



# Gender Violence Evictions:

Intersections of housing tenure insecurity  
and intimate partner violence against women  
in low-income settlements in Recife, Brazil.

**Raquel Ludermir**

PhD Candidate in Urban Development, Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil

Visiting Fellow, Latin America and Caribbean Centre, London School of Economics, UK

[ludermir.raquel@gmail.com](mailto:ludermir.raquel@gmail.com)

# Broader, ongoing PhD research

## Gender-based domestic and family violence against women (DV):

- **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**
- Patrimonial violence  
(violation of women's property rights, perpetrated by brothers, sons, in-laws)
- Gender gaps in housing tenure security in "non-violent" family contexts



## Women's housing tenure security (protection against forced evictions):

- Legal, perceived and *de facto* security of tenure
- In urban, low-income settlements in Recife, Brazil (in the poorest, most gender unequal regions in Brazil, but with interesting and well documented housing policy experiences)



# Why IPV and housing tenure security?

- IPV affects 1 in every 3 women worldwide (WHO, 2013)
- Many IPV survivors are forced to leave their homes and relocate;
- Continue living with abusive partners, fearing being evicted by them and lacking housing alternatives



# Why IPV and housing tenure security?

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- “Gender Violence Evictions”

- Housing tenure insecurity related to IPV

- Under-explored by housing studies;

- Increasingly explored by IPV studies

- (gaps related to property rights and housing processes)



# IPV literature

- IPV literature on women's property rights showed that **women who own property report less IPV** (Panda and Agarwal, 2005), replicated in many other countries;
- More recently, cross-national analysis pointed that **women's asset ownership** may increase women's bargaining power, but it may also **increase risk of IPV** where land is a marker of male dominance (Peterman et al., 2017);
- IPV debate on **housing instability** tends to focus on challenges faced **after escaping**;



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## Housing tenure security literature

- HTS literature tend to **overlook gender and intrahousehold** dynamics;
- But provides a more **nuanced understanding of housing and property rights**, usually absent in the IPV literature;
- **Housing processes** to access, improve, hold on to / accumulate property;
- **Perceptions** (popular understandings) of homeownership;
- **Other forms of tenure** such as possession, housing rights, rental, shared housing, etc.



## IPV literature

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- IPV debate on housing instability tends to focus on challenges faced after escaping;
  - ***Feminist theories: gender asset gaps; gendered perceptions of property rights; patrimonial violence against women...***

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# Empirical context (Recife, Brazil)



- Typical urban, low-income, Global South “informal settlements”;
- “Clouded” property ownership;
- Other forms of tenure: housing rights on public land, shared housing, informal rent, etc.;
- Only 2 DV shelters (1,6 million inhabitants)
- No housing program to address the urgent housing need of IPV survivors
- DV law recognizes “patrimonial violence” against women, but this is poorly reported

