

A Dreadful Mosaic: Rethinking Gender Violence through the Lives of Indigenous Women Migrants

Shannon Speed

University of Texas at Austin

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In 2010, I began working with the Hutto Visitation Project, an organization that coordinates visits of volunteers to immigrant women detained in the T. Don Hutto immigration detention facility, in Taylor, Texas. The purpose of the nascent project was to provide human rights accompaniment to women in the infamous facility, which had recently been the target of a lawsuit against the Department of Homeland Security for detaining families in prison-like conditions, as well as for having had guards recently arrested and prosecuted for sexual abuses against women detainees. I was particularly compelled to the project by reports that there were a significant number of indigenous women from Latin America in the facility, many of them with limited levels of Spanish ability. The reports conjured a terrible picture in my mind of the Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Chol women I had worked with over the years in Chiapas, incarcerated in such an alien and frightening place. My research interest in the project began with a desire to unpack the role of the United States national security system in the interpellation¹ of migrants as potential terrorists and criminals, with its shameless ties to the rise of the private prison-industrial complex, and to unmask the US's culpability in violent, multilayered illegal markets. Elsewhere, I have called these market networks neoliberal multicriminalism, in order to highlight the ways in which violent, corrupt, and lawless states are dominated by profit motives in massive scale illegal economies that lack any reasonable regulation or protection of basic human rights (Speed forthcoming). I expected, in my long afternoons chatting with women in the cold and unfriendly visitation room, to hear stories of a difficult journey and the hardships of being incarcerated despite having committed no criminal offense. And I heard those—fascinating, terrible, compelling stories of suffering and human resilience. What I did not expect, or certainly not at the level of frequency with which I heard them, were the seemingly endemic stories of domestic violence. After three years of visiting women in Hutto and two years conducting oral histories with indigenous and non-indigenous migrant women, I can count on one hand the number I have met who had not experienced domestic violence. What became clear to me, early on, was that intra-familial violence was something that virtually every woman encountered and that marked every woman's life in important ways.

I confess that I was not particularly comfortable with the issue. As one might gather from the research interests noted above, I tend to be interested in analysis of state power and the ways that the agency of particular subjects intersect with it. As a tribal citizen in the US and a researcher

and activist working with indigenous women in Mexico for the last twenty years, I have certainly been aware that domestic violence is a major problem affecting indigenous and Native women everywhere. But I always side-stepped the topic, tending to focus instead on state-perpetrated gender violence. Though violence among family members and loved ones is indeed abhorrent, my discomfort was not due to any repulsion I felt. Rather, I suffered from what Veena Das has called “definitional vertigo” around the term violence (2008, 283). I knew that, in spite of the abundance of individually pathologizing literature, domestic violence is in fact intimately bound up with other forms of violence, but I did not know how to talk about the intersections coherently. How is the violence associated with neoliberal multicriminalism—gang violence, narco-violence, militarization, and state violence—related to intra-familial violence, which is so easily relegated to the “private” sphere?

Feminist theories about gender violence often rely on the concept of a continuum of violence, which emphasizes that all forms of gender violence, from intra-personal to wartime mass-scale rape, are all products of dominant patriarchal ideologies that are deeply misogynistic (Kelly 1987, Sev’er 1999). The continuum of violence theory, in its best iterations, moves us past distinctions between public and private sphere as relevant for understanding gender violence (Moser 2001, Cockburn 2004, Giles and Hyndman 2004). However, the continuum has never been completely satisfying to me. This is in part because it tends to recommit the age-old feminist error of grouping all women together and not accounting for the ways that other aspects of women’s lives—their race, their class, their immigration or disability status—render them more vulnerable than other women. How does the continuum account for the fact that indigenous women are more likely than any other woman in society to be victims of gender violence?² Intersectionality theory has made it undeniably clear that these different axes of oppression are not only interrelated, but are mutually constitutive—that one cannot, for example, understand an indigenous women’s oppression simply by considering her gender (Crenshaw 1992, Collins 1998). Logically, then, one cannot understand an indigenous woman’s experience of gender violence by considering only her gender.

