

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	<b>Sheila Dauer</b> .....	1
	INTRODUCTION: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	
2.	<b>Melissa A. Beske</b> .....	16
	AN ANALYSIS OF THE COLLABORATIVE ENDEAVORS TO LESSEN GENDER-BASED INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN CAYO, BELIZE, AND A CASE FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT	
3.	<b>Janet Chernela</b> .....	34
	PARTICULARIZING UNIVERSALS/UNIVERSALIZING PARTICULARS: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO TRAFFICKING IN INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE NORTHWEST AMAZON OF BRAZIL	
4.	<b>Rebecka Lundgren and Melissa K. Adams</b> .....	53
	SAFE PASSAGES: BUILDING ON CULTURAL TRADITIONS TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGHOUT THE LIFE COURSE	
5.	<b>Shannon Speed</b> .....	78
	A DREADFUL MOSAIC: RETHINKING GENDER VIOLENCE THROUGH THE LIVES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN MIGRANTS	

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Approaches to  
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Human Rights**

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**Gender, Development, and Globalization Program**  
Center for Gender in Global Context  
Michigan State University  
206 International Center  
427 N Shaw Ln, East Lansing, MI 48824-1035  
Ph: 517/353-5040 • Fx: 517/432-4845  
Email: [gencen@msu.edu](mailto:gencen@msu.edu) • Web: <http://www.gencen.msu.edu>

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# **Introduction: Anthropological Approaches to Gender-based Violence**

Sheila Dauer

Graduate Program in International Affairs  
New School for Public Engagement

## **Biography**

Sheila Dauer is the former Director of Amnesty International USA (AIUSA)'s Women's Human Rights Program during the program's existence from October 1997 to December 2008. She was on the staff of AIUSA from 1979 to 2008. As a charter member of an AIUSA Taskforce on Women's Human Rights since 1988, she worked with both AI's international research office and other national sections to develop AI's policy, action, and publications on women's human rights. In 1991, she prepared AI's first international report on women's human rights, *Women in the Front Line*. She served as Theme Advisor to AIUSA's Stop Violence Against Women Campaign (2004-2008), developing strategies and actions on multiple countries and issues around violence against women. Dr. Dauer, who holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology, carried out fieldwork for two years in Tanzania. She is an emeritus member of the American Anthropological Association's Committee for Human Rights and a Fellow of the Society for Applied Anthropology. She teaches at The New School for Public Engagement's Graduate Program in International Affairs and Columbia Teachers College.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence against women is one of the major challenges to social justice and human rights in the 21st century. The important work of anthropologists contributes to recent advances both in ways to understand gender-based violence in ethnographically accurate terms and ways to work with the community to end these abuses.

This special issue represents the work of four anthropologists who use and further refine the concept of gender-based violence within the international human rights framework through their ethnographic research. All of the authors have identified forms of gender-based violence carried out against women or girls and engage with the goal of lessening and eventually eliminating this violence. Their work expresses the influence of feminism in both anthropology and human rights.

During the 1970s through 1990s, partly due to the UN Decade on Women (1975-1985) and four World Conferences on Women ending with Beijing in 1995, women's movements organized transnationally to introduce the concept of gender into the human rights regime and to identify a relationship between subordination of women and their vulnerability to forms of violence. Using Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the women's rights treaty, and the human rights framework as an organizing tool, women raised awareness of forms of gender-based violence committed by private actors in the home and community that are ignored or condoned by government and that present a major obstacle to equality.

CEDAW had not discussed violence explicitly. In 1992, the CEDAW Committee issued General Recommendation 19 to close this gap. This document made clear that gender-based violence breaches the Convention and declared that government "is responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence and provide compensation."

In order to obtain broad UN recognition of this definition of government's human rights responsibility, a transnational coalition of women's organizations used the occasion of the 1993 2nd World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna to mount a campaign with the slogan, "Women's rights ARE human rights."<sup>1</sup> They succeeded in that the final agreement—the Vienna Declaration—states that women's rights are an integral part of all human rights, that equal participation of women in all areas of life is a priority of the UN and that violence against women is a human rights violation for which governments can be held accountable if they do not exercise due diligence to prevent and punish it. In addition, the UN General Assembly approved a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and appointed a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (VAW) to report on gender-based violence and its causes and consequences to the UN Human Rights Commission.

During this same period, feminist anthropologists developed the distinction between sex and gender—the idea that biological differences between men and women do not solely underlie social definitions and that attributes and behaviors associated with women are culturally and historically specific—and they applied this gender lens to anthropological theory.<sup>2</sup> By 1988, the Association for Feminist Anthropology (AFA) became a permanent section within the American

Anthropological Association (AAA). In 1989, the AAA institutionalized recognition of feminist anthropology when it published *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching*, edited by Sandra Morgen.

The resulting ethnographic research led to, among other things, the understanding that gender can intersect with race, class, and other forms of difference and that these intersections transform the nature of gender. Ethnographies of culturally specific masculinities and femininities around the world (e.g. Lancaster and DiLeonardo 1997) revealed the widespread presence of gender-based violence against women (Brown and Campbell 1992; 1999; Counts 1990; Das 2008; Goldstein 2003; Levinson 1989; McClusky 2001; Merry 2006; Parsons 2010; Plesser 2006; Wies and Haldane 2011).<sup>3</sup> Anthropologists working globally became interested not only in studying forms of gender-based violence but in highlighting the “persistence yet invisibility of sexual violence” in the belief that ethnographic research and exposure could lead to amelioration of the problem (McChesney and Singleton 2010, 1). Anthropological approaches to violence against women describe cultural beliefs and norms and the political, economic, and social structures that underlie tolerance of violence against women. With their depth of knowledge about a society, anthropologists offer culturally resonant ways for ideas about protecting women from gender-based violence to be introduced into social discourses in that society.

## **ANTHROPOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Anthropologists have been characterized as hostile to the human rights framework. For example Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (1994-2003), criticized the academic discipline of anthropology for inventing and encouraging cultural relativism which has been used as a rationale by government and community leaders to reject women’s human right to be free of violence in the home and community (2002).

This history of this criticism begins as a result of early opposition in 1947 to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At that time, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) responded to the newly formed UN Human Rights Commission that the proposed Universal Declaration on Human Rights was in danger of being ethnocentric, expressing ideas of “rights conceived only in terms of values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America.” Further, they noted that “in stressing these particular absolute values it could be used to justify colonialist doctrines such as the ‘white man’s burden’ – a doctrine used to implement economic exploitation and to deny the right to control their own affairs to millions of people over the world” (AAA 1947).

Anthropologists have long stressed the importance of ensuring that cultural relativism not be applied only to societies in the Global South but also to societies in the Global North that have morally questionable cultural practices, such as racial violence and discrimination, repression of minorities, gender-based discrimination and violence, and destruction of the environment vital to a people’s survival. Many anthropologists remain skeptical about reform efforts that call for changes in cultural practices without sufficient respect for the history and context of those practices – whether these efforts are neo-colonial, further globalization, or advocate human rights.<sup>4</sup>

A significant initiative within the AAA to explore human rights began in the 1980s with an increasing concern about the gravity and urgency of human rights violations affecting peasant, indigenous, and other communities amongst whom anthropologists worked—particularly in Latin America. Anthropologists began to see the power of international human rights discourse:

(1) to expose abuses against oppressed peoples and subaltern groups, (2) to facilitate articulation of their locally based demands for justice and redress in internationally accepted terms and (3) to apply pressure to states and other perpetrators of these abuses that may succeed in forcing an end to the abuses and a change for the better (AAA 1999).

In 1990 the AAA adopted Principles of Professional Responsibility and formed committees to work on abuses against particular groups of indigenous people, as well as on problems such as hunger, famine, AIDS, homelessness, involuntary resettlement and refugees. In 1988, the Association for Feminist Anthropology (AFA) named women and human rights as one of its three Working Commissions. After several years of exploring the relationship of anthropology and human rights, the AAA Executive Board approved a permanent Human Rights Committee in 1995, the members of which submitted a draft Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights. Approved by the whole association in 1999, the Declaration states that the organization has an “ethical responsibility to promote and protect the rights of people and peoples everywhere to fully realize their humanity, meaning their capacity for culture” (AAA 1999). The Declaration calls on members to be concerned “whenever human difference is made the basis for a denial of basic human rights, building on the UDHR, and the core international human rights and humanitarian treaties” (ibid).