# Research question

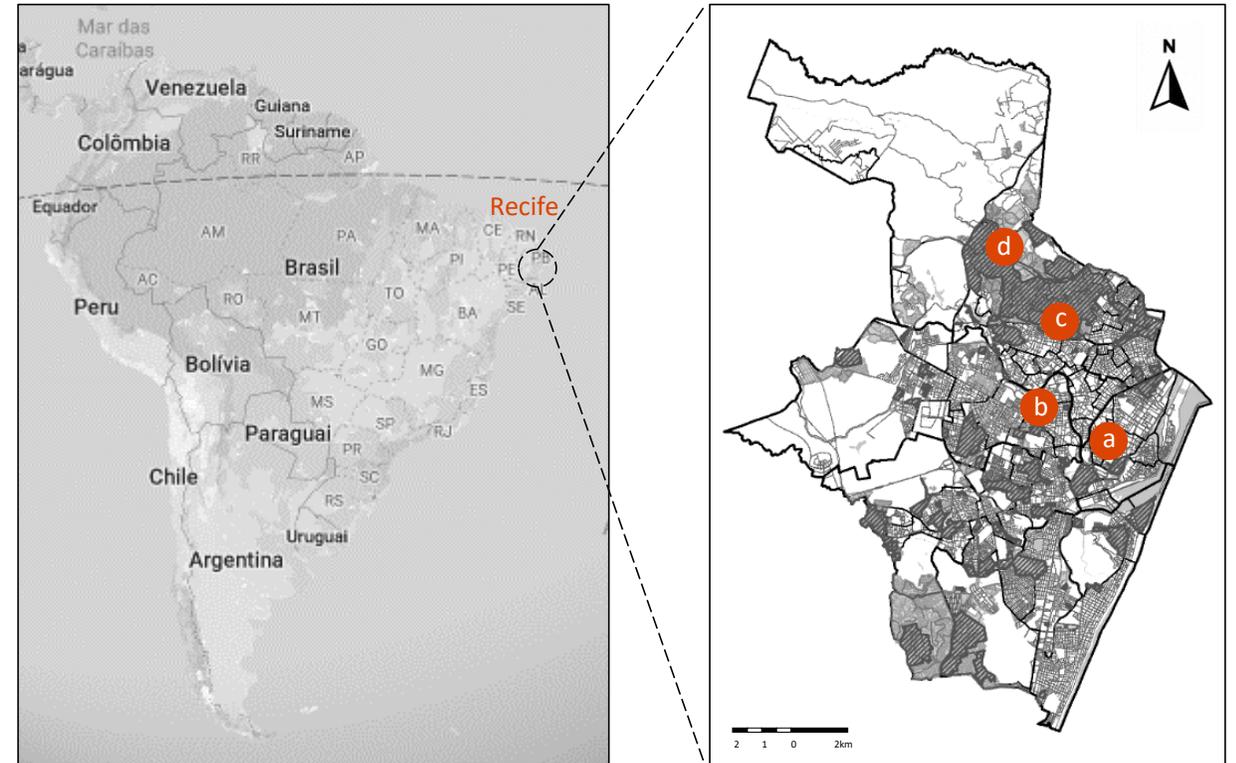


**How does IPV affects women's housing tenure security in urban, low-income settlements in Recife, Brazil?**

# Methodology and data

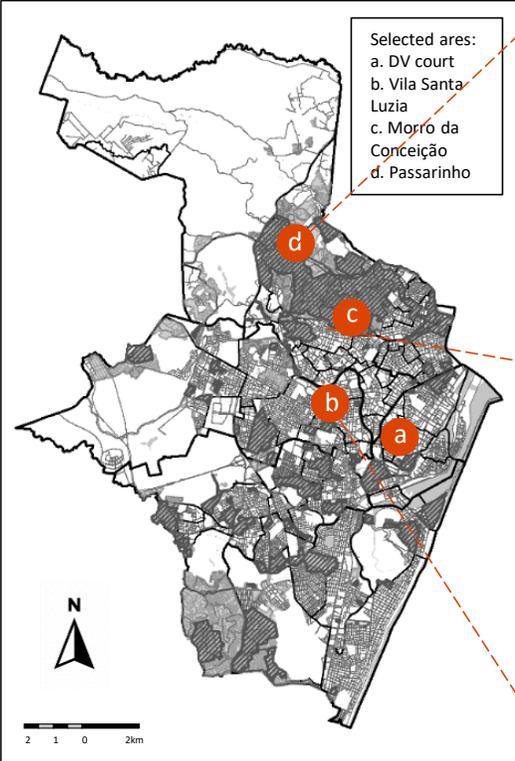
This paper focuses on the housing histories of **31 women who disclosed experiences of IPV** (IPV survivors):

- 10 interviewed at **DV court**
  - Self-reported survivors, with active judicial cases against abusive partners
- 21 interviewed at their homes, in three selected **low-income settlements**
  - Many had not accessed IPV judicial or police services = underreported DV)



- Selected areas:
- a. DV court
  - b. Vila Santa Luzia
  - c. Morro da Conceição
  - d. Passarinho

# Selected areas



N  
Passarinho  
(land allocation)



Morro da  
Conceição  
("slum" upgrading)



Vila Santa  
Luzia  
(housing allocation)



- Consolidated areas, with **no external threats of eviction**;
- Illustrative of different levels of **government intervention** on tenure security;
- Personal contacts in the areas;

# Methodology and data

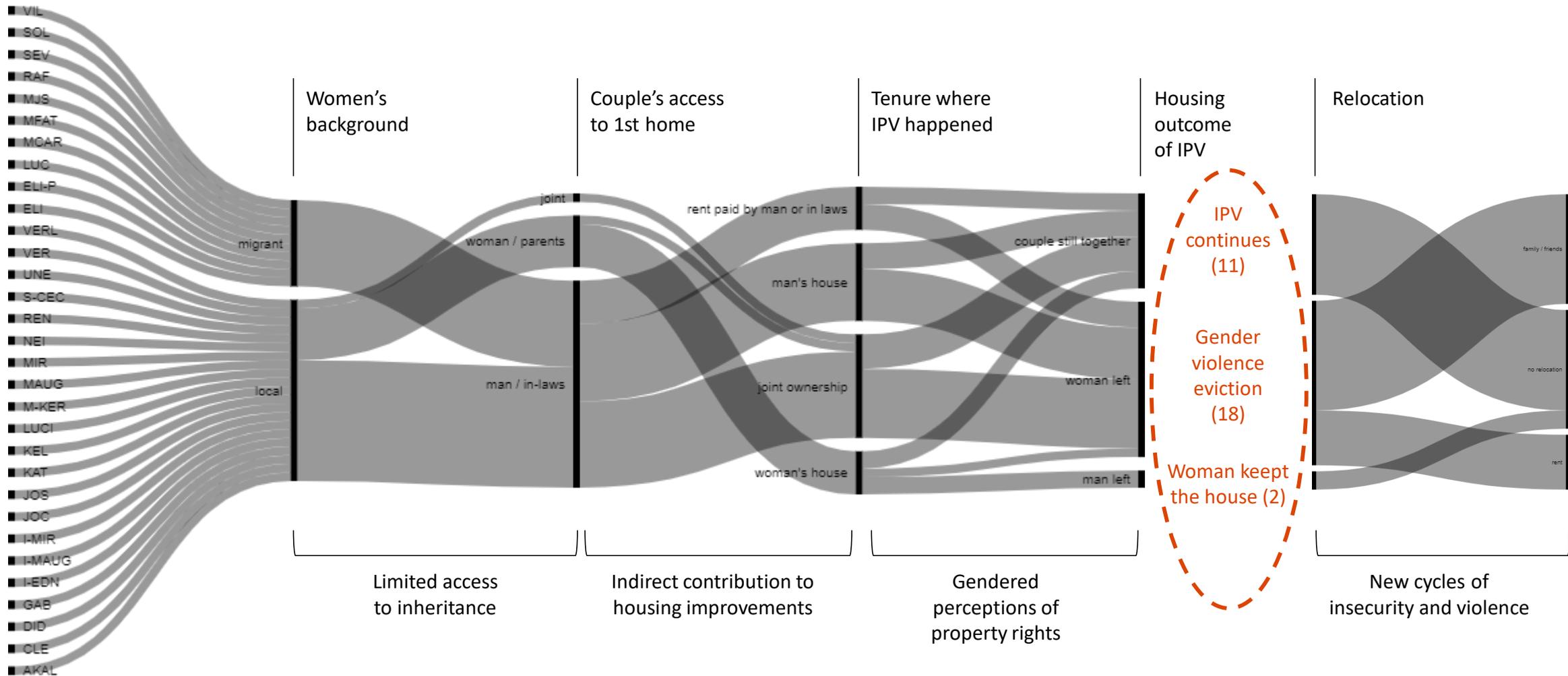
- Random recruitment at DV courts waiting room (10)
- Snowball sampling in selected areas (21)
- Interviews focused on **housing histories IPV survivors**:
  - Before marriage / consensual union
  - Couples first access to housing
  - Housing improvements during relationship
  - Popular understandings of property rights