A second problem with the continuum model is that it tends to understand different types of violence as discreet forms located along the continuum—each is in the same category of misogyny-inspired actions, but each is definitionally-speaking a recognizably distinct practice. This obscures the mutually constituted nature of most gender violence. For example, domestic violence is in part generated by state violence (Bourgeois 2001). As the stories examined in this article show, the violence (often, but not necessarily, gendered) unleashed during wartime or counterinsurgency leaves in its wake emotional damage which may be acted out through the perpetuation of violence against family members (see also Wing 1996 for an analysis of this process in Palestine and South Africa). However, the continuum leaves the interpersonal and the state-sponsored at opposite ends of the spectrum, limiting our ability to understand their relationship.

The constant presence and inevitability of the domestic violence in the detained women’s stories has forced me to try to come to terms with the difficult nature of the relationship between this and other forms of violence as they play out at the intersection of various axes of oppression. What I have found is that the women’s stories themselves revealed those intersections with far more clarity than any theories of violence I had sought elsewhere. In this article, I will analyze

the multi-layered, inter-related and mutually-constitutive nature of the myriad forms of violence suffered by indigenous women migrants, based on the stories of three women.

THREE STORIES: MARISOL, BELINDA, AND CANDELARIA:³

Marisol (Guatemala)

Marisol was born in the Ixcán, Guatemala. She does not know how she came to live with adoptive parents in Campeche, Mexico. She did not question the fact that she was short and brown skinned, while they were tall and fair, until many years later. When she was fourteen, her adoptive mother told a family friend that he could marry her. Marisol refused, and the man proceeded to sexually assault her on several occasions, apparently with her mother's consent. Furious at Marisol's stubborn refusal obey her demand, her mother told her, "What do you think? That with *your* face a prince is going to arrive for you?" Then one night she awoke to a strange man in her room, clearly intending to rape her. He told her she had to submit, as he had paid her mother money in exchange for sex with her. Marisol managed to escape the man and fled her house. At that point, she decided her only choice was to go and live with the man that wanted to marry her, as she could not return home and had nowhere else to go. She lived with him for a number of months, but never adjusted. He would beat her if she cried or refused to have sex, and he forbade her to visit her siblings.

Eventually, she fled after a harsher than usual beating and approached her father. Seeing how she had been treated, he brought her back into the family home, where she lived, in a great deal of tension with her mother, until she met and married a man of her own choosing. He was a good provider, but shortly after they married he began to express jealousy about the man she had been with previously, telling her, "I love you. But you should have waited for me." He would fly into rages, especially when drinking, and beat her brutally. She had two children by him and endured his beatings for seven years before leaving him.

A few years later, while working alone in a shop, Marisol was attacked by a local man known to have carried out several previous rapes, about which the police did nothing. After brutally raping her, he began calmly putting on his pants. Something about his casual attitude caused Marisol to snap, and she grabbed a machete, whacking him with it once in the back and once in the leg. Terrified, Marisol fled the town. She was certain that the man would go to the police, who would almost certainly not arrest him for the rape, but rather her for the *machetazos* (machete blows). She called a family member and borrowed money, departing that same afternoon for the border of the United States.

Marisol was able to cross Mexico without incident—something few women I have talked to would be able to say. However, in a US border town, a man followed her out of a convenience store. She ran; he chased her. Marisol believed he was a person who preyed on undocumented migrants and likely intended to rape her. She managed to evade him by hiding in a clothing store, but when she came out, she was so terrified that he would reappear and harm her that she turned herself in to the border patrol. She thought she would be safe in immigration custody. She learned differently when sent to one of the worst facilities in the state of Texas, where guards repeatedly verbally assaulted and humiliated her and other detainees.

Belinda (Honduras)

Belinda was born in northern Honduras. Her mother abandoned the family when she was small. She was raised for several years by her father and callous step mother and would pray for her mother to return, sure that her mother would bring the love and protection she needed. When she was six, her mother did return. She had remarried and wanted to claim the children. Belinda was overjoyed, thinking that now her life was going to be happy. That dream was short-lived. Her step father treated her and her siblings harshly, and they had to do many chores despite their young age.

Within a year, her stepfather began sexually abusing her, though she was only seven years old. She did not tell her mother because she believed her mother loved her new husband more and would choose him over her. The abuse continued for five years, until Belinda was old enough to finally say, “*ya no*” (no more) to her stepfather. But by that time her brother had joined a gang and was involved with drugs. He began being abusive, hitting her and forcing her carry drugs for him. Finally, seeing few options, she fled home at the age of 14.

