, from countries in the Global South to the North, which are constructed as a linear shift from a stereotypical and ‘traditional’ rural gender regime towards a ‘modern’, urban and liberated one (Barajas and Ramirez 2007; Gutmann 2004; Kim 2006). In turn, it interrelates with postcolonial interpretations of transnationalism that challenge binary constructions of mobility, identities and the depiction of migrants, especially women, from the Global South as uniformly oppressed and subjugated (McEwan 2001; McIlwaine forthcoming). In critiquing ethnocentric and static portrayals of transnational migrants, intersectionality can also foreground the complexities of simultaneously experiencing and producing different identities that can reflect intersecting ‘geometries of oppression’ across space and time (Valentine 2007). In the current study, where women and men migrated from different countries, but mainly from urban areas, were relatively well-educated, with many from middle- and lower-middle-class backgrounds yet with most ending up working in low-paid service jobs, this is especially pertinent.

In terms of searching for explanations as to why particular changes in the gendered nature of transnational migration occur, Mahler and Pessar’s (2001) ‘gendered geographies of power framework’ provides some guidelines (see also Pessar and Mahler 2003). They highlight three key dimensions. First, ‘geographies of scale’ to show that gender is embedded and functions across different social and spatial scales from the body, to the family, to the state (ibid., 815). Second, and recalling the notion of intersectionality, social location which recognises how class, race, sexuality, or nationality affect people’s positioning which in turn, is interpolated with historical context, place and so on. Their third dimension draws on Massey’s (1994) power geometry to highlight how people express their agency in different ways as they move, and how they are influenced by the imaginaries of migration or the expectations of what it might hold for people. However, although the structural materialities of transnational migration and especially the inequalities inherent in patterns of uneven global development are mentioned in this framework, there is scope to be more explicit about the connections between transforming identities and changing structural and institutional conditions globally and nationally in migrant destination countries. In particular, McDowell’s (2008, 496) conceptualisation of intersectionality in relation to transnational labour migration is especially useful in making the links between how constructions of differences among migrants are produced and maintained through practices and processes in labour markets and immigration regimes in home and host countries. Combining these approaches can provide a more holistic guide to understanding how gendered practices or acts, ideologies or scripts change and connect with discursive, institutional and structural processes in a multiscalar perspective across different scales and in different ways.

In the current context, such an approach can shed important light on how changes in gender identities in one sphere may not translate to another. For instance, early work on the gendered outcomes of international migration emphasised how labour market entry in a new country could lead to some challenging of patriarchal orders in the home especially in terms of greater decision-making power, childcare and so on (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994;
Zentgraf 2002). However, later work has challenged this optimistic view in line with wider discussions of the contradictory outcomes of women’s employment (see Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Pearson 2007). The fact that many migrant women are often concentrated in highly feminised, low-status work provides few avenues for improving their lives (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Their embodied labour is not only gendered, but also racialised and ethnicised as national stereotypes about the appropriateness of different migrant women to fulfil different jobs becomes entrenched in the production and functioning of labour markets (Datta et al. 2006; Wills et al. 2010). Viewed from a global scale, migrant women can also be viewed as part of exploitative global care chains denoting how middle-class women’s entry into the labour market in the industrialised North creates a demand for ‘emotional’ or caring labour that is increasingly met by women from the Global South. Yet, while such migrants are positioned in host countries in inferior social class positions, the reality is often very different with many, especially from countries such as the Philippines, often from professional middle-class backgrounds (Parreñas 2001; see also Datta et al. 2009).

While the specific global care chains approach neglects migrant women’s experiences beyond domestic service as well as migrant men’s position (Yeates 2004), the broader gendered geographies of power framework combined with intersectionality allows for consideration of men. Even then, there is much more scope to include an analysis of different types of masculinities and the ways in which male migrants’ identities transform in complex and contradictory ways as they move. This is crucial to understand more clearly how migration can lead to a backlash through emotional and physical abuse as men cope with deteriorating status, as well as to shifts towards more egalitarian relations (Gamburd 2000; Kim 2006). This entails the recognition that male migrants are not uniformly ‘deviant others’ but that their experiences are highly variable (Datta et al. 2009). In this way, Connell’s (2005) work on hegemonic masculinities can be instructive in recognising the inherent dynamism of masculinities across space and time, as well as variations according to race, nationality, age and sexuality (Berg and Longhurst 2003). Differences among men or ‘otherness’ can be organised and managed in relation to both subordinate masculinities, which are diametrically opposite to hegemonic masculinities, as well as marginalised masculinities, which are attendant power differentials based on class and race. Increasingly, migration is being recognised as a central mechanism in destabilising and re-making different types of masculinities and indeed, femininities (Datta et al. 2009; McKay 2007).

It is also important to remember that current gendered patterns of international migration are fundamentally influenced by states and their immigration regimes (Wills et al. 2010). These can create particular types of migrant workers and migrant communities in given places as women and men from different nationalities, social classes and ethnicities may be more or less likely to enter and/or settle in a country (Bailey et al. 2002; Kofman et al. 2000; Piper 2006). Furthermore, migrants’ relationships with the state in a host country, in terms of negotiating formal and/or informal citizenship, can affect their ability to remain and their exercise of rights, and also the ways in which gender identities transform. It is not enough for micro-level changes to occur in households (or in labour markets), if the state reinforces gender stereotypes and denies people access to citizenship (Anthias and Lazardis 2000; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005; see also Silvey 2004, 2006).