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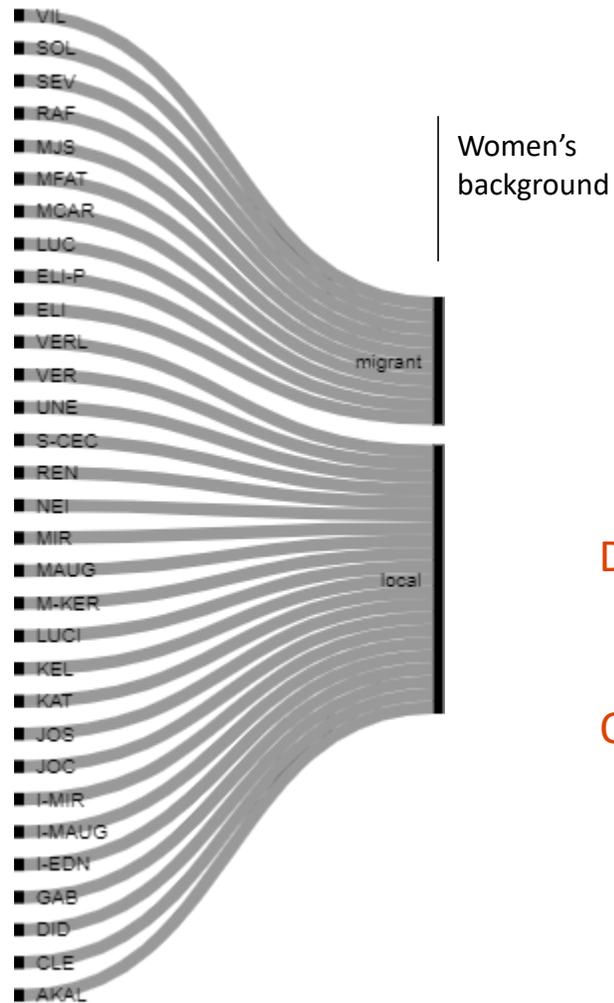
- **Tenure insecurity during abusive relationship**
- **Property settlement upon separation**
- **Escape and relocation**
- Thematic analysis using NVIVO 12



# Results: housing histories of IPV survivors



# Results



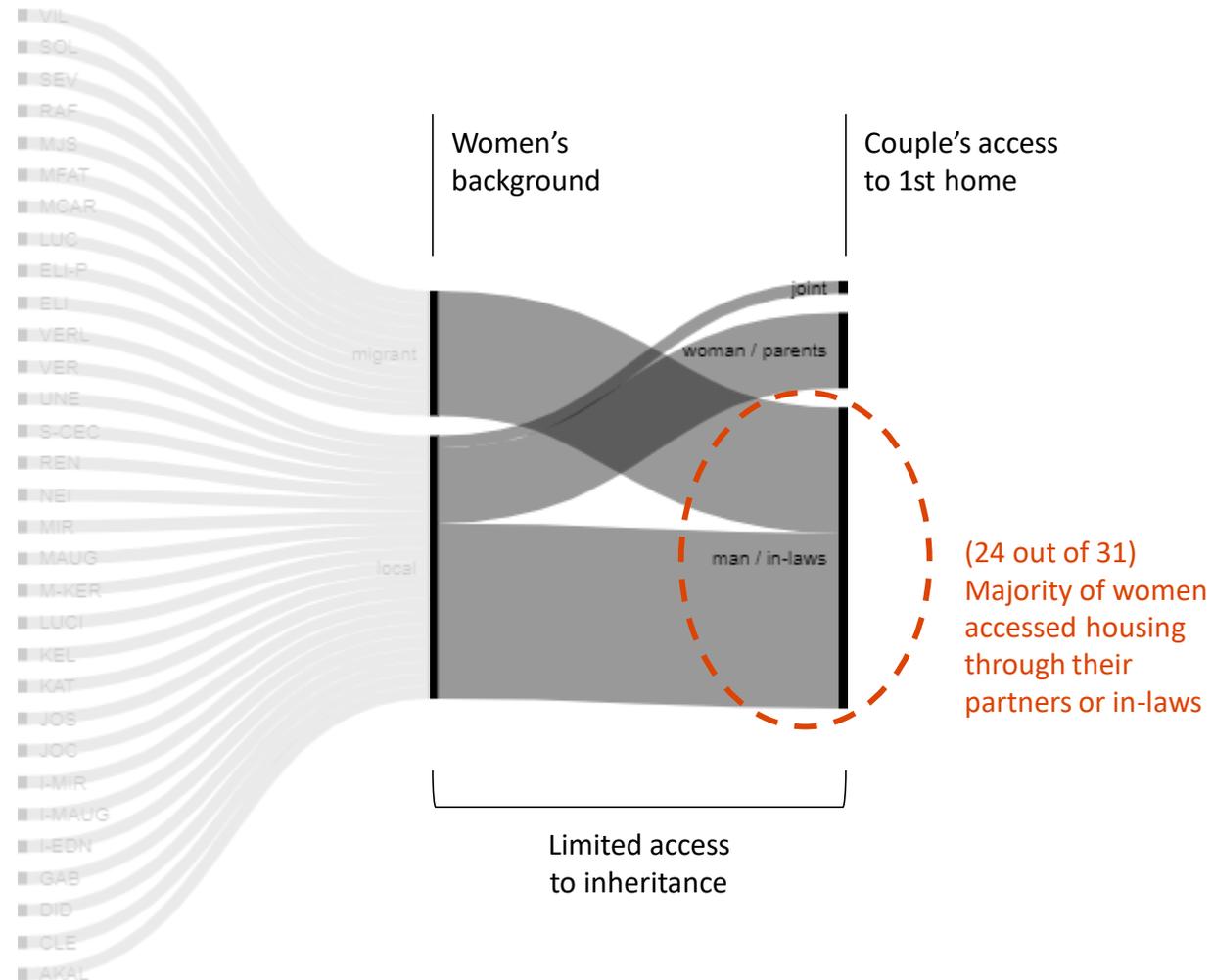
Did women have access to inheritance?

Or accessed property in any other way?