Belinda had a little money saved, which she used to make her way to the Mexican border. There, her money ran out. She took a job as a live-in housekeeper in Tapachula, just over the border in Mexico. Though the job did not pay much, it provided her meals and a roof over her head. A short time later, a young man began approaching her on her outings to the market, asking her to go out with him. Though she did not want to at first, eventually she agreed, she said, because he was from a good family. On their first date, he forced himself on her, leaving her pregnant, a fact she would not realize for several months. The young man did not reappear. When her employers learned that she was pregnant they fired her, tossing her into the street and calling her an “*india puta*” (Indian whore). Belinda was terrified and had no idea what to do. She considered going into prostitution—if everyone believed her to be a whore maybe she should be. But she rejected that, and eventually decided to approach the parents of the young man who had raped her and ask for support for the child. They agreed to this, but what at first seemed like a good thing would later turn dark, as two years later the grandparents used her illiteracy to trick her into signing papers ceding custody to them under the pretense of registering the child’s birth. When she tried to fight this, they threatened to turn her over to immigration.

Months later, desperately unhappy at having had her son taken away, she decided to depart for the US in order to seek some other remedy to get him back. On the way north, gang members assaulted the train she was riding on, robbing people and raping women and men alike. Belinda had to escape by jumping off the moving train, a dangerous move that could have caused her death. When she was detained crossing into the US, the border patrol agent repeatedly offered to “help her out” if she would “help him out,” attempting to barter sex for release into the US, which she refused. Eventually, Belinda was released, and has been in the US for several years. Though she has occasionally been able to talk to him by phone, she has never seen her son again, an open wound that causes her on-going anguish.

Calendaria (Guatemala)

Candelaria left her home in Todos Santos, Guatemala, seeking a better life in the United States. She joined relatives in Washington State and began work harvesting plants. Her daughter was born there the following year. When her daughter was two, Candelaria was apprehended in a workplace raid by ICE. When she failed to appear for a court date, she was ordered deported. With a deportation order against her, she lived for several years in fear of being apprehended and deported without her daughter. Finally, she decided it was better to return to Guatemala than to risk such a separation. There, she began a relationship with a man who quickly became abusive. His violence was severe enough that Candelaria bears a number of visible scars on her face and head from his beatings. He drank heavily, a result, Candelaria explained, of the lasting effects of terrible experiences he had suffered as a child during Guatemala's civil war. Candelaria went to the police, but they would not intervene. Finally, Candelaria put her US citizen daughter on a plane to Seattle, and undertook the long journey overland.

Candelaria's journey was long and difficult, and it included being kidnapped and held for ransom by a cartel in Reynosa. She was grabbed off the streets minutes after arriving there, and fortunately, having lived in the US previously, had people she could call to get the money. When she was released and finally made it to the border and attempted to enter the US, she was abandoned by her coyote in the desert when Border Patrol appeared and her group was forced to scatter. After wandering lost for two days, terrified and without food or water, she was apprehended by the Border Patrol. When she expressed fear of returning to Guatemala, she was thrown into immigration detention and ended up at the T. Don Hutto facility, where I met her. She was extremely anguished about being separated from her young daughter, the very thing she had been attempting to avoid by returning to Guatemala in the first place. She was insecure about her Spanish, which despite her time in the US was still not strong. She had learned from women at the detention center that if she failed to pass her "credible fear" interview, she would be deported to Guatemala. With her entire future, and especially her ability to get back to her daughter, riding on it, she requested an interpreter in the Mam language for her asylum interview. This was her right under the law. That decision would cost her eight months of separation from her child, languishing in detention, as her annoyed deportation officer harassed her to "give up" and just do her interview in Spanish.

RETHINKING GENDER VIOLENCE

What stands out about all three women's stories is the multiplicity of different forms of violence they have suffered. Their lives seem to be an unending stream of assaults, coming from every direction. Interestingly, the women themselves often do not understand these as separate kinds of violence, but rather as a consistent part of their interaction with the world. They have been targets for violence and abuse since they can remember, and the aspects of their being that render them targets are evident in their stories. Gender matters, of course; much of the violence they suffer is gendered. But race, class, and immigration status all come into play in clear ways as well.