Clearly, a much more nuanced approach is required to understand the gendered nature and outcomes of transnational migration. I argue that this can be achieved by moving away from comparing gender roles among migrants towards understanding them as situational
and relational among women and men from different subject positions and from the viewpoint of different domains (Mahler and Pessar 2006). This can be done through an empirical analysis based on Pessar’s (2005) typology of gender regimes, which in this case is useful for examining the gendered experiences of migration for Colombian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian migrants in London, combined with the multi-scalar gendered geographies of power approach that incorporates intersectionality.

**Latin Americans as a new migrant group in London: background and methods**

It is important to provide a brief outline of Latin American migration to the UK, where the Latin Americans have emerged as one of London’s under-studied ‘new migrant populations’ with few previous links with the UK. In contributing to the growing ‘super-diversity’ of migrant groups in London in particular (Vertovec 2007), Latin Americans are a heterogeneous population in terms of nationality, immigration status and class position. Where they are less differentiated is in their concentration in the lower echelons of the UK and London economy situated in elementary jobs, earning low wages and experiencing widespread vulnerability.

Despite a long-standing presence of Latin Americans in the UK as diplomats, writers, activists and businesspeople (Miller 1998), their numbers were very small until the 1970s when Colombians began arriving through the work permit system to take up jobs in domestic service, as au pair and in catering. After 1980 more arrived through social networks despite the end of the work permit system, with an increase in those seeking asylum at the end of the decade as the conflict in Colombia escalated. Once visa requirements were introduced in 1997, asylum applications decreased (Bermúdez Torres 2003; Román-Velázquez 1999). Since the 1980s, increasing numbers of Ecuadorians, Peruvians, Brazilians, Argentineans and more recently, Bolivians have arrived in London, linked mainly with the economic crises in their home countries (Carlisle 2006; Guarnizo 2008; Sveinsson 2007).

Accurate estimates of the size of the Latin American population in London and the UK remain elusive. The 2001 Census recorded the combined population of Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Bolivians in London as only 11,863 although the Labour Force Survey in 2006 estimated significant increases in Colombians (8000 in 1997 to 18,000 in 2006) and in Brazilians (up from 4000 to 25,000). Most believe that these official statistics are under-estimates because of the high proportion of irregular Latin Americans, their entry via Spain and Portugal (legally and illegally), and their general invisibility. Acknowledging this, other estimates suggest that there are between 700,000 and 1 million Latin Americans in the UK (FCO 2007, 5), including 200,000 Brazilians, 140,000 Colombians, 70–90,000 Ecuadorians and 10–15,000 Peruvians.

Turning to the research on which this article draws, 70 qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted with Latin American migrants together with three focus group discussions with 17 migrants (including Peruvians, Venezuelans and Brazilians) and a series of interviews with people working with the Latin American community between November 2006 and July 2007. In addition, I conducted participant observation through my membership of the Management Committee of a Latin American migrant community organisation for two years between 2006 and 2008. Three main Latin American nationalities were chosen to work with: Colombians (28), Ecuadorians (22) and Bolivians (20), with a total of 26 men and 44 women interviewed. Colombians were chosen as the most established and most numerous group (besides Brazilians), Ecuadorians as the second largest and relatively established population and Bolivians as the most
recent arrivals. Respondents were recruited in various ways including 20 interviews conducted through a migrant community organisation with a further 50 via snowballing techniques. The aim was to interview ‘ordinary’ migrants and to exclude the elites. Despite this, the origins of a significant proportion of the migrants were middle-class, reflecting quite marked downward social mobility (see below).

In terms of the characteristics of those interviewed, most were aged between 21 and 40 and were relatively well-educated, with almost a quarter having completed tertiary education (24%). The majority had a job, with only five women defining themselves as housewives or unemployed and four men who received welfare benefits. A further 16 said they were studying English as their main occupation, although all worked as well. For those employed, the majority were concentrated in cleaning and catering. Cleaning generally comprised working as contract cleaners for large companies in offices, shops, banks as well as some live-out domestic service. Also common was work in catering in kitchens or serving, with a minority working in factories, laundries or in their own businesses. Occupational patterns differed little between women and men, with both working in similar proportions in cleaning and catering. Acknowledging the difficulties in identifying migrants’ legal status, the majority reported that they were living in the country legally (60), with only 10 reportedly irregular. Twenty-two had student visas (31%), with a further 22 stating they had residence acquired either through asylum, by marriage, or by having Spanish passports (legally or illegally). It is important to note here that the high number of migrants with student visas reflects the fact that obtaining a student visa was a route to enter and remain the country. Although many Colombians and Ecuadorians took advantage of the opportunity to learn English, most Bolivians did not study and breached the conditions of their visa (i.e. worked more than 20 hours per week). Most migrants had arrived in the previous 10 years, with Bolivians the most recent, and with residence largely dispersed across London (McIlwaine 2007).