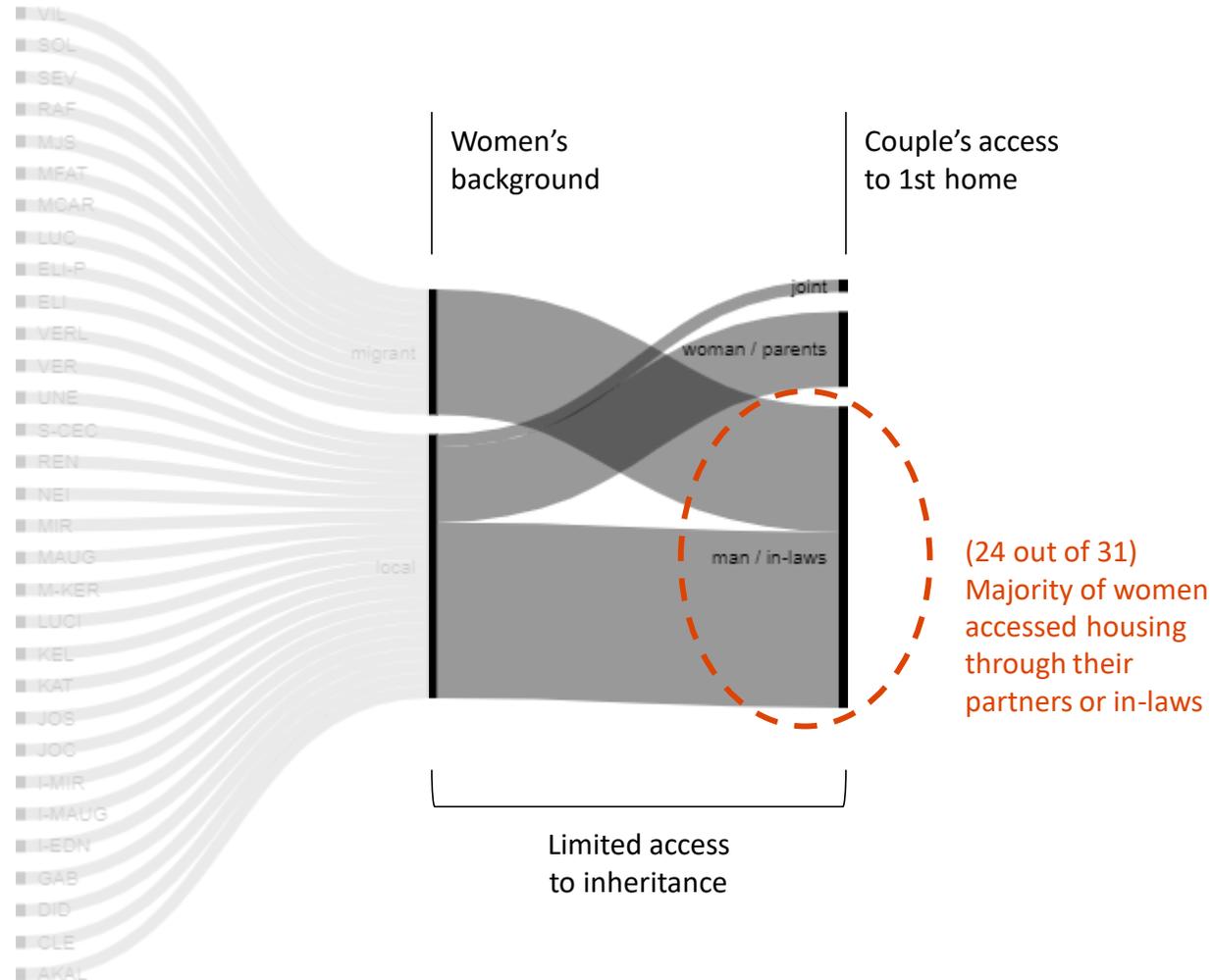
# Results

When I got *pregnant*, my mother told me to leave because there was *not enough space* for another kid in the house. Plus, it is the *father's role to provide for the [new] family*. So, I had to *move into my mother in law's house*. (CLE)

- Patrilocality;
- Gendered inheritance practices;
- Asset poverty;
- Gender norms;