The Declaration speaks to continuing criticism of human rights within the profession—that human rights are implemented rigidly, demanding cultural changes without an understanding or appreciation of the historical context of a society’s values and resources. The Declaration states:

... Human rights is not a static concept. Our understanding of human rights is constantly evolving as we come to know more about the human condition. It is therefore incumbent on anthropologists to be involved in the debate on enlarging our understanding of human rights on the basis of anthropological knowledge and research (ibid).

One anthropologist who describes both the positive and negative effects of the human rights framework is Sally Engle Merry (2006). Focusing on gender-based violence, she highlighted some of the complexities of applying international human rights standards to this problem. Through her ethnographic research on the human rights system, she analyzed the complex ways that human rights principles such as women’s right to live free of violence and to maintain bodily integrity are “translated into the vernacular” in diverse societies. As a result of her ethnographic study of the human rights system, she concluded that some human rights advocates have different understandings of “culture” from anthropologists.

The international human rights community’s definition of culture tended to conflate “custom” and “tradition” with culture, leading to the characterization of culture as static and resistant to change. In this interpretation, culture is seen as an obstacle to achieving equality and freedom from violence.

Anthropologists understand culture to contain not only hegemonic social norms, but at the same time contestations to those norms. This understanding explains how those in power may identify changes as violations of “their” culture while subaltern groups in the same society identify them as desired changes. Merry posited that rather than viewing culture as an obstacle to change, human rights advocates use a more current understanding of culture as a dynamic, open and flexible system. This definition recognizes that through understanding how meanings are contextualized, people have the capacity to alter and change local practices.

In 2007 Yakin Erturk, UN Rapporteur on VAW, (2003-2009) submitted a report on the intersection of culture and violence against women. In it she recognizes this contemporary anthropological definition of culture and condemns the use of “cultural relativism” to support a rejection of universality of human rights principles, in particular a woman’s right to live free of violence.

The anthropologists in this collection have engaged with people in Belize, Uganda, Brazil, and the United States in the process of challenging the conditions within society which lead to violations of women’s human rights. These include women of subaltern ethnic groups within a dominant society that exploits them (Chernela; Speed, this volume), and people struggling to form new visions and actions that challenge violence in their midst (Beske; Lundgren and Adams, this volume). These authors produce findings which can inform strategies to develop gender equality and end violence against women in particular societies. Among the most prominent themes crosscutting these works are the intersection of multiple identities with gender-based violence; economic, social, and cultural rights; and violence against individuals versus structural violence involving government and other institutions.

Lundgren and Adams conducted ethnographic field research in Northern Ugandan communities recovering from a 20-year violent conflict. The research consisted of life history interviews with adolescents at different life course stages focusing on issues or events relevant to gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health. The authors identify moments when gender identity is under construction or pressure. Life histories as a research tool have been used in feminist anthropologies because they facilitate connections between individual biographies and larger cultural and structural contexts. In addition, the researchers’ in-depth interviews with clan and religious leaders reveal the critical role of gender inequality in supporting violence, as well as the influence of structural factors such as poverty, social inequality, unemployment, and lack of land. Their research reveals significant support for changing cultural norms that sustain forms of violence. In Lundgren and Adams’ research, while traditional gender norms enforce men’s power over women, these coexist with Acholi values that could also prevent violence such as respect, love, and protection. The researchers, in collaboration with Save the Children and Pathfinder International staff, designed tailored interventions that target adolescents at critical moments of passage from childhood to adulthood, and aim to create an environment that supports the elimination of gender-based violence. The GREAT (Gender Roles Equality and Transformations) consortium, for example, developed a serial radio drama that generates dialogue to encourage gender equitable attitudes to gender equality, decrease tolerance for violence, and model community revitalization in a more gender equitable way. This work shows how communities can use their own culture as a resource to end gender-based violence.

Beske carried out ethnographic research in the western Cayo District of Belize where gender-based violence in the form of intimate partner violence affects 70% of women in relationships. Her ethnography describes the efforts of government, religious institutions, medical practitioners, and NGOs to diminish the problem. Her findings highlight the divergent approaches of each of these sectors, while collaboration across these four sectors has included some improvement in the situation. These organizations have begun to re-conceptualize IPV from a matter of individual choice and intrafamilial concern to a public health emergency, an atrocity that should be the concern of the whole community and a matter for state and international action. These activists are “leading the way in fighting the cultural normalization of IPV (e.g., female discrimination and victim-blaming)...re-envisioning gender-based violence as a collective problem...re-imagining its solution as collective as well” (Beske, this volume, 24). As a result of working with organizations and individuals in these four sectors she is able to identify conflict and confusion within and amongst these groups that constitute an obstacle to further progress. Internal power struggles, conflicting interests and lack of sustainability prevent effectiveness. In the midst of this, her work exemplifies engaged anthropology as she combines ethnographic research and her own role to find ways to help women in support groups overcome obstacles, find common goals, and work together more consistently.

Speed, a tribal citizen in the US and a researcher and activist, has carried out ethnographic research both in Mexico and the US describing the effects of discrimination, marginalization, and structural violence experienced by indigenous peoples. Since 2010, as part of her commitment to the indigenous women she has worked with for over two decades, she has participated in the Hutto Visitation Project, an organization providing human rights accompaniment to women, mostly indigenous, in this immigration detention facility in Taylor, Texas. These women had universally experienced multiple forms of violence, including domestic violence. Using an oral history approach to the lives of three women, she re-centers her analysis around *their* interpretations of their experiences. She shows how their personal experiences are integrally related to ideological constructions of indigenous women as “violate-able” in terms of both genocide at the state level and domestic violence at the interpersonal level. She exposes the complicity of the state with gang violence, official corruption, and impunity for violence including gender-based violence. The article ends by demonstrating that the women’s decisions, actions, and struggles are the ultimate act of courage and of agency, enacted by women who are often characterized as powerless victims.

Chernela’s article, based on her long-term ethnographic work with indigenous peoples of the northwest Brazilian Amazon, is concerned with the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity and class. She provides the history of the alliance among the Salesian mission, the military, and the State in carrying out a program at indigenous boarding schools of national integration, economic production, and religious conversion, which “were seen as parts of a single process of ‘improvement’ in which the ‘uncivilized’ Indian would become assimilated to Western ways and ‘benefit’ spiritually and materially” (Chernela, this volume, 37). The schools trained girls in Western household chores such as cleaning, ironing, laundering, and cooking and transferred them from the boarding schools in the Upper Rio Negro region into unpaid domestic labor in confined and inhumane conditions in a distant city, a process that meets the definition of human trafficking. Chernela worked with the affected women, a seminarian, and a humanitarian aid worker to document this case and facilitate its presentation by an indigenous speaker to the Russell Tribunal in 1980 in the Netherlands. International exposure at this tribunal caused the



Salesian order to close the mission schools starting in 1985, thus ending the trafficking. A related important outcome of this process was the founding of the organization AMARN in 1982 by the indigenous women affected. In collaboration with the anthropologist, the participants safely shared news and were able to “evolve collective solutions to common problems.” With continuing commitment over the years from Chernela and a support network called Friends of AMARN, AMARN is now an independently funded NGO and the oldest registered indigenous organization in Brazil.

## **INTERSECTIONALITY AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE**

In her report to the UN General Assembly in 2011, Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (2009- ) emphasized the relevance of both intersectionality and structural violence for understanding gender-based violence. She situated violence against women on a continuum which included interpersonal, structural, and institutional inequalities that result in violence. Stating that “no form of interpersonal violence against women is devoid of structural violence” (2011, 8), she noted that considerations of intersectionality require scholars and activists to focus not only on the interpersonal aspects of violence against women but also on the structural conditions through which these forms of discrimination and violence are produced and reproduced. She calls on States to ratify all human rights treaties and respect their obligations to apply due diligence to prevent and protect against gender-based violence and provide compensation to victims in both the public and private spheres. Were all states to do what she requires, they would ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as respect the 2009 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, the State itself is often a violator in its action and its inaction, i.e. its failure to end, or complicity in, forms of violence and discrimination throughout society.

The authors in this volume use both an intersectional approach to gender and a structural approach to violence to interrogate these problems. Intersectionality focuses on the need to understand gender discrimination in terms of the multiple identities that simultaneously affect women—gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, etc.—which lead to distinctive forms of human rights violations against women. Structural violence refers to the processes, policies, and politics that systematically produce or reproduce “social and economic inequalities that determine who will be at risk for assaults and who will be shielded from them” (Farmer 2005, 30). Anthropologists use a structural violence approach to move beyond an individual pathology approach to gender-based violence and to analyze the way social, economic, and political factors produce, reproduce, and maintain forms of gender-based violence while at the same time protecting the perpetrator.