There were also important differences among the nationality groups. Colombians were the most settled and most likely to have residency and citizenship (usually claimed through asylum). They were therefore more likely to have been refugees and to have migrated for political reasons (although many political migrants also stated economic reasons for leaving – see McIlwaine 2007, forthcoming). This gave them privileges over the other two main groups as they could access the welfare state, establish civil society organisations serving their community and set up businesses. While several Ecuadorians had also secured residency through the asylum system (8), this was mainly through the Family Amnesty Programme, with only one Bolivian woman having secured asylum, again through the amnesty. Indeed, Bolivians were the most likely to be irregular or have temporary visas and, not surprisingly, they had the lowest occupational status, working in the most vulnerable jobs such as washing dishes and cleaning toilets. While the sample as a whole was broadly from urban, lower-middle-class backgrounds, there were differences according to nationality. Again linked with the fact that many Colombians had arrived through the asylum system, their class position tended to be higher than Ecuadorians and Bolivians who were generally less well-educated and less likely to have worked in professional jobs in their home countries.

In terms of racial and ethnic background, where data was collected and acknowledging the contested nature of racial categorising in Latin America (Wade 1997), most Ecuadorians and Colombians referred to themselves as mestizos (mixed race), except two people who identified themselves as African Latin American or of mixed African ancestry. Most of the Bolivians from the highlands referred to themselves as indigenous, while all of those from lowland Santa Cruz called themselves white or mestizo (see below). It is also
important to remember that in London, while racial identities were still a source of division, their ethnicity had transformed into being Latin American or what was most commonly referred to as ‘latino’. Although this is not unproblematic, especially as the population is far from united or homogeneous (McIlwaine 2007), it is significant that there is currently a campaign in process calling for their recognition as a specific ethnic group in the forthcoming UK census in 2011. In addition, there are also important shared experiences among Latin American migrants in light of widespread downward social mobility and vulnerability, and concentration in elementary occupations despite relatively high educational levels and middle-class origins.

Remembering machismo: migrant perceptions of gender regimes in Latin America

Exploring the everyday gender practices and ideologies among Latin American migrants in their home countries (and in London) cannot be understood without some initial discussion of machismo, a concept firmly associated with Latin America (Melhuus and Stølen 1996). Defined as a ‘cult of exaggerated masculinity’ involving ‘the assertion of power and control over women, and over other men’ (Chant with Craske 2003, 14), in practice, machismo may entail protection, provision, as well as drinking, gambling and proving one’s virility. According to Lancaster (1992, 235), it is primarily a way of structuring power among men to prove and validate one’s masculinity to other men and oneself. Yet machismo, a form of hegemonic masculinity, is not monolithic (Gutmann 1996). It is no surprise, therefore, that machismo adapts and changes as it ‘travels’ from one country to another, especially as it intersects with class and racial position. Although there is some evidence that hegemonic masculinities are challenged as more egalitarian gendered authority patterns emerge with migration, it has also been shown that masculine posturing becomes more aggressive as part of a defensive reaction to class oppression and racism in an attempt to ‘express power over others within a context of relative powerlessness’ (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1999, 354; see also Peña 1991). Therefore, constructions of masculinities must also be understood within wider structures of power vis-à-vis other marginalised men and women and in relation to the real rather than symbolic effects of such posturing for women (ibid.). In turn, these constructions are constantly negotiated over space through a ‘double masculine consciousness’ (McKay 2007, 630) where men play off subordinated and hegemonic masculinities between home and host country.

Turning to the migrants in London, machismo and its everyday manifestations were discussed repeatedly by both women and men. In recalling pre-migration regimes, women migrants interpreted machismo as a cultural trait that denoted how men prevented women from working, controlled decision-making, and imposed their will in forceful ways. In turn, women were confined to the home and to housework. Adriana, 44, a former dressmaker from Quito in Ecuador who had been living in London since 1987 where she had worked as a cleaner until her husband fell ill, reflected on this: ‘In my country men are always machista . . . there men want to dominate women or keep them in line, there are violent and aggressive men there.’ The recollections of men, not surprisingly, were less negative and more defensive. Although most agreed that women suffered significant disadvantages back home in relation to the labour market and government, it was common for men to highlight the burdens of machismo in terms of family responsibilities. Dario, 26, from Santa Cruz, Bolivia where he had worked for a non-governmental organisation providing services for local farmers until he moved to London in 2006 to work as a cleaner, pointed out: ‘There, women depend completely
on men, they expect him to go out to work, to give them money, while they stay at home looking after the children.’

Although these recollections focused on hegemonic masculinities and femininities in home societies as rather reified, a more complex pattern emerged as people remembered their specific experiences in relation to their own social locations. This reflects Pessar’s (2005) second set of outcomes where gender regimes are flexible, diverse and potentially counter-hegemonic in both sources and destination areas. It also illustrates the process of upholding hegemonic ideals about gender while acting out quite different roles, as has been widely acknowledged among Mexican migrants in the US (Boehm 2008). Although dominant patterns of machismo based on ideals of ‘women for the home’ and ‘men for the street’ prevail throughout Latin America, these have been shown to be mutable (Andrade 2003 on Ecuador). Pineda’s (2001) research among micro-enterprise workers in Cali, Colombia, for instance, showed that women’s control over small businesses led to changes in gendered authority patterns within households as the notion of a male breadwinner was challenged. Male migration has also led to some rethinking of the valuation of women’s roles as they are left behind with increased control over households, families and livelihoods even if this is not always sustainable when men return and can entail increased burdens for women and family conflicts (Boehm 2008; Pribilsky 2004 on Ecuador). Some men have also been reported to be retreating from machista behaviour due to the stresses of being unable to express emotion in positive ways (CISTAC 1998; also Gutmann 1996), although this also depends on class, race and ethnicity. In Bolivia, such differences are particularly striking, where the mestizo-dominated lowland ‘Oriente’ region is thought to have a more relaxed gender regime compared with the indigenous Andean ‘Altiplano’ (Paulson and Bailey 2003). Yet in all three countries and with variations, masculine and feminine subjectivities have increasingly been portrayed as diverse and flexible (Laurie 2005; Radcliffe 1999).