# Results



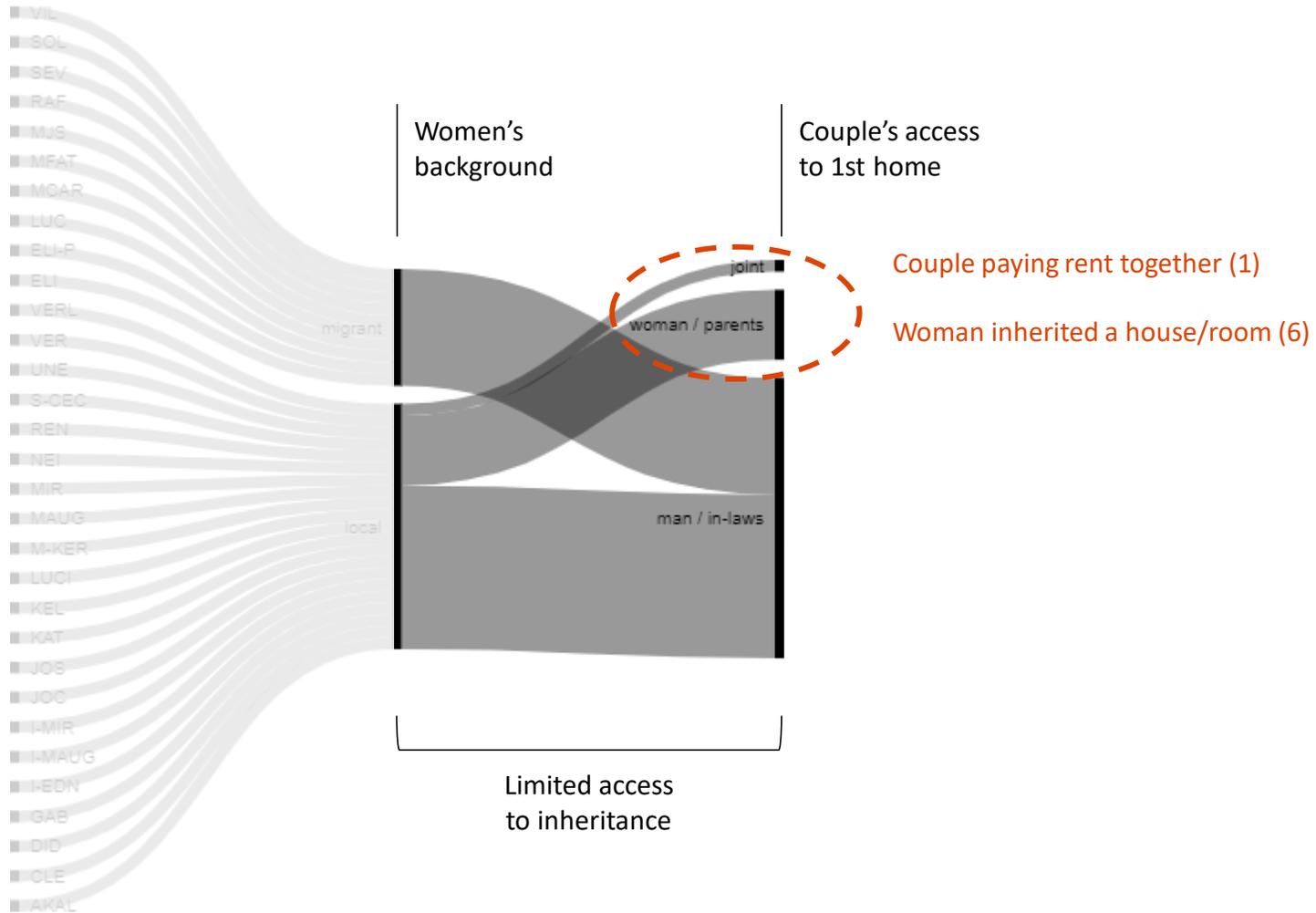
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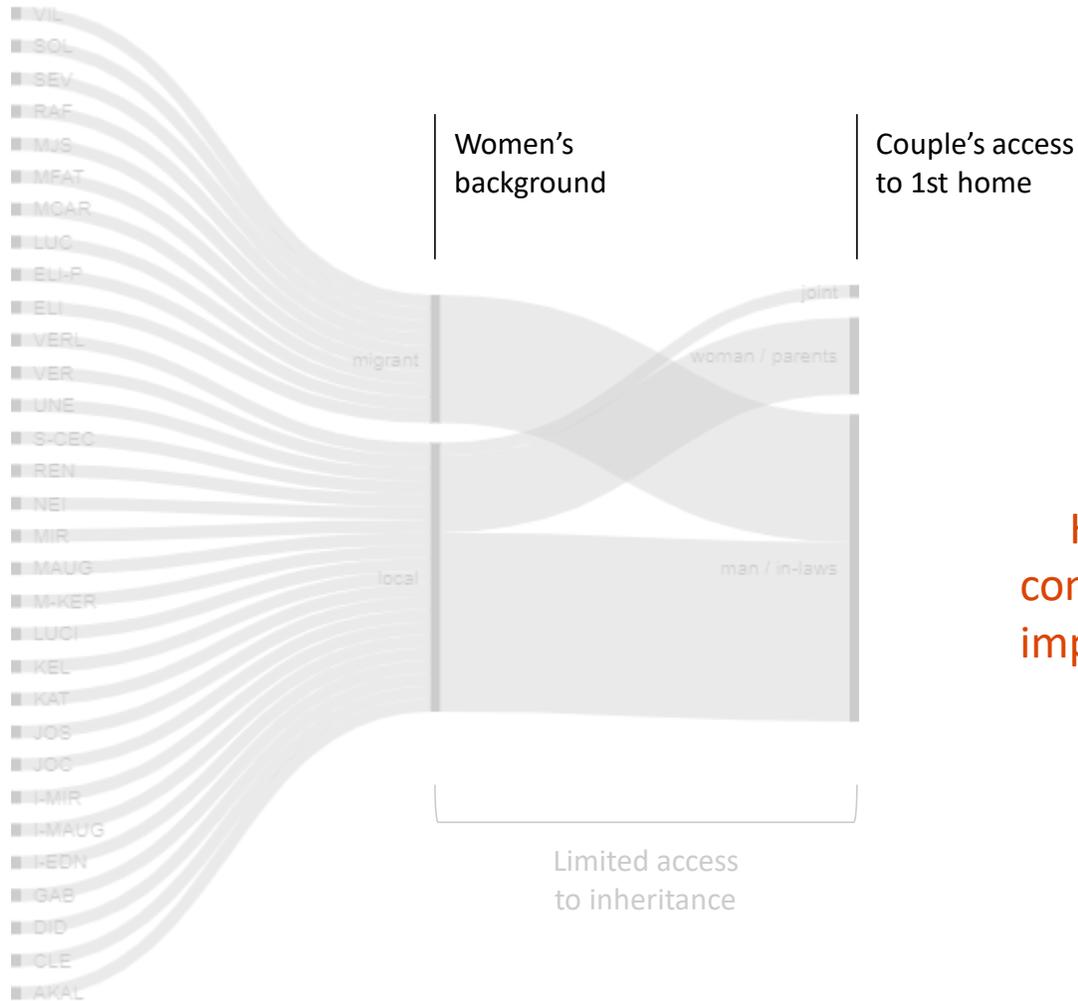
*I left the house where I grew up when I was 12 years old. I had become a woman [got first period] and **my step-father raped me**. When I told my mother, **he forced me to leave**, and made my mother chose between leaving with me or staying there. I remember her saying "go to your sister's house in Recife, she will take care of you. I will stay here, because at least he gives me a roof over my head". (...) My sister helped me find a job to **work as a maid where I could stay for the night**. I lived at my boss' house for 19 years until I met the father of my kids. When I got pregnant, I was dizzy, weak, I couldn't work at someone else's home like that. **So I moved into my mother-in-law's house, quit my job and told my partner that he would have to "take me" and support me [financially] while I took care of our family.** (SOL)*