Speed interrogates and brings together feminist concepts of the “continuum of gender violence” and intersectionality. She observes that the feminist theory of the continuum of violence successfully deconstructed the idea that gender violence must be conceptualized via a split between public and private spheres. But she sees two problems with the continuum. One is that there is still the tendency to blame all gender violence on patriarchy alone. Speed draws on Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) who argues that women of color experience oppression and discrimination along multiple axes (gender, race) that are not only interrelated but also mutually constituted. Speed focuses on how the intersection of indigenous women’s multiple identities (gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigrant status) result in the forms of gender-based violence

they experience. Her work also demonstrates that the forms of interpersonal violence the women experience are shaped by state sponsored structural forms of violence. She exposes the responsibility of the state (both US and Mexican governments) and other institutions for creating or condoning laws, policies, practices, and institutions that wreak violence at every level—in public and private spaces—in the lives of the detained indigenous women she visited in the Hutto Prison in Texas.

Chernela's case illustrates the prominence that intersectionality plays in anthropological studies where the subjects are often members of minority groups. Her paper suggests a multipronged approach to human rights abuse by first addressing the abuse itself; later the needs of the abused population; and finally the structural causes of the abuse. The action taken by Chernela and her collaborators drew on the resources of international human rights treaties such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) protections of indigenous land and labor rights and the international public exposure of the Russell Tribunal. With the abuses identified and in the process of remediation, attention shifts to the immediate social and economic needs of the victims of the abuse. The project advocated by Chernela for approaching human rights abuses includes tackling the structural sources of abuses. This entails the recognition of intersectionality involved in the violence experienced by Amazonian indigenous girls based on their gender, race, and class. The project links the local and personal experience of the abuse to national, and even transnational, institutions.

Although Beske and Lundgren and Adams do not mention intersectionality or structural violence explicitly, evidence of these concepts may be found in their articles. Beske describes the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class in intimate partner violence in Cayo, Belize. She explores institutional victim blaming by the police, courts, and religious institutions that can be seen as manifestations of structural violence. At the government level very few police officers are trained to handle intimate partner complaints and the majority who are untrained often take bribes to favor accused perpetrators, or even sexually harass the complainants themselves. Similar criticisms have been made about court magistrates. As a whole, the government has done little to correct this situation. Belize has the lowest per capita percentage of medical practitioners in Latin America. With so few medical care providers, women receive little help in filling out the medico-legal report form that would provide forensic evidence in a complaint. A number of religious institutions frown on divorce or even leaving an abusive relationship. Beske also identifies problems within NGOs committed to improving conditions for women and their families that are obstacles to their ability to do so.

Lundgren and Adams work with communities in northern Uganda that are emerging from the effects of armed conflict, effects that included destruction of the political and social institutions governing and structuring society and internal displacement into government approved camps. The colonial and post-colonial history leading up to the conflict and the conflict itself constitute structural violence. One of the most harmful effects of rape and other forms of violence against women during armed conflict is the development of a militarized understanding of masculinity that includes valorization of violence. Lundgren and Adams' research is meant to change these effects within these northern Uganda communities.

## ENGAGED ANTHROPOLOGY

All of these authors exemplify multiple roles for anthropologists, particularly through engaged scholarship. They not only describe the culture, economy, and politics of a society through participant-observation in fieldwork but they also collaborate with the community in diverse ways to identify and solve problems. All emphasize anthropologists' ability to help make women's voices in local communities heard clearly and accurately.

A research concern of many anthropologists is investigating the development and social embedding of gender norms. Lundgren and Adams, working in the post-conflict context of northern Uganda, analyze the process by which boys and girls acquire a definition of masculine identity that tolerates forms of violence against girls and women. Their scholarship seeks creative ways to work with young people to change these norms. They explore ways that young people "resist hegemonic social norms and chart paths that lead to more equitable and peaceful relationships in the society they are rebuilding" (Lundgren and Adams, this volume, 54). They focus on early adolescence in particular, as intervention at this stage in the life cycle represents an opportunity to promote more equitable norms and behaviors. Lundgren is both a researcher and collaborator with the community. She uses her research to help local people, including clan elders and cultural leaders, identify the aspects of their culturally specific gender norms that they wish to change as well as those they wish to reinvigorate. She works with them to develop creative new ways for elders to re-assume their role in advising and mentoring young people as well as for adolescents to build new kinds of relationships between boys and girls.

Beske also argues for engagement of the anthropologist while providing a glimpse into the contradictions and pitfalls facing a researcher in the field. She describes hers as an engaged role consisting of "bridging gaps that hinder moving forward" when different sectors of society—government, NGOs, religious institutions, healthcare providers—collaborate in ending gender-based violence. These obstacles—conflicts of interest, power imbalances and lack of resources/sustainability—have implications for the engaged researcher. This raises ethical and methodological dilemmas. The anthropologist must recognize her positionality (as a Western-based scholar and researcher in this case) while seeking ethical collaboration to become "...but one [voice] of many" (Beske, this volume). She concludes, "While such a delicate positionality brings inevitable conflicts of interest or power struggles to the fore, it simultaneously places engaged scholars in the ideal position to counter oppressive forces" (Beske, this volume, 29). She characterizes the ethnographer's position as simultaneous outsider and insider, observer and activist, administrator and friend. Beske views her unique contribution as developing an analysis of the situation that accurately expresses the circumstances and strategies at the local level in ways that could easily be understood by external audiences, thus strengthening ties between the local and global contexts.

Chernela sees the role of the anthropologist as recognizing harms to the people they work with and taking steps to end them. She recommends (1) helping to develop a variety of programs to empower the abused population, to secure their livelihoods, and to reduce their vulnerability, (2) serving as a link to resources such as finding opportunities for them to attend national and international meetings where they can share experiences, ideas, and strategies with their peers and build their capacity to widen their networks, (3) providing protection for the people with whom they work through publicity of harms and subsequent condemnation by institutions,

organizations, and the media, and (4) informing international organizations and international donors with accurate information about their needs.

Speed's advocacy includes a deeply empathetic and sensitive portrayal of the hardships of undocumented migrant women and a critique of the US legal system that treats these women as criminals when they have committed no crime. She exposes in detail the responsibility of both the US and Mexican governments in contributing – both actively and by negligence – to much of the violence the women have experienced throughout their lives.

In summary, the anthropologists in this special issue address a number of important questions of relevance to development as well as anthropology and human rights. How does an ethnographic understanding of gender roles in a particular society assist those seeking to eliminate tolerance for gender-based violence in that society? How can anthropological research more accurately describe the multiple experiences of gender-based violence while leading to better policies for its elimination? How can anthropologists and human rights advocates work together to improve accountability within the institutions (economic, political, and social) that constitute the structural conditions perpetuating the violence? Anthropologists, human rights defenders, and development advocates alike say there is a need for detailed discussion both about how women's human rights are implemented and about how the framework might be further developed. This collection is part of the on-going dialogue.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J., coordinated this international campaign. See Bunch and Reilly (1994) for a comprehensive history and analysis of the systematic organizing efforts of women prior to, during, and after the UN World Conference on Human Rights.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) *Women, Culture and Society*, and Reiter (1975) *Towards an Anthropology of Women*.

<sup>3</sup> David Levinson (*Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 1989) and Dorothy Counts (Special issue of *Pacific Studies*, 1990) began to identify forms of violence against women using more universal terms such as gender equality, finding stresses brought on by political and economic changes, including the effects of the idea of "modernity" on people newly becoming part of wage labor production. In 1992, Counts published *Sanctions and Sanctuaries: Cultural perspectives on the Beating of Wives* (w/Judith Brown and Jacquelyn Campbell) and followed in 1999 with *To Have and to Hit: Cultural Perspectives on Wife Beating*. In 2001 Laura McClusky published *Here our culture is Hard: Stories of Domestic Violence from a Mayan Community in Belize*. In 2003, Donna Goldstein published *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*, which explored the structural inequality operating to obscure the experience of black women. In 2006, Sonya Plessner published *Sheltering Women: Negotiating Gender Violence in Northern Italy* comparing two women's shelters, one run by communists and another by the Catholic Church. Veena Das (2008) shows that definitions of gender-based violence are based on subjectivities that are part of the link between the national and local and that violence can become part of the ordinary within that context. Nia Parsons' (2010) *Transformative Ties: Gendered Violence, forms of recovery and shifting subjectivities in Chile* examined "transformative" relationships that radically reframe the way survivors of violence view themselves. Wies and Haldane published a 2011 collection of articles, *Anthropology at the Front Lines of Gender-based Violence*.