Among those interviewed, this flexibility was evident in how some migrants described the changes in their pre-migration lives, especially in relation to women’s work. Indeed, although 13 women had been studying beforehand, mainly in tertiary education, only two identified themselves as housewives, with most working in a range of jobs before migrating, including hairdressing, journalism, and running their own businesses. Among the housewives, only one, Clara, 31, from Calarcá, Quindío, Colombia, who arrived in London in 1997, had continued in this role after migrating, although she had worked briefly as a cleaner when she first arrived in London. Indeed, she was only able to do this because she had citizenship (and access to benefits) secured through asylum claimed because her family had fled Colombia because of repeated attempts on her husband’s life by the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) (see below).

Yet, recalling the importance of a multi-scalar approach, a focus on women’s economic roles provides only a partial picture, not least because class relations in Latin America can also mean that being a housewife can be a reflection of middle-class status (Willis 2000). In talking about their domestic lives back home, it emerged that while changes had occurred in women’s attitudes towards gender roles, traditional gender divisions of labour within homes prevailed. Although women were increasingly working outside the home, they continued to bear the primary responsibility for reproductive work. Carla, 35, from Ambato, Ecuador who was one of the few people to identify herself as mixed race ‘African-Latin American’, had previously worked as an office assistant in a primary school before migrating to London in 1996. She recalled that her husband rarely helped her in the home: ‘most men don’t enter the kitchen, it’s women who have to cook,
to wash-up, to iron, and it’s the man who has to bring the money home’. Many migrant men also acknowledged that they did very little in the home, blaming cultural traditions. Sebastian, 40, a former taxi driver from Palmira in Colombia stated: ‘I would burn water ... first my mother did everything for me and then my wife and I just went along with it.’ However, several men also noted that the enactment of hegemonic masculinities induced certain emotional costs in terms of being able to spend time with their children and to express themselves freely. Guillermo, 38, a former electrician from Quito, Ecuador, and of indigenous ethnic origin, complained that his friends made fun of him when he looked after his children even though he enjoyed it.

Class and nationality emerged as especially significant for a minority of educated, middle-class Colombian women who reported that counter-hegemonic practices were emerging before they migrated. Sara, 29, from Bucaramanga, who had been an engineer with a large cattle-farming company and came from a middle-class family, noted: ‘I always saw my father supporting my mother who was a really hard worker; he always let her work. Within my family, the husbands help the wives in the same way as they do here.’ Similarly, Sandra, 27, from Medellín, a graduate social worker who had been working on a government nutrition project before she left, and who also identified herself as middle-class, noted how all her young work colleagues called themselves feminists, women and men. Thus, for some migrants, especially young, educated Colombians, and for women rather than male migrants, counter-hegemonic gender norms had begun to be re-shaped before they migrated. Migrants did not leave what Gutmann (2004) calls uniformly ‘barbarous’ countries where gender relations were ‘backward’, ‘traditional’ and ‘static’ (see also Boehm 2008; Zentgraf 2002). Instead, despite a tendency to reify hegemonic gender norms or scripts, gender practices or acts were becoming more flexible, although they intersected with nationality and class.

Contesting machismo across scales: negotiating gender practices and ideologies among migrants in London

It is pertinent to begin this section with reference to Sandra from Colombia’s views on London as they immediately eschew the notion that the (global) city somehow presents a ‘modern’ ideal of gender equality. In observing her life in London, and especially her job working in a café in a large investment bank in the City, she noted: ‘There is supposed to be favouritism for women here, but I don’t think so. Why not? Because in the bank where I work, it’s full of men, if you go to the City it’s full of men in ties, if you go to a pub, more men, men, men’ (see also McDowell 1997). Against this backdrop, migrants discussed a range of ways in which gender identities were contested and negotiated in London, reflecting all three outcomes as outlined by Pessar (2005), closely intersecting with other social axes, and underpinned by particular configurations of labour markets and immigration regimes in Latin America and London.

Challenging and reconstituting gender inequalities: the view from the domestic terrain

Despite some evidence that women and men consolidated the changes already occurring before their migration, there was general agreement among women and men participants in this study that pre-migration gender ideologies and practices were reconstituted in broadly positive ways as migrants carved out a life for themselves in London. The majority of women from all three nationalities spoke of how their lives had improved as they felt greater equality vis-à-vis men. These changes were especially in relation to gender
divisions of reproductive labour. Carla, who was working as a cleaning supervisor in London (see above), asserted that Ecuadorian men changed when they migrated, but prompted as much by circumstance as by ideological change:

Here, both men and women have to cook, they both have to work, whoever arrives home first has to do the housework. Therefore, you can see the changes here as there’s hardly any machismo, men have to do the same things as women, they have to help each other out. This also reflects the lack of assistance for domestic work from extended family members in particular as well as from domestic helpers or maids in the case of middle-class households (Willis 2000; see below on childcare). Sebastian (see above), who worked in a laundry in London, also mentioned changes at home: ‘Now I cook, I make some really good dishes, I look after the children, sometimes I wash the dirty clothes, I mow the lawn … and I like doing these things, I like to keep the house in good order.’ Across the nationalities, most men agreed that they had to start doing housework, especially childcare which was often viewed as the least onerous and least threatening to hegemonic masculine norms (Boehm 2008). This was regardless of whether they had migrated before their wives and thus ‘learnt’ how to do domestic work – although it was more common for couples and families to migrate to London together (Barajas and Ramirez 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