- Eroded family networks
- Previous experiences of gender violence

# Results

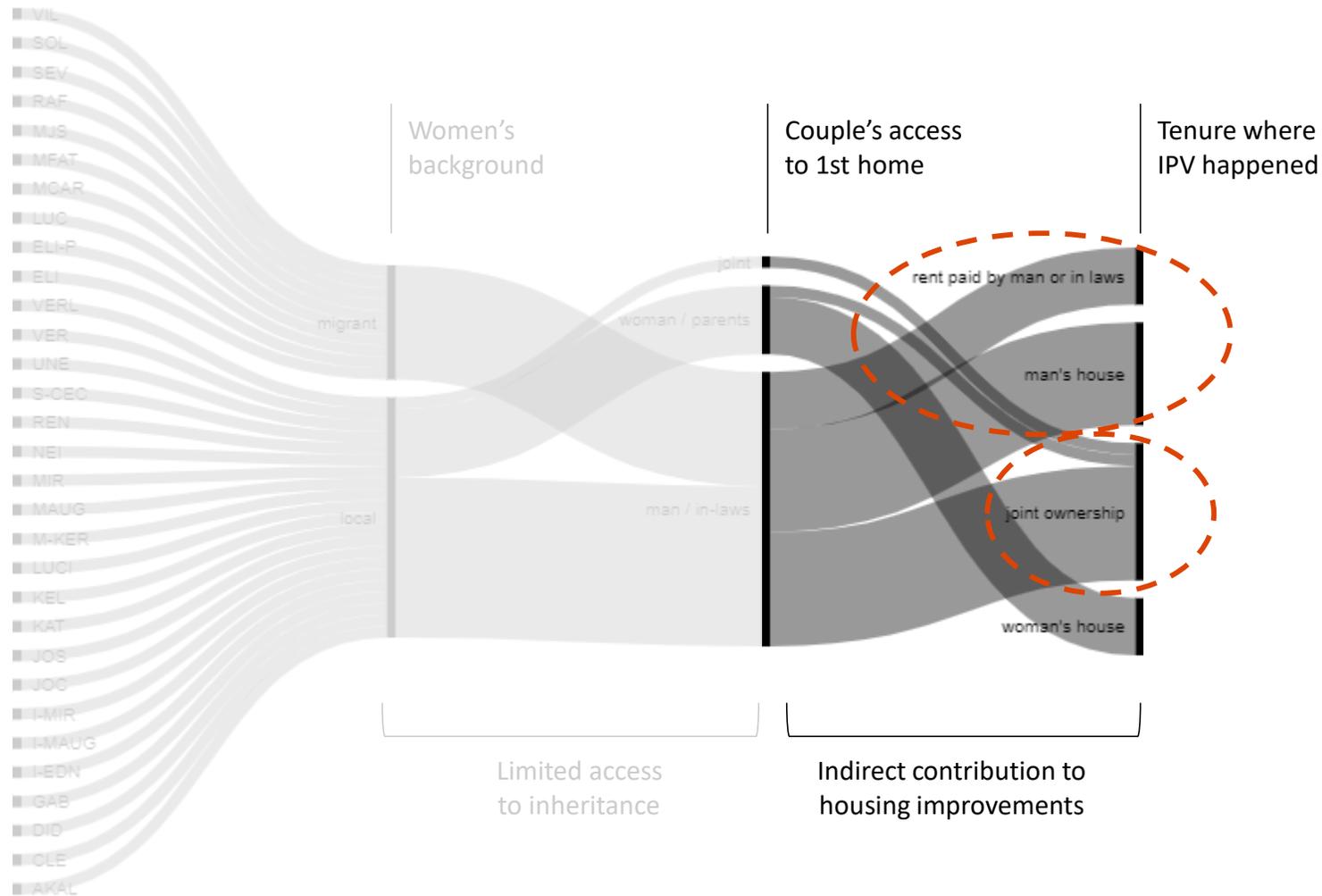


# Results



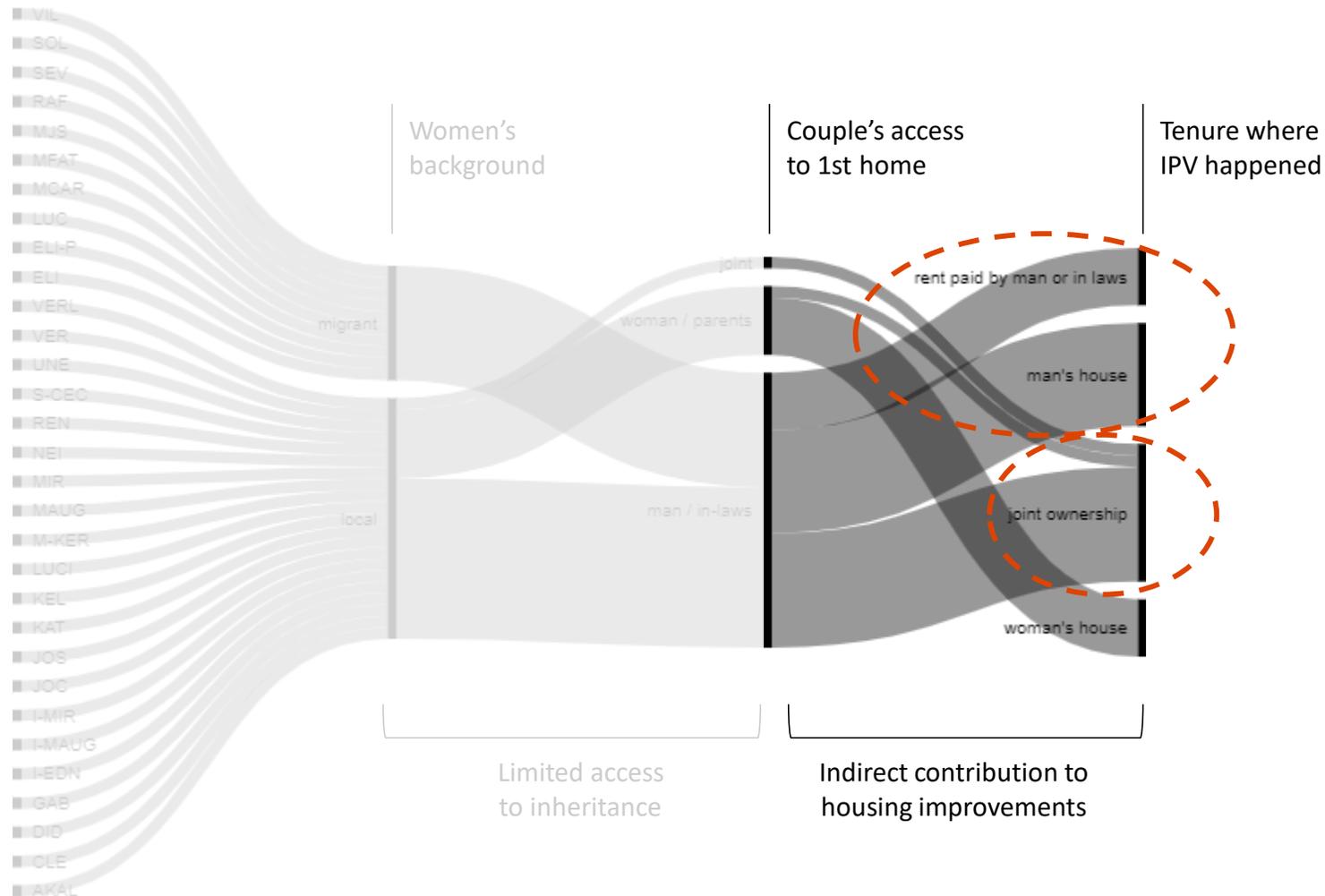
# Results

*He is the one who works, while I stay home taking care of the house and the kids. (SEV)*



- Gendered division of labor;
- Disproportionate time and income poverty;
- 22 out of 31 women were economically dependent on their partners;
- Indirect contribution to housing improvements;