<sup>4</sup> A thoughtful statement of these reservations was offered by Veena Das (2006, 5): "As abstract formulations, discourses of human rights can be used to destroy carefully knitted social arrangements in local worlds—but as one among other resources that are actively used by social actors and given new forms, the same discourses could be translated in practices on the side of

justice. An anthropological rather than a purely juridical understanding of human rights then can contribute to a deeper understanding of the contemporary world.”

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# **An Analysis of the Collaborative Endeavors to Lessen Gender-Based Intimate Partner Violence in Cayo, Belize, and a Case for Anthropological Engagement**

Melissa A. Beske

Tulane University

## **Abstract**

Intimate partner violence affects approximately 50% of Belizeans and 70% of those living in the western Cayo District. Though it is illegal according to both national and international mandates, these laws are seldom enforced and the crime poses a considerable challenge for advocates in diverse sectors of society. While governmental personnel have focused on ensuring legal protection for survivors, medical and religious practitioners have been committed to survivors' physiological, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing. Additionally, NGOs—staffed by locals and oftentimes foreign volunteers working within a human rights framework—have organized and implemented practical solutions to diminish the problem. Though combined efforts among these groups have produced improvements, they have also resulted in conflicts and confusions which have substantially slowed progress. This paper will assess both the strengths and shortcomings of their collaborative endeavors and, drawing insights from this case, further reflect upon the role of engaged anthropology in contributing to this process.

## **Biography**

Melissa A. Beske is a Research Associate of the Department of Anthropology at Tulane University. Her work focuses on the cultural underpinnings which normalize gender-based intimate partner violence in western Belize, as well as the steps which advocates are making towards the phenomenon's resolution.

## **AN ANALYSIS OF THE COLLABORATIVE ENDEAVORS TO LESSEN GENDER-BASED INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN CAYO, BELIZE, AND A CASE FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT**

Gender-based intimate partner violence (IPV) is a significant problem in western Belize. An incidence assessment carried out by the Belize Organization for Women and Development in 1998 estimated a near 50% prevalence rate for the region (Epstein 2003, 4). Conducted a decade later, my dissertation research revealed a lifetime occurrence rate of 70% among 564 ever-partnered<sup>1</sup> survey respondents residing in the western Cayo District. While there is a strong gender-based component to such violence in that men are disproportionately the perpetrators and women the victims in heterosexual relationships, the crime nonetheless cuts across lines of ethnicity, marital status, religious-affiliation, educational level, and socioeconomic standing. It has become normalized by women as an abysmal yet widely anticipated fate in intimate partnerships, and it is repeatedly justified by cultural discourses that conflate love and violence. As such, it becomes a hard lesson that mothers teach their daughters that they, too, will endure—just as the generations of women before them.

Despite this astonishing prevalence, gender-based IPV is unquestionably illegal in Belize. The Belizean Domestic Violence Act—first passed in 1992 and then revised in 2008—grants victims the right to pursue Protection or Occupation Orders to prevent perpetrators from entering their homes or work environments. In addition, Belize ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, Belém do Pará, in 1996—thus agreeing to make the crime answerable to the international community (Beske 2009, 491; Kardam 2002, 415). While these laws are in place, however, resources are sparse and legal enforcement is insufficient on a number of levels, and these factors pose major problems for advocates across society who are working to improve the conditions for women.

### **METHODOLOGY**

For over the last decade, I have been investigating the factors which facilitate IPV in Cayo and present challenges for those seeking its resolution. Beginning with several months of preliminary studies conducted over the summers from 2002-2005 and 2007, proceeding with twelve months of dissertation research spanning from September 2008-August 2009, and continuing with brief follow-up studies in the summer of 2010 and fall of 2013, I have collected a great deal of data pertaining to the pervasiveness of this crime and the associated individual and community responses. The bulk of my findings stem from my dissertation research which consisted of both academic and applied methodologies, including daily participant observation in addition to 623 prevalence survey questionnaires, 40 in-depth interviews, and 36 focus groups which later became support groups.

To ensure the safety of both researcher and respondents, surveys were distributed via voluntary convenience sampling in public spaces—namely streets, schools, and market places—rather than via targeted random household sampling. The survey consisted of 42 structured questions covering each respondent's basic demographic information, his/her general views on IPV in the community, and his/her personal IPV experience in terms of incidences of behaviors signifying financial, psychological, verbal, sexual, and/or physical abuse in intimate partnerships.

The 40 interviews addressed similar subject matter as the survey but were substantially more in-depth, posing approximately 17 semi-structured questions to each interviewee pertaining to, in some cases, his or her life history, or in other cases, to the nature of his/her work assisting IPV victims. Interview questions also addressed interviewee opinions regarding cultural contributing factors and treatment options. Those interviewed included men and women of diverse sectors of society—abuse survivors or family members, reformed perpetrators, government officials, NGO workers, police officers, judicial personnel, medical practitioners, religious leaders, educators, and counselors.

Finally, the 36 focus groups—each of approximately 6-12 participants, all female—were comprised of voluntarily-recruited concerned citizens as well as residents of Belize’s second women’s shelter which a Belizean-run NGO, Mary Open Doors (MOD), had just opened in 2008 in the Cayo District. Focus groups revealed that these parties shared an array of IPV-related frustrations and wished to work together to seek solutions. It is my collaboration with these groups that formed the instrumental applied component of my work. Initially, focus groups facilitated discussion and social networking with regards to IPV and its social treatment options, but the focus groups quickly turned into support groups devoted to collective action. With this shift, my role moved from “organizer” to “fellow advocate” as we worked together to combat IPV. To raise money to keep the shelter running, for example, participants held bake sales and walk-a-thons to generate revenue. We also practiced community outreach by organizing skits on IPV and the available treatment resources to perform for classrooms, as well as hosted and took part in legal and self-defense workshops. Furthermore, to assist victims leaving abusive relationships in achieving financial independence from their perpetrators, group members produced jewelry and weavings to sell at local markets with supplies donated from local and international sponsors.

Drawing from the findings garnered by use of these methodologies, I will now offer an assessment of the collaborative endeavors attempted by members across diverse sectors of society in dealing with IPV. In this account, I will specifically address the four major sets of actors considered in my research—government officials (including those in the criminal justice system), religious leaders, medical practitioners, and NGO workers—as they strive to find a common ground in working to enforce the laws at the local level, and I will reflect upon both the strengths and shortcomings of their efforts. Building upon a discussion of what these groups of advocates have accomplished, I will then delve into the ways in which my experiences employing engaged anthropological methodologies in this case have aided in overcoming the obstacles facing collective action so as to assist in their endeavors.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL ADVOCATE SECTORS**

### **Government Officials**

There are several governmental bodies which are designated to handle intimate partner violence in Belize. The two which are the most crucial are the Women’s Department and the criminal justice system—comprised of police officers, judicial personnel, and the incarceration structure. The aforementioned strides in policy which criminalize IPV in Belize are largely due to the advances made by the Women’s Department which, since its formation in 1978 (McClaurin 1996, 177), has worked tirelessly to specifically address the needs of female citizens and their

most pressing problems. Among these concerns, gender-based intimate partner violence ranks high. The Women's Department is one of three sectors comprising the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation—part of the executive branch in Belize's parliamentary democracy—and it continues to provide the services of resource and policy development, legislative review, women's rights education, court advocacy, and case management (including connecting victims with counseling services). While the department is headquartered in Belize City, there is also one Women's Development Officer (WDO) per each of the six geopolitical districts in Belize, and thus the Cayo WDO is responsible for ensuring these services in the area.

Knowing one's rights is only the first part of the battle in combating intimate partner violence, however. While the Women's Department has made great strides in helping the public to become aware of the laws, the governmental divisions responsible for enforcing and interpreting those laws have raised a great deal more concern. While 90% of my interviewees (36 of 40) felt quite satisfied with the existing legislation, a substantial portion—70% (28 of 40)—also lacked trust in the criminal justice system. Of all the police officers in Cayo, only four have currently undergone training to handle intimate partner violence complaints. If one of these four is not available to answer a call (which is quite common, given the frequency of cases and the population of approximately 70,000 that these officers must serve), another officer can be sent in their place. Regular officers, however, are frequently accused of favoring their friends (quite problematic in these areas where the police tend to know the perpetrators), succumbing to bribes, or even sexually harassing the complainants.