For example, Marisol's mother's comment about her face not bringing her a prince undoubtedly referenced her phenotype and its implications for her place in the racial social structure in Mexico, in which whites are dominant and Indians at the bottom of the hierarchy. In trying to compel Marisol to submit to her demands that she marry, her mother deployed this racial trope,

one in which she was in a position of dominance in relation to Marisol. The comments of Belinda's employers, calling her an "*india puta*" did similar work. Notably, this designation was apparently based on her class status or phenotype, because Belinda does not speak an indigenous language or wear indigenous dress. In both cases, the gender violence done to them is ideologically justified by deploying race/class. Race magnifies the vulnerability of these women to violence, by locating them in a social structure in which they are understood to be violat-e-able.

Class also impacts women's migration experience. Marisol, as the adopted daughter of a white Campechano family, was able to quickly turn to a relative and get sufficient money to take a first-class bus to the border, freeing her of the hardships many others, like both Belinda and Candelaria, suffer. Similarly, several non-indigenous women of middle class professional backgrounds have told me that they stayed in their *coyotes*' (traffickers') homes while waiting to cross the border, even eating with their families at the table. It is hard to imagine an indigenous woman being hosted in this way, and while waiting on the streets they are at risk for kidnappings and assaults like that suffered by Candelaria. These differences, while not eliminating all the hardships of migrating by any means, do reduce vulnerability and reflect important class differences in women's migration experiences. In these dynamics we see how race and class articulate with gender, creating the particular context in which violence is generated and accepted.

The vast majority of indigenous women, once they have left their home country, enter the vulnerable realm of the undocumented, since few are able to obtain visas to legally immigrate. Marisol's fear that the man who followed her in Laredo planned to prey on her as an undocumented migrant speaks to that vulnerability. Belinda's loss of her son, a brutal violence against her by her rapist's parents, probably could not and would not have been committed if she had not been undocumented. Her status was wielded against her to ensure that she would not seek redress. Once in the US, that vulnerability remains, as women who experience domestic or partner violence are fearful of reporting it to police or seeking other forms of help or support, including medical care for wounds, for fear of disclosing their undocumented status (Ray and Silverman 2002, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005).

The women's stories presented above convey the fact that race, class, and immigration status articulate with gender in particular ways to define each experience of violence. In a telling comment, when I asked Marisol if she imagined a life in the US without threat of violence, she said, "In truth, no. I am here [in the US], I do not have papers, I don't know how to read and write and I don't speak Spanish well, I am a woman with brown skin in a country of white people. I think there will always be risk..." Marisol understands the intersectional nature of her vulnerability to violence. The violence she has suffered takes place at the intersection of gender, class, race, and immigration status, and it cannot be understood without taking their articulation seriously. As Sokoloff and Dupont note, "gender inequality itself is modified by its intersection with other systems of power and oppression" (2005, 43). This is important because it suggests that it is not sufficient to understand that race, class, and gender are all important factors, but rather that they are inseparable because they are mutually constitutive. The fact that Marisol is an undocumented migrant gives shape to her experience of being a brown-skinned woman in (what she perceives to be) a white country. Her skin color shapes her experience of being an

undocumented migrant. Her class status (being illiterate, with poor Spanish) plays a similarly formative role, and each in turn shapes her experience of gender oppression.

The women's stories also reflect how different forms of violence are mutually constitutive and thus inseparable. For example, we can see the traces of state violence and how they give rise to and define the conditions for domestic violence. Throughout the Americas, the ideological construction of indigenous women as violate-able has underpinned genocidal policies against indigenous peoples from colonial through modern state times (Smith 2005). That ideological construction of indigenous women is fundamental to understanding the near total impunity for violence against them, including domestic violence (Deer 2005). Specific histories of state-sponsored violence that draw on the trope of the violate-able Indian woman are also critical for shaping the contexts that generate and tolerate such violence. For example, during the 30 year civil war in Guatemala, a period known as "*La Violencia*" (The Violence) women were subjected to rape and gendered violence on a massive scale (Hastings 2002, Sanford 2008). These crimes were never prosecuted. As Sanford notes, "it is against this backdrop of genocide and impunity that Guatemalans today find themselves living in an extremely violent country" (2008, 104). Sanford examines the relationship between discourses and practices of past violence to those of current violence against women, and demonstrates strong connections between them, a "particular lexicon that we can trace from the 1980s to the present." (2008, 119). These dynamics emerge in the women's stories—such as Candelaria attributing her partner's alcoholism and violence to his experiences during the war—and are a recurring theme in oral histories from Guatemala. While we don't know exactly how Marisol ended up with a family of *gueros* (white people) in Campeche, the fact that she is about 30 might suggest that she and her birth family were displaced and affected by the violence of the war, which raged in the Ixcán in the early 1980s. Thousands fled Guatemala for Mexico, mostly to refugee camps in Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Campeche (Manz 1988). Her adoption into this family set up the conditions in which racialized and gendered violence would be perpetrated against her. Their stories reflect what Veena Das has called the centrality of gender for "understanding what connects the national to the domestic," and "the deep connections between the spectacular and the everyday" (2008, 283). The domestic circumstances of Marisol that facilitated the violence against her cannot be separated from the "spectacular" national violence of "*La Violencia*," which in fact generated it. State violence cannot be extricated from other forms of violence—it is state discourse and practice that set the context and generate the conditions in which such violence can be enacted.