While most men accepted these transformations as the only pragmatic option, there was evidence of some clinging to vestiges of power and in some cases reconstructing new gender inequalities. Several women noted that their partners still wanted to retain the final say on household matters. Bolivian women were the most likely to complain that men were more resistant to change, with Colombian women and men being more likely to identify changes for the better. Diana, 27, from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, who had previously worked as a receptionist in a shoe-making factory while studying part-time at university and who had been employed as a cleaner in London since she arrived in 2002, reiterated this: ‘It’s different here, but in the sense that the man is in charge, that is the same. It’s him who has the last word, I can say something but he always has the last word.’

In some cases, men sought to assert themselves through physical and verbal abuse, primarily against their female partners but sometimes against children (see also Menjívar and Salcido 2002). Significantly, one in four women spoke openly about physical abuse they had suffered in London at the hands of their husbands, with two noting that their partners had also abused their children (with Bolivian women most likely to have suffered). There was no consensus that domestic violence was more or less common in London or about its multiple causes, despite recognition that women’s enhanced economic role and protection from the state played a role along with men’s disempowerment (see below). Rosa, 42, a former journalist from Bolivia who had spent her working life in London as a cleaner, had experienced severe daily violence at the hands of her husband for three years after they migrated in 2001 (and until her eldest son migrated to London to help her). She pointed out that while jealousy and the fact that they both worked different shifts exacerbated the abuse, ultimately it was about power:

the power of money and because men in Bolivia are accustomed to hit women with no comeback. They come here, they fear the police and realise it’s not a game. But they also lose power. It made him even worse.

Thus, a complex picture of gains and losses emerged in the domestic sphere. Domestic divisions of labour were certainly becoming more egalitarian. These were welcomed by migrant women and accepted, often reluctantly, by migrant men. However, resentments emerged among some men as they perceived women’s freedom to be growing, most
notably commented on by Bolivian men from Santa Cruz of white/mestizo origin (regardless of their class origin). Indeed, it was common for men to portray women’s freedom in derogatory and resentful terms as noted by Dario (see above):

Here, women go out and get drunk and if they want an [sexual] adventure they have it. Women work, have their money and if they don’t like their husband they give kick him up the backside and he’s gone and she looks after the children.

Liberty was often conflated with sexual licentiousness as some men found it difficult to separate women’s freedom and rights from promiscuity. At the same time, several women complained that men became more promiscuous in London. According to Milena, 42, the only openly lesbian woman interviewed, from a middle-class background in Cali, Colombia, this was because there was more sexual freedom among Latin American migrants and among English women. However, she went on to say that few Colombian men would marry an English woman because: ‘The Latin man likes to come home and have his woman put his food in front of him, to have his breakfast made, and clothes washed. An English woman wouldn’t do that.’

Certain forms of ‘migrant machismos’ denoting a particular configuration of Latin American migrant hegemonic masculinities therefore endured the migration and settlement process in a subterranean guise. Ángelica from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, who had worked in a travel agency back home and who was a cleaner in London (having also lived in Spain for six years), summarised this:

Here, many men learn to swallow their machismo and leave it there. In Bolivia, no, it is maintained because the society is like that, but here I know Bolivians who say, my machismo has gone to ground, here I have learned to do everything.

In order to understand this more fully, it is important to examine changes in relation to migrants’ working lives.

Challenging and reconstituting gender inequalities: a view from the labour market

It is now widely acknowledged that access to paid work is central to understanding gender transformations in the household and beyond with the entry of migrant women into the labour force potentially contributing to the destabilisation of hegemonic gender norms (Zentgraf 2002). However, just as within the domestic terrain, the relationship is not clear-cut or linear but strongly influenced by intersectionality (Donato et al. 2006).

As previously mentioned, labour force participation was nothing new for Latin American women regardless of their nationality, class or racial background. On arrival, all the working-age women interviewed had had a job at some point, albeit in elementary occupations such as cleaning and catering where they worked alongside men. Although this type of work was low status, low paid, and exploitative working practices were rife, especially for irregular migrants (May et al. 2007; Wills et al. 2010), women were usually seen to be more advantaged than men. This was, in part because they were thought to be able to get jobs more easily than men because they were viewed as ‘naturally’ suited to cleaning work but also because they could get casual jobs cleaning houses, especially important for irregular migrants. Also significant was that women earned broadly the same as men in contract cleaning (usually the National Minimum Wage or just above) with the same terms and conditions. For women who were accustomed to routinely earning less than men in their home countries, this was a revelation and source of pride. Helena, 38, of indigenous, working-class origin from Bolivia and formerly a hairdresser in La Paz, said she enjoyed cleaning in houses and offices:
Here, I feel useful, people value what I do, I clean well, and I feel good when they say this. My husband is never going to tell me that the house looks nice, that I cleaned well, that I ironed well, never.

Her cleaning work gave her newfound independence that she never had as a hairdresser:

When I came here, I realised that I was worth a lot. He [her husband] always looked down on me, that I wasn’t worth anything, but I’ve realised that I can work and that I can look after children on my own.