Another vital component of the criminal justice system is the court magistrates. While there are two of these in Cayo—each of which does process family cases for about three hours per week, in addition to civil and criminal matters—similar criticisms have been made of these officials by complainants, and thus very few victims ever report their cases. In effect, despite a number of well-intentioned government workers and adequate legislation, it is estimated that the crime nonetheless abounds unchecked, as only an estimated 1% of victims report their cases to government officials (Women's Department of Belize 2003, 1).

### **Medical Practitioners**

Next, while governmental advocates have focused on policy production and dissemination (and to a lesser degree on law enforcement), the second set of actors—medical and psychological practitioners—have devoted their attentions primarily to the physiological and mental well-being of survivors. As with the government-based resources, though, medical resources in Cayo are quite limited. Belize has fewer physicians per capita than anywhere else in Latin America (Alleyne 2007, 43-44), and there are just two hospitals in the Cayo District. In addition, while the governmental executive branch's Ministry of Health is responsible for the organization and funding of health care services, there is no public system in place to reliably evaluate and monitor them (Beske 2009, 494; PAHO 1998, 86), and thus few of the facilities that do exist meet international standards.

Though substantial links have been found between various physiological conditions and the occurrence of IPV, few victims in Belize are willing or able to seek medical attention from the limited resources which are available. Intimate partner violence has been found in correlation with external injuries, functional impairment, permanent disability, chronic pain syndromes,

gastrointestinal disorders, gynecological disorders, sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), and pregnancy complications (Velzeboer et al. 2003, 6). While patients often present with combinations of these conditions, without a Medical-Legal form which must first include a police report, physicians are left to treat just the individual IPV symptoms rather than the address the underlying causal connection. Because so few victims report their cases due to fear, shame, or simply limited access, even fewer come to their health care practitioners with Medical-Legal reports.

Practitioners striving to improve the mental health of victims are facing even greater challenges in addressing the needs of violence victims. In addition to the physiological conditions, a number of psychological afflictions are linked to IPV as well including PTSD, depression, anxiety, panic disorders, eating disorders, sexual dysfunction, and substance abuse (Velzeboer et al. 2003, 6). There are two trained counselors in Cayo who are affiliated with the hospital and available to focus on such afflictions, yet even fewer Belizeans than those who seek medical care opt for psychological help—especially in IPV situations. Due to the pervasiveness of gossip and the prevalent fears of others in a small town setting “knowing one’s business,” visits to counselors, for any sort of affliction, are relatively rare. This is all the more true with violence victims, however, who are not only afraid of experiencing shame as a result of making their cases public, but who must usually also do so without their abuser finding out—as he, too, could become enraged if the issue comes to public attention. In effect, it is quite rare for mental health services to be reliably available to victims.

### **Religious Leaders**

Perhaps more accessible options for those experiencing IPV are those in the third sector—the Catholic and Evangelical religious leaders who focus on the spiritual wellbeing of survivors in the semi-secular state of Belize. Religion is extremely important to life in Cayo, historically taking a seat inextricably linked to both the government and educational system, and the overwhelming majority of the population is devoutly Christian. Approximately 50% of the country’s population is Roman Catholic and 34% is Protestant, including Pentecostals, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists, Nazarenes, and Jehovah’s Witnesses, among others (Statistical Institute of Belize 2008, 29). Attending church is an important frequent occurrence for many, and most are closely affiliated with some sort of congregation. For this reason, religious leaders are relatively accessible for help with intimate partner violence situations.

A number of Belizeans have spoken of deriving great strength from their religious beliefs (McClaurin 1996, 56, 157), and alignment with more progressive sects within both Catholicism and Protestantism are serving as a primary form of women’s activism not only in Belize, but in Latin America as a whole. While Progressive Catholicism emphasizing liberation theology is taking root in the region and encouraging greater women’s participation in public life (Alvarez 1990, 381), Pentecostalism is gaining particular attention among women as a means to obtain greater standing in their families by lessening the machismo mentality of male drinking, adultery, and abuse that diminishes their quality of life (Cline 2000, 245; Hallum 2003, 178). Though their growing numbers in the Protestant ranks may not immediately signify a major difference for women with regards to living in male-dominated households (Carter 2004, 647), the access to new leadership positions in their congregations is giving many women a sense of

empowerment which they were previously denied due to their marginalization in the traditional Catholic system (Hallum 2003, 184). As both Catholic and Protestant sects across the region are diversifying and devoting attention to a wider range of both men's and women's voices (Levine 2009, 121; Stark and Smith 2012, 48), the religious realm is proving an increasingly viable venue for advocates to counter partner abuse. In addition, as Belizean religious institutions tend to have financial backing both from their own members and from foreign affiliates (Swatos 1995, 153), they generally possess the means to contribute to establishing material resources to aid victims of violence.

Despite all of this potential, however, findings from my in-depth interviews suggest that the frequency with which victims come to religious institutions with IPV cases is relatively low (spiritual-leader interviewee reception frequencies averaged about one case per every two weeks). While the leaders with whom I spoke (of Protestant, Catholic, and independent service-oriented sects alike) each described their methods of dealing with cases in a similar way—by attempting to hear both sides of the story and counsel the couple towards working through the problem—only a minority of my total interviewees from across many sectors of society said they would be willing to handle cases in this manner. Though 25% of all interviewees (10 of 40) felt that religious institutions were helpful in handling IPV, a substantial 75% (30 of 40) maintained at least some degree of mistrust of this option.

This mistrust stemmed from two major causes. First, as the Roman Church Catholic does not condone divorce and both Evangelical and Catholic leaders discourage separation, interviewees indicated that, should they be seeking these things, they may feel quite ashamed to bring their cases forward. Despite the growing liberalization of Belizean religion and the opportunities this has opened up for women, female interviewees still substantially feared that their congregations or religious leaders would judge them negatively for having trouble with their partners. Indeed, many women I interviewed remarked that arriving for worship without their husbands would invite gossip at the least—and in extreme cases get them expelled from their congregations. Supplementing this gender-based discrimination, a number of interviewees, both male and female, also suspected that—despite their religious teachings which guided one to live a virtuous life—their spiritual leaders and congregation members might not be abiding by such norms themselves (e.g., priests engaging inappropriate relationships with teenagers, pastors abusing children), and thus they questioned the worthiness of their abilities to offer them counsel or assistance.

## **NGO Workers**

Belizean nongovernmental workers—often assisted by foreign volunteers—round out the fourth main sector of advocates. NGO workers primarily focus on finding practical solutions to the social and economic problems related to IPV. Inspired by the UN's Decade for Women from 1976-1985, the Women's Movement took shape in Belize in the 1980s aligned with international "women's rights as human rights" frameworks and evolving alongside similar transnational local-global movements that were emerging across Latin America (Alvarez 2000, 30; Alvarez et al. 2003, 538, 540-541). During this time a number of social activist groups commenced: the Belize Organization for Women and Development (BOWAND) to work for women's economic advancement in 1982, Women Against Violence (WAV) to specifically combat IPV as well as the Belize Family Life Association (BFLA) as a satellite of Planned Parenthood in 1985, and the

Women's Issues Network (WIN-Belize) to enhance communication and efforts between these multiple parties in 1993. Joining forces to fill in the gaps of the semi-secular state which privilege men at many levels (even among the previous three groups of advocates), the NGO workers set out to promote victim assistance ideologies and services centered around shared concepts of "sisterhood" and a prioritization of women's rights within the family and larger society.

One of their primary goals has been to expand material options for survivors. Since there was not a safe space for victims to go when leaving abusive partners, NGO advocates opened the country's first women's shelter, Haven House, in Belize City in 1993. Inspired by the type of solidarity and collective organizing that formed around sharing problems and goals in this shelter, a number of women's support groups began to form thereafter across the country as well. There were soon at least forty-five of such active groups in existence (McClaurin 1996, 177). In February of 2008, some former NGO colleagues of mine (Belizean women with whom I'd worked in 2005 for a foreign-initiated NGO called Cornerstone Foundation) formed a new locally-initiated NGO in Cayo. This led to the opening of the aforementioned Mary Open Doors (MOD), the country's second of only two women's shelters. It is here that I worked on the front lines for the duration of my dissertation research from 2008-2009 while simultaneously conducting surveys, interviews, and participant observation. Through my affiliation with this NGO I helped grow the aforesaid focus group-turned-support group, Women at Work (WAW). While the group has changed its name several times since my departure (adopting new titles such as San Ignacio Support Group and Women Empowering Each Other), the same set of individuals—each deeply committed to assisting women leaving abusive relationships and now armed with the tools and shared responsibility necessary to do so—is continuing to work towards this end.