# Results



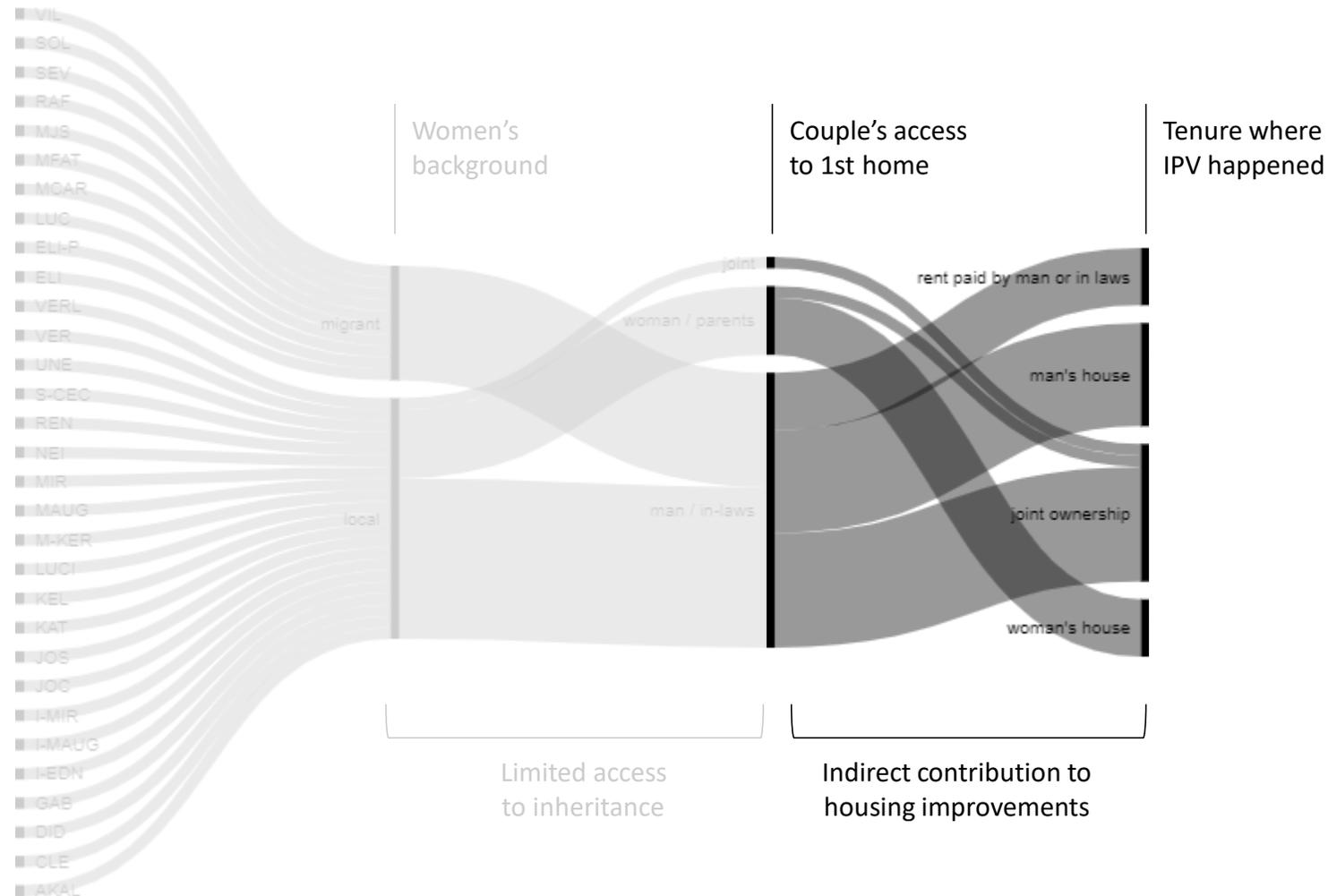
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*He convinced me to use my annual bonus to pay for the new bathroom on his father's plot. (MJS)*

- Direct contribution to housing improvements (earn income, housing programs, inheritance);
- Men controlling women's spending;

# Results



Partial community property is the default marital property regime;

## Popular understandings of property rights?

*This is my family's land...  
(O terreno é da minha família)*

*Owner is the one who pays...  
(Dono é quem paga)*

*Whatever is yours is mine...  
(Casou, divide tudo)*

Gendered perceptions of property rights shaped to ensure men's control over property



# During an abusive relationship

- Women live in **constant fear of being evicted** (perceived insecurity)
  - *He would beat me and threaten to leave me in the streets... Every day he would tell me to get out, because that was his house and his father's backyard, and he was not leaving it for anything in the world. (MJS)*
  - *He used to tell me to leave, but he knew I would not leave, I had nowhere to go, no family here. He used to say 'leave! You can leave, it's your choice. But if you stay you have to do what I say'. (ELI)*
- Start mapping **exit options** and housing alternatives
  - *I knew that if I didn't leave, he would end up killing me. But where would I go? I have no family here, no one to look after me. (I-MIR)*
  - *People think it is easy to get out of, that we stay in this [violent] situation because we want to. But no, it is not easy. I had 3 kids under my arm and received only the "Bolsa Família", it was impossible to make the ends meet on my own, to find a place I could afford. I would only leave if I knew I had a safe place to stay and how to survive. (KEL)*