While histories of state violence are evident in the women's stories as formative factors of domestic and other violence, the determinative role of current state policies, ideologies and actions are also visible. Neoliberalism took hold of countries like Guatemala and Mexico in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the US model of unrestrained capitalism swept throughout the hemisphere. In what was viewed at the time as the inevitable march of "globalization," the idea that states should reduce social spending and remove all barriers to the (ostensibly) free flow of capital through the economy was enshrined in reformed constitutions in many countries of Latin America, as trade barriers were lifted, resources, industry and finance sectors privatized, and collectively-held lands parceled out and rendered newly alienable.⁴ Governments were to restrain themselves from any intervention in the economy—the mediation of social inequality would be left to the paly of market forces.

The process of neoliberalization was supposed to bring democracy and rule of law with it. It was assumed that free market capitalism, democracy, and respect for human rights went hand in hand, including the recognition of the rights of indigenous people often included in these reforms, and there were faltering steps in that direction (Speed 2008). However, it wasn't long before neoliberalism's extreme market logics combined with preexisting dynamics of crime, corruption, and impunity to unleash a new status quo in which the only law that matters is the law of supply and demand and the only logic is that of the profit motive. Under this system, which I have referred to elsewhere as neoliberal multicriminalism, human lives, particularly those of the most oppressed, are rendered irrelevant. Guatemala and Mexico today are characterized by an extraordinary level of violence and impunity which are products of that dynamic. It is worth stating that it is a dynamic that the United States also participates both as a primary market for illegal goods from drugs to trafficked persons, and through US-based actors that form a the northern flank of the networks of traffickers moving the goods. The manifestations of this violent era in the lives of average people include both cartel violence and gang violence, which emerge in women's stories again and again.

Belinda's life is affected by the spread of gang violence and the near total impunity with which gang members operate in these spaces. Neoliberalization increased conditions of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, and expanded drug trafficking, which has created fertile ground for the growth of youth gangs. These gangs have strongly misogynistic tendencies, and constitute what Mercedes Olivera has called, "a permanent threat to young women" (Olivera 2006, 108). One of the greatest threats on the trip north, especially on the trains running from Tapachula, are the gangs such as the Mara Salvatruchas ("Maras"), who ride them committing assaults, robberies and rapes. People are so vulnerable to abuses on these trains that they are known collectively as "La Bestia" or "The Beast" (Nazario 2007). Belinda was confronted with precisely such an attack by Maras in her life-threatening experience on the train north. But she also experienced the impact of gang violence that forced her to leave her home in Honduras, when her brother's participation in a gang led him to begin physically assaulting her as the gendered and misogynistic aspects of gang life permeated their domestic environment. Again, gender violence presents a clear site for observing Das's "connect[ion of] the national to the domestic," and "deep connections between the spectacular and the everyday" (2008, 283). What might otherwise be categorized as "domestic" or "generalized" violence in fact bears clear marks of the effects of state policies and ideologies.