Like Helena, most women experienced downward occupational (and class) mobility in London. While several women found this extremely difficult to cope with, especially the educated, middle-class Colombian women such as Sara and Sandra, most were pragmatic about their drop in status. This was either because their cleaning jobs in London paid more than their positions back home or, in the case of those who had fled political persecution, because they valued the security of their lives in London. In addition, although there was little occupational mobility in the cleaning or catering sectors (Escrivá 2000), women were more likely to become cleaning supervisors than men. Although this did not involve much more pay, it did entail increased levels of responsibility over recruitment in particular. According to Carla, who worked as a supervisor (while her husband was a regular cleaner for the same company), women tended to get supervisor jobs because their English was better and because men tended to treat cleaning as a temporary option that was associated with women’s work (see below). Furthermore, acknowledging the small sample, women were more likely than men to establish a small business (five women compared with three men). These were usually hairdressers, cafés or remittance-sending agencies.

For married women with children and especially for single mothers (one in four), cleaning allowed them to work relatively flexibly in terms of childcare as it entailed 2–3 hour shifts, often outside regular working hours, even though ultimately this often led to occupational entrenchment. Ximena, 59, was from a working-class barrio in Palmira, Colombia, and had arrived via the work permit system in 1977. She had been a single mother for most of her time in London and recounted how she had never been able to move out of cleaning despite having secured citizenship because she had to accommodate her two children’s needs with her working hours. Childcare problems were further exacerbated by the high cost of formal childcare, which had led 10 women to leave their children in Latin America when they had first arrived and live as ‘transnational mothers’ (see also Wills et al. 2010; Zontini 2004).

Among male migrants, labour market participation was identified as especially difficult to cope with. Not only did they have to deal with loss of occupational and social status, they had to adjust to the pressures of doing what most regarded as ‘women’s work’. This represented a significant affront to hegemonic masculinities, especially for middle-class men and those whose migration was political – mainly Colombian (see also Datta et al. 2009). Edgar, 41, was from Pereira, Colombia, where he had owned a bookshop and a book distribution business before he had to flee the country because of death threats from a left-wing guerrilla organisation (the FARC) because of his involvement with the Conservative party. Reflecting his misogyny, he recalled:

In my life, I had never done cleaning, but to arrive and to have to dust, to wipe, to brush-up, it affects your self-esteem, you feel really, really bad, bad because you come with the idea of improving your life … it’s very difficult when you have a certain status in life, a good standard of living, and having to clean is very difficult.

Although these so-called ‘transgressive performances’ of migrant men working in jobs associated with femininity challenge the ‘heterosexual matrix’ (McDowell 2008, 498,
citing Butler 1990), the ways in which they affected men as individuals and gender relations more widely was dependent on class position and immigration status. For Edgar, a former refugee from a middle-class professional background, having to clean was traumatic, and he rarely helped out at home as a result. In contrast, other men, and especially working-class Bolivians who were economic migrants, were much less aggrieved. Jose, 44, from Santa Cruz was a former lorry-driver who was working as an office cleaner in London. He was clear that it was not difficult to work as a cleaner even though he was not accustomed to doing it. He had come to London to work in order to save money to build a house and start up his own business back home and so would do whatever was necessary. In addition, although cleaning represented a drop in occupational status, his former job involved working 20 hours a day for low wages. It is also worth mentioning that two openly gay Colombian men worked as hairdressers in London – David, 40, from a middle-class family in Cali, and Jose, 37, from a more modest background in Palmira. In contrast to Edgar, they relished the opportunity of working in the female-dominated world of hairdressing in a tolerant cosmopolitan city where they felt more accepted by other Latin Americans, especially by other men.

Therefore, while both female and male migrants experienced occupational downward mobility in London, women from all class and nationality backgrounds tended to be more pragmatic about their loss of status than men from middle-class backgrounds. Women tended to make the most of their working experiences, with some moving on to establish their own businesses, especially Colombian and Ecuadorian women with regular immigration status. For middle-class men such as Pedro, 44, a former engineer from Lima, Peru, who was a bus driver in London, dealing with disempowerment in the labour market was closely related with emasculation: ‘Men have been used to being machista, and they “go down the stairs” so to speak, they lose status, finding work is not that easy, and now even their woman isn’t at home, she’s gone out to work.’ Pedro went on to say that he knew some men who turned to alcohol, gambling and womanising in order to cope.

Challenging and reconstituting gender inequalities: the role of the state

One of the most important issues for migrants was their relationship with the state and especially their immigration status and access to welfare benefits, which were central to the functioning of migrants’ material and symbolic lives (Sales 2002). Although UK immigration legislation certainly views women in stereotyped ways as dependants (Gedalof 2007; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005), this sometimes worked to their benefit if they managed to secure certain rights, and especially the right to make claims on the welfare state.

