



**HAL**  
open science

Marion Tillous (ed.), *Espace, genre et violences conjugales: ce que révèle la crise de la Covid-19* [Space, Gender, and Conjugal Violence: What the COVID-19 Crisis Tells Us]. Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2022, 160 pages

Corinne Nativel

► To cite this version:

Corinne Nativel. Marion Tillous (ed.), *Espace, genre et violences conjugales: ce que révèle la crise de la Covid-19* [Space, Gender, and Conjugal Violence: What the COVID-19 Crisis Tells Us]. Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2022, 160 pages. *Population* (English edition), 2023, Book Reviews, 78 (2), pp.312-314. 10.3917/popu.2302.0312 . hal-04459287

HAL Id: hal-04459287

<https://hal.science/hal-04459287>

Submitted on 15 Feb 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Marion Tillous (ed.), *Espace, genre et violences conjugales: ce que révèle la crise de la Covid-19* [*Space, Gender, and Conjugal Violence: What the COVID-19 Crisis Tells Us*]. Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2022, 160 pages.

Conjugal violence is now a widely investigated research topic in the social sciences and gender studies, but in France its spatial dimension remains little studied. This volume examining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on intimate partner violence and support for victims, edited by the geographer Marion Tillous, highlights how powerfully these phenomena are shaped by spatial logics.

The book is the result of an ANR–FdF research project entitled Spatiality of Conjugal Violence and COVID-19. It is built on an empirical investigation carried out between March 2020 and March 2021, in close alignment with the timing of the first phase of the COVID-19 crisis. Its methodology combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the quantitative component, a questionnaire on movement and travel was used to collect information on how the crisis affected the lives of women and men. It was completed by a sample of 2,771 respondents living in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Occitanie regions. The study's qualitative component is built on a body of interviews: 25 with women who have been the victims of conjugal violence and 87 with professionals working in 56 different organizations offering support to victims in the Haute-Garonne and Isère *départements* (located in the two study regions).

In the Introduction, Tillous presents the epistemological questions addressed by the study, situating it in theoretical terms at the intersection of contemporary materialist feminist thought and spatial geography, both of which postulate the centrality of power relations. The resulting conceptual approach in terms of 'spatial continua' and 'spatial control' enriches the more familiar notions of continua and coercive control.

The book consists of three chapters. The first, by Julie Bulteau, Esté R. Torres, and Marion Tillous, draws on the responses to the questionnaire to analyse gender differences in spatial mobility. The data from INSEE's National Transport and Travel Surveys, carried out before the COVID-19 crisis, pointed to a trend towards a homogenization of women's and men's movements. This study, in contrast, identifies gender differences, which were statistically significant during the period of lockdown, in terms of the number, duration, and distance of women's and men's movements. It also finds differences between different types of areas (rural, peri-urban, and urban) and socio-occupational categories.

This chapter situates the specificities of intimate partner violence in a context where gender inequalities in women's disfavour were aggravated by restrictions on movement. This echoes the notion of a 'shadow pandemic' used by UN Women from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to sound the alarm about the risk of increased violence towards women, who in many cases were left to carry the burden of care tasks while confined to shared domestic spaces with their abusers. Women who had already separated from violent ex-partners, on the

other hand, benefited from a ‘protective bubble’ created by spatial restrictions, decreasing the risks they faced.

The second chapter explores these themes in more depth. Its authors, Eva San Martin (whose doctoral thesis focused on the spatial dimensions of domestic violence) and Marion Tillous, explore the experiences of women who have had violent partners. The interviews show how women faced with a loss of spatial options—a ‘forced constriction both within and beyond the living space’—used strategies of resistance to protect themselves from their violent partners. San Martin and Tillous use the notion of a ‘safety zone’ to describe the tactics that women used to temporarily escape persecution and control both within the home and outside it. As French government directives set limits on individual movements, specifying the allowable distances and times for trips outside the home for shopping and exercise, women made use of these allowances to connect with resource persons. In extreme cases, the COVID-19 crisis culminated in the decision to end a violent relationship.

The third and final chapter looks at how professional practices for supporting the victims of conjugal violence were adapted to the conditions of the pandemic. Pauline Delage, Eva San Martin, and Marion Tillous identify the possibilities for, and limitations on, listening and support services that these workers faced in this period. The pandemic reoriented their activities, which shifted towards disseminating resources, door-to-door visits, and more in-depth remote exchanges. The pandemic also highlighted the role of other local actors; the mayors of certain rural municipalities, for example, acted as ‘sentinels’ keeping watch over the local population. Finally, the pandemic generated isolation and stress among these support workers, who had to combine paid and domestic labour. The effects of the crisis on different local practices were thus very mixed and depended in each case on geographical configurations.

One of the key contributions of this book is to the emerging field of studies on the demographic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and on the visualization and amplification of existing phenomena (the famous ‘magnifying mirror’). Furthermore, the concept of a spatial continuum enables the authors to reassess the concept of an opposition between ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’, highlighting the continuities between private and public spaces. Private life makes its way into public space through ‘common places’—local places, everyday places. Reporting systems such as those implemented in bakeries, pharmacies, and shopping centres highlight the role that places such as these, the sites of brief visits, can play in facilitating access to support systems, although the results of their use for this purpose have been mixed. Finally, the book’s other significant contribution is to the analysis of the dynamics of public action. It confirms that a major global crisis, in this case a pandemic, can generate awareness, public information campaigns, and emergency measures, but without producing a lasting structural transformation.

The book avoids the pitfall of generalizing from a single case, based as it is on the analysis of two regions and two *départements*. It thereby presents a well-conceived exercise in comparison—between different cities and regions, but also between rural, urban, and peri-urban areas, at multiple scales. The authors explain that the choice of areas for inclusion was motivated by the diversity and geographical distribution of support structures (associations affiliated with the National Women’s Solidarity Federation, or not). It would nonetheless have been helpful to situate them on a map illustrating the prevalence of conjugal violence and the distribution and density of support structures throughout France. The study faced a major methodological constraint, which can also be seen in INED’s national survey on violence and gender relations (VIRAGE): the available data do not allow variations to be mapped across the whole of France, either in terms of prevalence or of various qualitative dimensions (such as the diversity of conditions and resources in different areas, and that of their resident populations). As minority populations are considerably over-represented in large cities, especially in the Paris area, complementary studies could help to shed light on the intersectional and multigendered dimensions of intimate partner violence, whether different-sex or same-sex.

This book constitutes an important contribution to our understanding of the effects of the pandemic on violence and gender relations, and to local and regional public action. Its appendices (which present the interview grids, profiles of the respondents, categories of support actors, etc.) and the bibliography offer further detail on the study’s methodology and point to further relevant reading.

Besides its relevance for researchers, the book will undoubtedly be of interest to professionals who work with the victims of violence. In it, they will find considerable food for thought on the issues, possibilities, and constraints that orient their decisions and actions.

Corinne Nativel