In comparison to the other three sectors of advocates, NGO-affiliated actors are the most directly involved with assisting those in Cayo who are enduring intimate partner violence. The MOD shelter and WAW support group have assisted survivors not only from across Belize, but also from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—where IPV treatment resources are also relatively scarce. Foreign-initiated (and largely foreigner-staffed) NGOs in Cayo such as Pro-Belize and Cornerstone Foundation have helped with women's daily struggles by instituting programs to provide food for the impoverished and by offering childcare. The BFLA has offered family planning education for women, so that they can have more say over the number of children they must birth and care for, even when their partners may not give them much negotiating power. NGO advocates have made many advances and are committed to improving conditions for women in their families and in society as a whole. Yet such organizations are commonly plagued by lack of personnel and funding. Without support from governmental, medical, and religious advocates, they are limited in their abilities to offer assistance.

## **COLLABORATIVE ADVANCEMENTS**

While each of these four individual sectors of advocates has made independent advancements in assisting victims, each has faced limitations as well, and in an attempt to increase their potential to affect positive change, many have aimed for collaboration in their efforts. These collaborations improve existing resources, strengthen the ties between organizations, and prevent IPV occurrence in the first place. This has resulted in a reconceptualization of both the problem



of partner violence as well as its solution. A number of these joint initiatives have made an impact in Cayo.

The first priority among those working across the governmental, medical, religious, and NGO realms has been the expansion and improvement of existing material treatment resources so as to formulate the infrastructure necessary to handle the problem. It was with space donated by the Sacred Heart Catholic Church as well as by the government that the Mary Open Doors NGO was able to open its office and shelter in 2008 to provide much-needed aid to violence survivors in Cayo. Shortly thereafter, when I commenced the WAW support group, attendees grew by leaps and bounds with referrals from medical doctors and those who had brought IPV cases to the Women's Department. By 2009, Mary Open Doors had joined forces with the Belizean Women's Department to offer a police sensitization workshop—additionally infused with medical and religious leaders' insight—to better prepare officers in Cayo for handling cases of partner abuse. Furthermore, both foreign and local NGO volunteers working with MOD and others (e.g., Pro-Belize and Cornerstone Foundation) came to aid victims in hospitals or provide them with compassionate counseling so as to enhance the person power of the existing resources. Together, these NGOs have also worked with the Women's Department, the BFLA, Catholic and Protestant leaders, and practitioners from the San Ignacio Hospital to provide workshops for survivors about the existing laws and treatment options.

Armed with a new shelter, more sensitized police officers, an accessible support group, and greater medical aids and spiritual counselors, advocates working across these sectors have gone on to focused on strengthening their interconnections. Medical practitioners and criminal justice officials have joined forces to ensure the completion of Medical-Legal forms when presented with patients who've been abused, so that the survivors have a better chance of obtaining Protection or Restraining Orders when and if they pursue their cases through court. As reported by a general practitioner at the San Ignacio Hospital in his 2009 interview, "Without these forms, the courts will not prosecute. If a patient shows signs of domestic violence, I encourage her to contact the police to complete a Medical-Legal." Continuing in this line of thought, MOD has worked closely with the police department to remove victims from violent situations, with court personnel to aid them in pursuing their cases (if they so choose), with medical staff to ensure they receive necessary health care, and with religious leaders and psychological counselors to help them find inner peace. By forming these alliances and maintaining regular communication regarding client care and follow-up from one venue to the next, the collaborative efforts of these advocates have enabled them to provide more comprehensive victim care.

Finally, in addition to improving the existing resources and strengthening the ties between them, advocates across these four sectors have been devoting a great deal of attention to prevention, primarily in the form of education. Teachers in religiously-affiliated schools (the majority of schools in Belize) have welcomed NGO workers, government officials, and medical staff into their classrooms to educate their students about IPV, the associated physiological and psychological consequences, and the resources in place to help. In 2009, I participated in a number of such educational skits along with fellow MOD advocates, whereby we demonstrated an example of a couple involved in an abusive relationship and portrayed the "victim"—with assistance of a helpful friend—calling the police and filing a report, going to MOD, getting counseling and medical care, and so on. In this format, we were able to demonstrate the treatment services available, resulting in two students bringing their loved ones to the shelter.

Supplementing these school presentations, MOD and the Women's Department also jointly hosted a number of community workshops about enhancing communication within relationships and determining peaceful strategies for conflict management.

Perhaps the hallmark of the collaboration between the government, NGOs, religious leaders, and medical practitioners is the annual "Sixteen Days of Activism"<sup>2</sup> event hosted each year across Belize from November 25 through December 10. Tied into an international initiative started by the Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991, the annual Belizean Sixteen Days of Activism generally results in a culmination of art displays, poetry readings, informational fairs, community speak-outs, marches, demonstrations, and national women's summits—all centered around the topics of discrimination and violence against women, as well as the crisis of the IPV-HIV/AIDS connection.<sup>3</sup>

These collaborative efforts have led to reconceptualized notions of not only the problem of gender-based IPV, but also the means of achieving a solution. While my survey results indicated that a substantial 34% of general population respondents viewed partner violence as a matter of individual circumstance—as a fault of one's own behavioral choices rather than part of a structural problem—the majority of collaborative advocates across these four sectors in Belize instead recognize IPV as a matter of public significance rather than an individual "private" family affair. By treating the matter as an atrocity against the state and international community, a public health emergency, an ethically reprehensible act, and an economic and social disaster, they are leading the way in fighting the cultural normalization of IPV (e.g., female discrimination, victim-blaming) that has for so long facilitated its presence. By holding perpetrators accountable for their actions and reformulating their behaviors as an offense against all (locally, nationally, regionally, globally), they are supporting and empowering victims by helping them to realize that it is not a struggle they must fight alone.

By re-envisioning gender-based violence as a collective problem, they also are re-imagining its solution as collective as well—not one's problem but everyone's problem, not one's duty to solve, but a solution that relies on all. Police, magistrates, NGO workers, educators, doctors, priests, and advocates among all groups are realizing that they must focus not only on their own duties but also on their open lines of communication with each other so as to enable a holistic response. Without police and doctors collaborating on Medical-Legal forms, the courts will not prosecute IPV. When courts will not prosecute, or when both courts and police officers engage in victim-blaming, victims refrain from reporting their cases. When church congregations turn their backs on victims, or when victims are unaware of or unable to access the laws or services designed to protect them, they remain in abusive relationships. However, when governmental, NGO, medical, and religious actors all play their role and work together, it makes a world of difference for not only those experiencing violence, but for the Cayo community and Belize as a whole.

IPV advocates ground themselves in the local realities and immediate needs of daily lives, but also maintain connections across different scales—from local grassroots leaders, to national summit attendees, to regional conference participants, to United Nations representatives. This enables them to envision both the problem and solution(s) extending well beyond the individual—a notion which is, in itself, quite empowering (Alvarez 2000, 33; Alvarez et al.

2003, 573). When these interconnected advocates work well together, the result is a life-saving synergistic triumph that well surpasses the sum of its parts.

## ONGOING CHALLENGES

Despite these collaborative advancements, however, collective action is not without its difficulties. Even as new doors have opened for proposing and implementing solutions, problems have arisen which have complicated the abilities of advocates to aid in the struggle against IPV. I will now discuss three of the primary obstacles that have faced those working across these four advocacy sectors in the Belizean case. These challenges highlight many lingering questions for those engaged in activist endeavors in Belize and elsewhere.