As noted earlier, there were marked differences among more settled Colombian migrants with citizenship rights, and more recently arrived Bolivians who were more likely to be irregular or on temporary visas, although this was not clear-cut, especially for Ecuadorians. Among Colombians, it has also been reported that while men are more likely to make asylum claims (as primary applicants), women are more likely to secure asylum especially when they are single parents (Bermudez Torres 2003; McIiwaine 2005). Reflecting this, several of the Ecuadorian and Colombian interviewees claimed that women were dealt with favourably by the state in securing legal status and in accessing welfare benefits. Such access was seen to allow women to live independent lives or at least garner advantages over their male counterparts (Escrivá 2000). Isabel, 32, from Cali,
Colombia, had been studying at secondary school just before she had her first child. She migrated to London in 1995 with her baby son and boyfriend, who claimed asylum on arrival; he had received death threats from a paramilitary group because of his involvement with a left-wing political organisation. Although Isabel separated from her boyfriend after a year because of domestic violence, she made a separate asylum claim for herself and her child that took another six years to resolve successfully (via the family amnesty):

Here, there’s a lot of help for the children, and there’s lots of help for women. There’s Child Benefit and Child Support that makes fathers give money to their children. In Colombia, you have to have to wait and wait to get any help at all. Here, I’m very independent. In Colombia, you have to depend on your husband.

Isabel was especially grateful to the British government for assisting her in leaving her abusive husband and ensuring he paid child maintenance, something she said would have been impossible in Colombia.

This perceived preferential treatment by the British state was resented by some men. Eduardo, 44, from Quito, Ecuador who had worked as a presidential bodyguard before he moved to London in 2002, where he had secured asylum, pointed out:

Women have it easy here because the government helps them. When a man abuses a woman, the state protects her. If the woman has a child, the government helps the child. This country really helps women. In contrast, men are at the last to be helped.

Eduardo’s resentment was all the more inappropriate because he was a single parent caring for his young son and surviving on state benefits.

For women and men without legal immigration status, many of whom were Bolivian, the situation was much less favourable. While both suffered considerable anxiety as a result, women were more likely to articulate their stress, with men tending to discuss their problems in the workplace. Perhaps even more insidious, however, was that immigration status appeared to be used to manipulate power relations in gendered ways. This was primarily in cases where women were dependent on men for their legal status. Helena from Bolivia (see above) was dependent on her husband’s student visa (with her two children) despite the fact that she was officially his financial sponsor. Although her husband actually worked full-time as a janitor in a hotel, thus breaching his visa conditions, she had to prove to the Home Office that she could support him financially. Yet, despite frequent verbal and physical abuse as well as the theft of £8000 from her bank account, she could not leave him because she was dependent on his visa. Other instances emerged whereby women suffered domestic violence without informing the authorities for fear of being deported. Immigration status could obviously be used by women against men, yet this was less common.

As with their position in relation to paid employment, most women of all nationalities generally felt that their ability to access immigration status and state benefits was a route to betterment and a certain degree of autonomy, although Colombian, middle-class women were the most likely to be able to exercise this. Also significant is that betterment via state benefits also sometimes meant retreating to the home; three Colombian women became housewives once they secured citizenship rights, fulfilling the housewife ideal unlike any of the Ecuadorian or Bolivian women who had citizenship (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Although the British state granted significant rights to some migrant men, and especially Colombians, resentment again crept in as men felt increasingly redundant, as Pedro noted:
Women have their support from the government and they think, ‘what am I doing with this idiot? He doesn’t work, he doesn’t speak English and he doesn’t do anything. The council pays me for the three children and I can work and live without him’. In this way, men are left feeling frustrated and bitter.

Conclusions
This article has explored the multiple and contradictory ways that gender identities were negotiated and transformed as migrants from Latin America and especially Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia moved to and settled in London. While the focus of the research was on ‘ordinary’ migrants, the sample was very diverse especially in terms of class, immigration status, nationality, and, to a lesser extent, race and ethnicity. Generally speaking, the vast majority of migrants experienced downward social and occupational mobility regardless of their position in their home countries and being grouped together as ‘Latin Americans’ in London – a population generally associated with widespread vulnerability. However, the ways in which these changes were negotiated in the home, the labour market and in relation to the state, varied considerably in markedly gendered and classed ways.

Recalling Pessar’s (2005) typology, it was clear that assumptions about migrants moving from uniformly atavistic gender regimes to modern ones were erroneous. Not only were pre-migration gender regimes changing, although more markedly among middle-class Colombian families in contrast to working-class Bolivians from the Oriente, the prevalence of gender equality in London among both natives and migrants was also a myth. However, masculinities and femininities were flexible, although the latter emerged as being more mutable, probably because migrant women tended to have more to gain and migrant men more to lose in relation to the patriarchal orders in their countries of origin. Women’s lives generally changed for the better with the move to London, although those from more modest class backgrounds, especially from Bolivia and Ecuador, were more likely to experience marked changes compared with educated middle-class women from Colombia whose social decline was a source of deep anxiety. Nonetheless, women dealt with social disempowerment much more pragmatically than male migrants, possibly because of the gains they had made, however meagre. Overall, hegemonic masculinities or migrant machismos among migrants were partly renegotiated in London as these gave way to marginalised masculinities closely linked with downward social mobility, although this varied by social position and especially class position among Colombian men in particular. The marginalised or subordinate masculinities that emerged in London partly reflected an acceptance of changing gender practices or acts, especially in the home, yet in some cases also entailed an exaggeration of masculinity in order to compensate for wider experiences of disempowerment. This further highlights how gender ideologies or scripts are much more resistant to change than practices or acts (Ozyegin and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008).