Candelaria, on her trip north, is kidnapped and held for ransom in Reynosa, popularly known as "the city where cartels rule."⁵ Drug cartels, also actively engaged in arms and human trafficking, constitute a virtual parallel power to the state in Mexico and increasingly in Guatemala (Fregoso and Bejarano 2011; Report to the UN Human Rights Committee 2011). Perhaps "parallel" is the wrong word, as it suggests too many degrees of separation between the state and the cartels. In fact that line of separation between them is quite porous, as most spectacularly evidenced in Mexico by the recent indictment of four high-ranking military generals, one of them the former Undersecretary of Defense, on charges of collaborating with narco-traffickers.⁶ The vulnerability of Central American migrants to these cartels, which control everything and everyone in their territories, is tremendous. The Mexican National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) recently reported that nearly 10,000 migrants had been abducted, mainly for ransom, over a period of just six months (CNDH 2010). Astoundingly, nearly half of those interviewed said public officials

had played a direct role in their kidnapping.⁷ Thus, while the violence conducted by drug traffickers might seem to be a separate category from state violence, the state and its agents are in fact active participants in the illegal economy and its violence.

Corruption and impunity, while by no means new phenomena, are given new meaning in the neoliberal multicroiminal context, as histories of gendered state violence and patriarchal and misogynist ideologies manifest in the lawlessness of the current moment, leading to a complete lack of accountability for gendered violence. Notable in Marisol's story was her understanding that the police would never detain her rapist, but would come after her for having responded to it. Gender violence is rarely investigated or punished in Mexico or Guatemala, and less so when the victim is an indigenous woman. So intensified is this impunity at the current juncture that it has given rise to the phenomenon of femicide. Thousands of women have been killed by perpetrators from diverse backgrounds, including husbands, fathers, and brothers. Some of the best feminist theorizing on gender violence, from my perspective, has emerged around the phenomenon of femicide (see, for example, Sanford 2009). As the phenomenon expanded out from its first manifestations in Juarez and spread throughout Mexico and Central America, analysts endeavoring to understand it have had to come to terms with the fact that the violence could not be attributable to a single serial killer or a particular cartel. Instead, the thousands upon thousands of murdered women are products of a much broader and more heinous social dynamic, with perpetrators spread throughout the social fabric (Fregoso and Bejarano 2009). Grasping this, of course, necessitates recognizing the interrelatedness of various forms of violence. While some femicide analyses fail to incorporate race and class, a few usefully forefront them, particularly class (Olivera 2009, Weissman 2009). Most importantly, scholars highlight to role of the state in setting the conditions in which multiple, interrelated forms of gender violence are generated and tolerated (Domínguez Rubalcava and Ravelo Blancas 2009, Sanford 2009).

Corruption is by no means an exclusively Latin American concern. It also exists in the United States, as we saw in Belinda's experience with the Border Patrol agent who tried to barter her freedom for sex. But the immigration system, as Stephen (2013) has noted, appears to function outside the realm of the harms of neoliberal multicroiminalism, at times even providing women shelter from those harms through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) provisions. However, it is also the case that the massive expansion of immigration detention in recent years is part and parcel of the rise of the for-profit prison industrial complex, one of neoliberalism's more pernicious manifestations in the United States. Ideologies of the national security state that interpellate immigrants as potential terrorists and dangerous criminals⁸ and locking up immigrants (including asylum seekers in civil proceedings who have committed no crime) produces the added effect of generating massive profits for private prison corporations. The yearly detention of noncitizens more than doubled between 1999 and 2009, from 146,760 to 369,483 (TRAC 2009).

Detention has been the linchpin of Obama's immigration policy. A recent report by the non-partisan Migration Policy Institute showed that the Obama administration spent nearly \$18 billion on immigration enforcement in 2012, significantly more than it spent on all the other major federal law enforcement agencies combined. Annual detentions increased to 429,247 in 2011, meaning that detentions had nearly tripled in 13 years (Meissner, et. al. 2013). In 2013, Congress approved an additional \$147 million dollars over what the administration requested

specifically to maintain the quota of filling 30,000 detention beds. While I have elsewhere argued that this detention is, in and of itself, a violation of human rights given that detainees have committed no crime (Speed forthcoming), detention also creates conditions of possibility for other forms of abuse. Such abuse includes the psychological mistreatment Maribel suffered in immigration detention and Candelaria's "punishment" for requesting an interpreter, a violation which again highlights intersections of immigration status with race and racism. It also includes significant potential for gender violence, as the sexual abuses suffered by women at the hands of a male guard in the Hutto facility made alarmingly clear.⁹

Thus, the neoliberal logic of privatization and unrestrained profits, when viewed through the lens of immigration detention in the private prison industry, is clearly more than the reduction in state intervention and play of market forces that neoliberal economies ostensibly entail. In fact, the state is intimately bound up with this "private" industry, in effect creating its market through its interpellations of immigrants as potential terrorists and criminals, and ensuring that market continues to be large enough to be profitable through its state policies and even budget allocations. These state mediations set the conditions in which indigenous women migrants are incarcerated and made more vulnerable to abuse. Gender, race, and class all conjunct to increase the vulnerabilities that these socially-defined statuses bring, rendering women certain—and when in detention, captive—targets for violence.