# During an abusive relationship

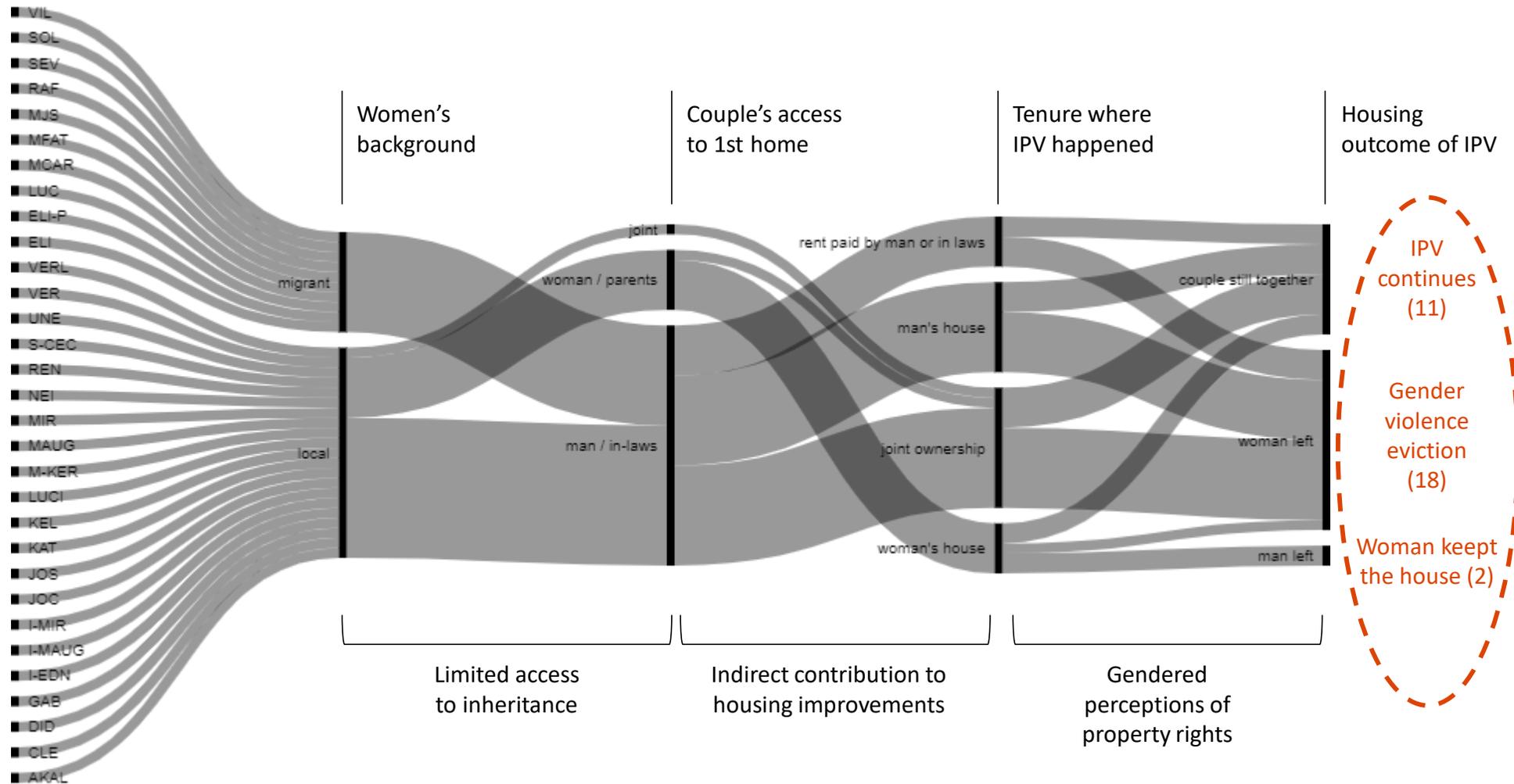
- **Cyclic evictions and returns** (actual insecurity)
  - *Every time he was aggressive, I would leave and go to my sister's house. I ended up **going back as soon as things calmed down** because I have nowhere else to stay. (ELI-P)*
  - *I would constantly escape to my mother's house. But I could no longer stand staying with relatives for a long period... We are not treated well when we live in someone else's home, we are **asking a favor**. My stepfather got fed up, he even found a room for me to rent nearby, but I couldn't afford it and I knew I was no longer welcome. So, I ended up going back home [to live the abusive partner]. This is why I say, 'it is bad with him, but worse without him'. (MFAT)*
- **Isolation**, fewer exit options, family and friends “give up”
- Over 1/3 of women sample **continue living with abusive partners**:
  - Women protecting their children's inheritance rights
  - Beneficiaries of housing or land allocation programs, trapped to homeownership, **refuse to leave**
  - Sole homeowners giving a “last chance”, retaliate, threat to evict their partners



# Separation and property settlement

- Few women (only 2) ended abusive relationships and **kept their homes**;
- Some women **tried to keep the marital home** (tried to exercise property rights):
  - Most severe levels of violence, reaching **death threats** and serious physical injuries (3)
  - Often involved family members of abusive partners
  - Ended up leaving to survive
- **Women left their homes (“Gender Violence Eviction”)**
  - 1 sole homeowner left her house on her mother’s backyard;
  - Many lost their rightful share of joint property;
  - Property-less women lost their housing tenure security
    - (violation of their human right to adequate housing)

# Separation and property settlement





## NEW CYCLES OF TENURE INSECURITY

- **Shared housing** (12):
  - Tenure security depends on their relationship with household head;
  - Hardship associated with overcrowdings;
  - Constant fear being forced to leave again;
- **Rental** (6):
  - Excessive rent burden; tenure security depend on their income (sole mothers)

## NEW CYCLES OF ABUSE

- Harassment by **former partners** when living in obvious places like family's homes;
- Risk of **child abuse** in overcrowded, precarious housing units
  - Single room dwellings, external bathrooms or bathrooms without doors, etc.



# Conclusions, implications for further policy and practice

- Integrated policies (inter-sectorial) to address **urgent and long-term housing needs** of IPV survivors and their children;
- **Patrimonial violence** must be better understood, reported, addressed;
  - Housing and property issues related to IPV should not be dissociated from the gender violence in which they are rooted;
  - Priority / “fast track” for IPV survivors in civil courts;
  - Awareness raising of service providers to start reporting patrimonial violence related to housing (current focus on movable property like cellphones, clothes)
- **Legal empowerment**, awareness raising at community level on property rights,
  - For both men and women, especially for women to ensure they can identify and report property rights violations as patrimonial violence;
  - Caution to avoid backlash (“crise do macho”)
- Women’s **economic empowerment**



# Conclusions, implications for further research

- **Housing studies** should no longer avoid gender and intrahousehold matters such as IPV;
  - Need to understand patterns like “patrivirilocality” and “gendered practices of inheritance”, occurring despite gender neutral legal provisions;
- Need to understand the **extent to which IPV is related to overall housing deficit and inadequacy**, such as shared and overcrowded houses and excessive rent burden;
- Need to understand the **urban impact of IPV**
  - These findings suggest a **gendered intra-urban migration** (women move in and move out of property controlled by men, while men keep their homes and accumulate assets).
  - I will test that using a quantitative database; More to come in the 2nd semester 😊
- Findings may be **relevant to other urban, Global South contexts**, where property rights are “clouded” and DV responses are still limited.



# Thank you!

**Raquel Ludermir**

PhD Candidate in Urban Development, Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil

Visiting Fellow, Latin America and Caribbean Centre, London School of Economics, UK

[ludermir.raquel@gmail.com](mailto:ludermir.raquel@gmail.com)