Conceptually, I suggest that these findings were facilitated by using a combined multi-scalar perspective in identifying the contradictions inherent in gendered migration processes in different domains and the complex ways they are interlinked. Indeed, there is scope for Pessar’s typology to place even greater emphasis on the interconnections and coexistence among the three sets of outcomes and how all can potentially coexist. In addition, although Mahler and Pessar’s framework includes social position, the explicit inclusion of intersectionality can help conceptualise social complexity more fully across scales. It can also facilitate the exploration of how different migrant groups within one place, in this case London, with specific migrant labour markets and immigration regimes, can experience mobility and settlement in differentiated ways compared to Latin
American migrants elsewhere in the world and among themselves according to nationality and class in particular. Thus, the complex materialities of transnational movement can be analysed in conjunction with transformations in people’s identities.

Finally, these findings need to be tempered with that fact that, collectively, Latin Americans remain a vulnerable group who are largely invisible in policy terms and who are overwhelmingly concentrated in low-status elementary jobs. Although some gains have been made in women’s lives in particular, the politics of immigration in the UK means that these might not be sustainable in the long term especially as the managed migration policy becomes ever more restrictive and an earned amnesty for irregular migrants remains elusive.

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Notes
2. The interviews were carried out in Spanish by the author, who is not Latin American but who has a long research history in Latin America and by a Colombian research assistant. The interviews were transcribed by this assistant and by two other Colombians. The transcripts were coded and analysed directly from Spanish.
3. This broadly correlates with the fact that there are thought to be slightly more women than men arriving in the UK although the gender balance is also thought to be more balanced than in other European countries where women tend to dominate migrant flows.
4. This gave those who had at least one dependent child in the UK and had claimed asylum before 2 October 2002 the right to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain and gave them full rights to remain in the UK and to work – see http://www.ncadc.org.uk/resources/familyamnesty.html (accessed 31 May 2009).
5. All names are pseudonyms.

Notes on contributor
Cathy McIlwaine is Reader in Human Geography at Queen Mary, University of London. Although her early career focused on development in the Global South in relation to gender, as well as poverty, violence, labour markets, more recently she has worked on international migration in the UK in relation to low-paid migrant workers and the Latin American community in London. She has written several authored and edited books and numerous journal articles on these issues.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

Machismos migrantes: exploración de las ideologías y prácticas de género entre inmigrantes latinoamericanos en Londres desde una perspectiva multiescalar

Este artículo analiza las complejas y generizadas experiencias de migración de mujeres y hombres latinoamericanos en Londres, un “nuevo grupo de inmigrantes” en el Reino Unido que ha sido poco estudiado y que sin embargo es de creciente importancia. Conceptualmente, combina una tipología de resultados de migración generizados, junto con el marco de ‘geografías de poder generizadas’ que también incorpora la intersectorialidad. Esto permite un análisis integral desde una perspectiva multiescalar a través de los hogares, los mercados laborales y el Estado para evaluar cómo y por qué las identidades de género se transforman a medida que la gente se mueve de lugar y cómo éstas intersecan con la clase, la nacionalidad, la raza y la etnicidad. Basándose en una investigación cualitativa con casi 100 inmigrantes (mayormente colombianos, ecuatorianos y bolivianos) así como en la observación participante, el artículo resalta la importancia de ir más allá de las trayectorias estereotipadas de migración que asumen cambios de los regímenes tradicionales de género hacia los llamados modernos, para enfatizar un cuadro más sutil. El artículo argumenta que aunque hubo cambios concretos en las prácticas o acciones cotidianas de género en formas que favorecieron a las mujeres, éstos variaron de acuerdo a la clase y la nacionalidad. Además, las transformaciones más profundas en las ideologías o libretos fueron mucho más resistentes al cambio. El desempoderamiento social fue de una importancia crítica para atemperar los cambios en las feminidades y masculinidades, aunque la transformación de las masculinidades hegemónicas en masculinidades marginalizadas o subordinadas reflejó tanto las aceptaciones de los cambios en las prácticas de género en los hogares y los mercados laborales, como en una exageración de la masculinidad para compensar por las experiencias más amplias de exclusión, aunque, otra vez, esto estuvo diferenciado por la nacionalidad y la clase.

Palabras clave: migración; machismo; masculinidades; Latinoamérica; Londres

移民的男性沙文主义: 探讨性别意识型态与实践, 以多角度观点看伦敦的拉丁美洲移民

本文探讨伦敦的女性与男性拉丁美洲移民之复杂的性别移民经验。这些尚未被研究的英国「新移民群体」日渐重要。概念上，此经验联结了对于不同性别移民结果的分类型态、「性别化地域权力」之框架，以及结合两者的分析。以多角度观点来看家户、劳工市场与国家，并评估性别认同在人口迁移时会如何、为何转变，以及与阶级、国籍、种族与族裔之间的关系。 经由对于近100位移民经验（主要来自哥伦比亚、厄瓜多尔和玻利维亚）之质性方式的研究及参与观察，本文强调移民非典型的迁移轨迹，从传统至现代之性别制度的转变，以强调更具细微差异的图像之呈现。本文认为，日常生活中之性别实践的具体转变确实有利女士，但不同的阶级和国家，情形会有所不同。但是，更深层的意识形态与性别脚本显得难以改变。社会性权力在提炼阴性气质与男性气概的变化上是极为重要的; 男性霸权的边缘化或是男性气概的次要化，反映出在客户与劳动市场中，性别实践之转变的被接受程度，以及为了弥补广泛的被排除经验，所产生被夸大的男子气概；同样地，这些情形在不同国籍和阶级也会有所差异。

关键词: 迁移; 男性沙文主义; 男性气概; 拉丁美洲; 伦敦