CONCLUSION: A DREADFUL MOSAIC

In this article, I have taken Marisol, Belinda, and Candelaria's stories as evidence that the multiple forms of violence that they are subject to is not only gendered, but that race, class, and immigration status conjunct with gender in ways that cannot be ignored. All forms of violence are interrelated and mutually constitutive. If we want to understand violence in all of its social depth and complexity, we must take the interaction of all of these social forms into our accounts. It might be better, then, to think about gender violence not so much as a continuum, in which separate forms of violence succeed each other along a line moving from individual and interpersonal to mass-scale and state-sponsored, but rather as kind of mosaic, in which many distinct forms are brought together, and the overall picture created by their juxtaposition can only be fully comprehended by contemplating them all together. While mosaic may sound too artistic and aesthetically pleasing to represent the ugly social dynamic of gender violence, it has the benefit of highlighting that each individual shard, like each form of oppression or violence, with its own sharp-edged and jagged contours, is always part of a much larger social assemblage that defines its meaning. Thinking about gender violence as a mosaic—albeit a dreadful one—gets us away from linear notions of the continuum. And although describing intersections across multiple axes of oppression has been important and useful for complicating gender analyses, it still evokes linear trajectories that cross only at specific moments in time. A mosaic presents us with those distinct aspect, interacting at all times to mutually constitute the whole.

Re-conceptualizing gender violence as a "mosaic" is not inventing a new way of talking about gender violence simply for the sake of better description; it has important political implications. One of my biggest concerns with the continuum model is that it posits individuals at one end of a linear scale and the state at the other. As the ultimate power holder, the state has more responsibility than other social actors, and the disarticulation of different forms of violence

almost inevitably serves to let the state off the hook. The histories of gendered state violence and the current state-defined context of a particularly vicious and unrestrained capitalism set the ideological and material conditions for gender violence. We should not leave the state dangling innocently off at one end of the continuum while we focus on other aspects of violence generated in those conditions.

Postscript on Victims, Agency, and Resistance

While not the principal subject of this article, any work that focuses on gender violence in specific women's lives raises the question of agency. Indeed, what is most remarkable about the oral histories of indigenous women migrants is not the seemingly relentless violence they are subject to, but rather that they continue to demonstrate significant agency in struggling to move beyond violence. This article has examined the multiple and interrelated ways that indigenous women migrants are rendered vulnerable to violence, victimhood is not the only picture that emerges from their oral histories. Women are victimized, again and again; there is no avoiding that fact in the stories. This is not because they are inherently victims, of course, but rather because of the historical and current dynamics addressed in this article. Recent literature has rightly criticized the portrayal of indigenous women as victims lacking agency (for discussion, see Moser and Clark 2001). However, the fact that people are victimized does not mean they are powerless to act in their lives. In fact, a human rights violation could be defined as the act of taking a person's agency away for a period of time. If we accept Long's definition of agency as an individual actors' "capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion" (1992, 23, cited in Moser and Clark 2001) then in fact, they demonstrate an extraordinary level of human agency in the face of those repeated human rights violations, in which their agency to define their lives and their experience is repeatedly taken from them by partners, family members, strangers, government officials and government policies. We tend to want to see agency in "resistance," particularly social movement organization. A common question I am asked, when I present on the oral history project, is whether the women are organizing to try to resist the violence. It is our instinct to seek a nice end to the story. My answer is no, the women I have worked with are not organizing. Women migrants, while on the journey, are almost by definition alone. In detention, their only goal is to get out. And if they remain in Central Texas, they are too busy finding work and too worried about being deported to start mass organizing. I want to emphasize, however, that they are not without agency. They are continually moving themselves forward in pursuit of a life free of violence. Returning to Marisol's response to my question about whether she could imagine a life without threat of violence that I quoted above, I would like to now add the final sentences of her response. She said, "Truthfully, no. I am here, I do not have papers, I don't know how to read and write and I don't speak Spanish well, I am a woman with brown skin in a country of white people. I think there will always be risk. *But I have to try. I have to try.*" The women express their agency in trying for that violence-free life, in spite of the odds stacked against them. They do so when they leave partners who threaten to kill them for leaving, when they pursue police assistance even knowing that they will not help, when they make the difficult decision to leave home, community, and family, when they take on the dangerous journey through Mexico and across the US border, and when they continue to get out of bed every day, even in the soul-crushing space of immigration detention. To my mind at least, indigenous women migrants, victimized in a myriad of forms of oppression and violence, are the very definition of agency.