To begin, one of the major concerns facing advocates attempting collaboration is that of conflicting interests. Viewpoints on intimate partner violence in Belize are defined by heterogeneity, as with women's issues or feminist perspectives across the Latin American and Caribbean region in general (Alvarez et al. 2003, 540). Thus, no matter the similar goals of the participating advocates, there are bound to be differences of opinion with regards to which particular facets of the problem are the most important, as well as which concerns should be prioritized in striving for a solution. Though interviews demonstrated that both priests and physicians desired to help women live lives free from violence, for example, priests indicated that they were more likely to encourage victims to focus on talking at length with their perpetrators in hopes of keeping their families together, while physicians worried that doing so could put women in greater danger and instead encouraged them to seek shelter care. In addition, though NGO staff and governmental workers worked hand in hand to carry out many joint ventures, local grassroots leaders expressed greater concern with ensuring that victims have access to a support group, while political leaders devoted more attention to ratifying international human rights laws and formulating national policy. Differences according to socioeconomic standing, religion, ethnicity, language, marriage, or health status surely lead to a multiplicity of goals and challenges. Yet, it is in bringing these differences to the table to engage in open discussion about them that a common discourse can be formed upon which to build for the task at hand (Alvarez et al. 2003, 539).

Building upon this common ground raises the next major concern with regards to collaborative endeavors: power imbalances. Within heterogeneous contexts, certain voices are bound to be heard more loudly than others. While those who have many contacts in their communities may fare well in local settings, those with higher-ranking ethnicities, socioeconomic status, or education levels may have more pull with regards to national or international organizing (Alvarez 2000, 56). Even the *encuentros* (regionalized feminist meetings), which have characterized the Latin American feminist movement since the 1980s and made great strides in building bridges between local and regional struggles (Alvarez et al. 2003, 540; Sternbach et al. 1992, 396), have had their exclusionary challenges<sup>4</sup>. Although having good intentions, NGOs staffed with foreign volunteers may prioritize Western practices (e.g., biomedical healthcare) over existing local frameworks (e.g., indigenous healing schema) (Kwiatkowski 2005, 402). This may inadvertently reinforce the power imbalances these NGOs aim to correct. Despite their best efforts, even well-meaning anthropologists or other scholars who endeavor to write of their role in collaborative movements may tend to emphasize the viewpoints of those advocates who align most closely with globalized feminist discourse (Forsythe 1991, 162-163).

In Belize in particular, there is the added challenge that locals sometimes feel that when one is gaining increasing power or status, such is coming at the expense of another—a notion which surely exacerbates the power imbalances of collaboration. Even the Mary Open Doors NGO, which established the shelter after successful collaboration with government, medical, and religious officials, has repeatedly run into trouble over the years with regards to legitimizing leadership. Not only were those who held official titles (e.g., CEO, Treasurer) commonly challenged by other office staff, but particularly following the commencement of the affiliated WAW support group, leadership roles were frequently contested.

With WAW itself in 2008, we attempted voluntary nomination for positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, after which group participants voted by anonymous ballot to determine who would fulfill each role. While this worked well for the first several months, the result was nonetheless several rounds of re-elections for these positions, as those who had not been elected argued that the process had been unfair because some had closer relationships with fellow group members than others. After three elections, the positions were firmly established though 2009, but by the time I returned to San Ignacio in the summer of 2010, WAW had completely separated from MOD due to more internal power struggles. Despite changing their name several times since then, the support group of former WAW members has continued to expand to provide educational and occupational training for those leaving abusive relationships. Yet, power imbalances have remained a challenge to group solidarity.

This example of WAW diverging from MOD raises the last major issue with regards to collaborative efforts: that of sustainability. As discussed earlier, violence treatment resources (e.g., police, shelters, counseling services) are scarce to begin with for advocates in all four aforementioned sectors. Those in each category are plagued by their own struggles of inadequate staffing and funding, and this limits their ability to reach out and aid in external collaborative endeavors. Furthermore, resource and sustainability problems are particularly salient following foreigner departures. Belize has long been a haven for volunteers and expats from the U.S., Canada, and Europe, and thus over the years numerous programs have been set up by foreigners who maintain a somewhat transient status. With good intentions, volunteers, doctors, and missionaries come from abroad with hopes of improving conditions for Belizean locals. Although they are excited to construct new churches and hospitals, bring new technologies, help feed hungry children, and teach things like gender equality, their plans often dissolve not long after they leave the country.

A byproduct of this pattern is an unfortunate mentality which has developed among Belizean citizens whereby they feel that they need not take the responsibility for solving their problems, as there will be more and more foreigners coming along to take the reins in doing so. Interestingly, this widespread foreigner presence has seemingly enhanced the governmental prioritization of women's issues rather than diminished it (in its increasing desire to design national policies in line with human rights, so as to attract greater international respect and bring in tourists). Also, there are many Belizean NGO, religious, and medical practitioners who balance the foreigners involved there, as well as some transient workers who nonetheless introduce very sustainable projects. Nonetheless, the biggest problem with the foreigner presence is that it does have the potential to enable an absolving of blame and accountability held among Belizean community members for the problems at hand. So long as locals do not feel the onus for creating for

themselves a better world, project sustainability will continue to confront major obstacles—which is why reframing IPV as a public problem requiring a public solution has been such a major emphasis with regards to the collectivist movement.

Considering these obstacles of conflicts of interest, power imbalances, and project/resource sustainability, several main questions remain with regards to the efficacy of collaborative projects to fight gender-based IPV in Belize. First, how can all voices be heard when determining common goals and solutions? What entitles one group's (or individual's) wants or needs the right to be valued over others? Can all viewpoints ever be truly heard, valued, and strived for equally? Furthermore, will focusing on reimagining partner violence as a collective problem with a collective solution be enough to improve the sustainability of treatment resources by increasing local accountability and ownership? If not, what additional steps should be taken? Finally, to what extent should foreigners be involved in such struggles? Is their involvement potentially doing more harm than good? I will now discuss these issues as I reflect upon my experiences in attempting to overcome such challenges while employing anthropology to aid in the Belizean anti-violence movement.

## **A CASE FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT**

Deciding whether or not to participate in collective activism depends on a number of factors, and it is a choice which requires a careful weighing of the potential benefits and costs. Perhaps there are cultural difficulties such as gender ideologies or religious views which will complicate involvement. If the goal is greater women's rights, for example, an engaged scholar must take care to understand local women's daily struggles (e.g., obtaining enough food, access to jobs and/or daycare) as well as international feminist views (e.g., reproductive rights, female liberation) so as to synthesize these two perspectives or at least take care to not have the latter engulf the former. Next, there may be procedural, logistical, or legal challenges which could hinder a researcher's ability to participate. If permits are required to work with government or NGO personnel, or if the work will involve people with a particularly vulnerable or inaccessible status (e.g., prison inmates, survivors with PTSD), such elements need to be taken into consideration. Safety of both consultants and researcher are, of course, of paramount importance. Finally, the scholar must do her best to ensure that her initiatives will continue to have a positive effect, even after she has left the field. If one initiates a program as a foreigner, how well will that program continue once that individual is gone? All of these questions must be considered carefully. Then, if the community members come to the researcher seeking help, and if the researcher has carefully assessed the above concerns and determined that she has the capacity to make a sustainable contribution, I believe it is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to offer such assistance.

I began working in Belize in 2002 as a Mayan archaeologist in San Ignacio. At that time, IPV arose as such a common topic of conversation with the women whom I got to know around the community that I decided to switch my focus to specifically address this problem in the years that followed. While still doing archaeology from 2002-2004, I spoke with women of many backgrounds (e.g., archaeologists, cooks, hotel staff, educators, local market vendors), and in case after case I heard not only of violent experiences, but also of feelings of resentment and frustration that weighed heavily on their shoulders. The occurrence had long been normalized by many as an unfortunate part of intimate relationships and most felt silenced in one way or

another—either by patriarchal partners, police or magistrates who didn't take them seriously, doctors who only treated their injuries but did not address the root cause, or congregations which they feared would expel them if they were to demonstrate marriage trouble. As these women shared with me their stories, we quickly bonded over our shared experiences (as I, too, had endured IPV during my earliest time in Belize), and in our friendships we decided that it was time to aim for something more. By the summer of 2005, I had switched my focus to cultural anthropology to specifically address IPV experiences and resistance, and thus began my unwavering commitment to assist in their struggle.