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NOTES

¹ I am utilizing “interpellation” in the philosophical sense, which refers to the process by which ideology addresses the pre-ideological individual and produces him or her as a subject proper.

² Studies abound that demonstrate domestic violence is at crisis levels in Native communities. The following are some recent examples: Keel 2004 (Australia); National Health Agency 2008 (Canada); Bachman, et. al. 2008 (US); Amnesty International 2008 (US). According to a press release from the Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC), in the US, Indian women are 2½ times more likely to be assaulted and more than twice as likely to be stalked as other women. One in three Native women will be raped in her lifetime, and six in 10 will be physically assaulted. On some reservations, the murder rate for Native women is 10 times the national average. Eighty-eight percent of these types of crimes are committed by non-Indians over which, until very recently, tribal governments lacked any criminal jurisdiction under US law in spite of the fact that, according to the US Census Bureau, 77 percent of the population residing on Indian lands and reservations is non-Indian. Deer 2005 offers a similar set of statistics drawn from the National Crime Victimization Survey and the National Violence Against Women Survey.

³ These are pseudonyms. In these redacted versions, I have slightly altered some identifying details when necessary to protect the identity of the women involved, though I have endeavored to do so without changing the practical facts of the stories or their significance. The oral histories were all recorded in 2012 and 2013 in Austin, Texas, and are in the possession of the author.

⁴ Notable are Brazil (1988) Colombia (1991), Paraguay (1992), Mexico (1992), Peru (1993), Bolivia (1994), Argentina (1994), and Ecuador (1998).

⁵ Batteletti, Don. 2010. “Reynosa, Mexico: where the cartels rule,” Los Angeles Times. November 5. <http://framework.latimes.com/2010/11/05/reynosa-mexico-where-the-cartels-rule/#/0>. Last accessed May 9, 2011.

⁶ Silvia Otero, “Juez Dicta Arresto contra Cuatro Generales por Narco,” El Universal, Miercoles, 1 de agosto, 2012. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/198877.html>. Last accessed January 15, 2013.

⁷ “Mexico Migrants Face Human Rights Crisis, Says Amnesty” BBC News, April 28, 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8647252.stm>. Last accessed May 12, 2012.

⁸ The creation of the US “national security state” in the post-September 11 period generated important shifts in the manner in which the state interprets and acts upon immigrants. In 2003, the Immigration and Naturalization Service was dissolved and its functions were brought under the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the mission of which is defined in the Homeland Security Act as “preventing terrorist acts in the United States [and] reducing the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism” (Homeland Security Act 2002). This move meant that all immigrants would be regarded as potential terrorist threats. In 2004, Congress linked that interpretation to incarceration, authorizing funds for the construction of up to 40,000 additional immigration detention bed spaces over the next five years through the Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act. The following year, the DHS implemented its Secure Border Initiative (SBI), which has as its stated goal, “improving public safety by working to better identify, detain and ultimately remove dangerous criminal aliens from your community” (ICE 2013). Thus immigrants, including asylum seekers in civil proceedings, were recast as terrorists and criminals.

⁹ The Hutto facility been the subject of two federal sexual abuse investigations and a former guard has been convicted on misdemeanor charges and pled guilty to federal charges for repeatedly groping detained women. Claire Osborn. “Former supervisor at corrections center pleads guilty to molesting women.” Austin American Statesman, Wednesday, September 7, 2011. http://www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/blotter/entries/2011/09/07/former_supervisor_at_correctio.html/

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