Upon committing to join in the collective endeavors to diminish IPV in Belize, I next questioned how, exactly, to play the most effective role as an anthropologist. Faced with the aforementioned challenges of conflicts of interest and power imbalances, positionality was certainly an important consideration. Given the cultural, socioeconomic, and educational status differences that tend to exist between anthropologists and local consultants, how could I, as a scholar, ensure that I would not merely push a form of neocolonialism by inadvertently promoting Western ideals? Even if community members were the ones requesting a researcher's involvement, asking the questions, and brainstorming the solutions, power inequities are perhaps unavoidable when one assumes the prestigious scholarly position (Mullins 2011, 237). In grappling with this problem, I looked to the potentially hybridized space of ethnographers—as simultaneous outsiders and insiders (Freeman and Murdock 2001, 432), observers and activists (Alcalde 2007, 146; Babior 2011, 29), and administrators and friends (Martinez 2009, 111). Striving to fulfill a flexible position which incorporated all of these roles enabled me to collaborate with advocates via shared goals and experience. I let them set the agenda but still found unique ways to contribute, for example by offering a quantitative and qualitative holistic analysis of the situation which could easily be transmitted to external audiences—thus strengthening ties between those working within local, national, regional, and global contexts.

In conducting collaborative work, conflicts of interest and power imbalances are perhaps unavoidable. Yet, rather than turning a blind eye to such discrepancies, engaged scholarship decolonizes the research process by requiring community members and scholars working together to manage these tensions as they join efforts to pursue a common goal (Speed 2006, 66, 74-75). Thus, by continually reflecting on the differences of opinion that stemmed from our varying experiences due to gender, education, religion, economic status, language, and ethnicity, and by confronting disagreements as they arose, we were able to forge sameness across division lines for the purpose of working towards a set of shared aspirations—to provide a greater support network for survivors of violence.

In the case of Women at Work, participants filled many different roles (e.g. mothers and non-mothers, Catholics and Protestants, taxi drivers, educators, business women, rich and poor), but we united around shared goal of empowerment, freedom, and the ability to make our own choices to positively impact our lives. In doing so, we formed strong ties between the MOD NGO and others, and we strengthened a great many bonds between individual survivors and government, medical, and religious practitioners—all of whom were committed to help. By joining hands in pursuits such as conducting the largest IPV survey ever carried out in Belize, carrying out fundraisers which expanded the shelter and kept it running smoothly, and offering educational workshops to challenge the cultural acceptance of the problem, we united around a shared sense of purpose daily that empowered us all and gave us the motivation to continue the

uphill battle to keep moving forward. In turn, it was not just our shared goals, but furthermore our conflicts which propelled us. When faced with power struggles or conflicts of interest, our disagreements would push us to reassess, reformulate, and find solutions that were even better than they might have been had they come more easily.

Such processes fueled a solidarity that bolstered empowerment and led to the long-aspired-to sustainability of IPV initiatives in Belize. Though my attempt as an anthropologist in this situation was to minimize my own voice as but one of many, our collective efforts enabled us to maximize our impact via the continual ebb and flow of giving and taking that kept everyone connected and moving. Despite our lack of resources and occasional disagreements, the collective ideology that all stakeholders must accept accountability for both problem and solution enabled each set of advocates to focus on contributing its own unique set of strengths while still feeling the support from others. As a foreign anthropologist, I contributed data, provided logistical guidance, facilitated medical and legal assistance, and shared grassroots concerns with government officials—but all the while I reflected upon the fact that my work relied on the fellow survivors who shared with me their stories, the NGO who opened the shelter and a place for me to take part, the religious institutions who reached out and lent their space to us, and the doctors who freely provided their expertise and services. Following along in this collaborative vein, by 2009 the WAW support group had been nominated by the Belizean Women's Department as being the most influential women's organization in the country for their comprehensive assistance to survivors. Since then, advocates across NGO, government, medical, and religious spheres in Cayo have continued to strengthen their bonds by remaining united in their interdependence as they face the ever-evolving challenges of overcoming IPV.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Because intimate partner violence is such a widespread and pervasive phenomenon in Belize that affects so many aspects of life for victims and their family members, it is crucial for a combination of multiple parties to accept accountability for the problem and to play a role in helping to diminish it. Despite the pitfalls and unavoidable obstacles of conflicts of interest, power imbalances, and sustainability which arise during the melding of multiple groups, collaboration among advocates in this situation is essential to effectively processing and handling the problem.

Within such collaborative initiatives, there is an important potential for engaged anthropologists to serve as bridge-building liaisons with the ability to lessen conflict among stakeholders. As hybridized holistic observers with keen understandings of both local and global frameworks (Lamphere 2003, 167), anthropologists are uniquely positioned to translate between what are, at times, opposing worlds (Merry 2006, 40, 49). While such a delicate positionality brings inevitable conflicts of interest or power struggles to the fore, it simultaneously places engaged scholars in the ideal position to counter oppressive forces (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 2000, 42). Involvement emerges naturally from the anthropological methodologies of gaining a deep understanding and concern for one's consultants (Bourgois 2006), thus especially uniting researcher with community when assessing social struggles. As this case of engaged scholarship in Cayo has shown with regards to fighting IPV, when working to strengthen interconnectivity and therefore sustainable empowerment between heterogeneous advocate sectors working towards a common goal, anthropologists have great potential to enhance collaborative efforts.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this case, “ever-partnered” refers to respondents who were currently or had previously been involved in an intimate partner relationship at the time of their survey. This includes those who defined their relationship status as “married,” “common law,” “boyfriend/girlfriend,” “separated,” “divorced,” or “widowed.” Though I surveyed a total of 623 total respondents, 564 of them qualified as “ever-partnered.”

<sup>2</sup> Since the early 1990s, the Women’s Department of Belize has taken part in the global initiative to hold an annual “Sixteen Days of Activism” event as a means to raise awareness about gender-based violence and its consequences. Each year, the event begins on November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and runs through December 10 (International Human Rights Day). Encompassed within this period is also World AIDS Awareness Day, on December 1.

<sup>3</sup> Belize tops the charts in Central America with a 2% HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, well above the region’s overall prevalence of 0.49% (Bain 2005, 62; Smallman 2007, 149). Infection rates are growing the most rapidly among women (Kelly and Bain 2005, 126)—many of whom are contracting it from their husbands who’ve been involved in extramarital affairs, with whom they have little ability to negotiate condom usage if in controlling relationships. In effect, Sixteen Days of Activism events highlight the connection between partner abuse and HIV.

<sup>4</sup> In 1985, a busload of women from the favelas of Rio De Janeiro was denied access to the International Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Feminists in Bertioga, Brazil (Craske 1999, 183)—thus illustrating the exclusion present in even the most inclusive events.



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# **Particularizing Universals/Universalizing Particulars: A Comprehensive Approach to Trafficking in Indigenous Women and Girls in the Northwest Amazon of Brazil**

Janet Chernela

University of Maryland

## **Abstract**

This article examines a case of trafficking in indigenous women in the Brazilian Amazon to analyze both international strategies and local advocacy. The example illustrates a two-pronged approach involving, first, a “politics of exposure,” accomplished through the Russell Tribunal of 1980, and, second, a long-term strategy of local social services, support networks, and resources, designed to address the gendered and racial nature of structural economic abuse. Given the limitations of international human rights law, the case illustrates the importance of extra-judicial strategies that use testimonials and court decisions to achieve public censure and condemnation of abuses. The case also demonstrates steps taken to address structural abuse and to remedy the impacts of trafficking, including organization and other forms of praxis and empowerment for the women at the center of the case. Knowledge and awareness gained during and after the process provided the basis for actions, claims, and negotiations later deployed by the women to improve their lives and increase their participation in the democratic society and growing indigenous movement that followed. An exploration of the Tribunal and the supplemental strategies around it together demonstrate the importance of a multifaceted approach in addressing human rights abuse and remediation.

## **Biography**

Janet Chernela holds a PhD in anthropology from Columbia University and is a Professor of Anthropology and Latin American Studies at the University of Maryland. She has conducted fieldwork and consultation in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru and is author of numerous articles and a book, *A Sense of Space: The Wanano Indians of the Brazilian Amazon*. Dr. Chernela has worked with the indigenous peoples of the Upper Rio Negro basin in Brazil for over three decades and assisted in the creation of the indigenous organization, AMARN-Numia Kurá, described in this article.

**PARTICULARIZING UNIVERSALS/UNIVERSALIZING PARTICULARS:  
A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO TRAFFICKING IN INDIGENOUS WOMEN  
AND GIRLS IN THE NORTHWEST AMAZON OF BRAZIL**

The 1980 Russell Tribunal on the rights of indigenous peoples of the Americas, which exposed trafficking of indigenous women in Brazil, represented a landmark victory in the history of the rights of Native American women. The international forum was fundamental in exposing violations of national and international laws and agreements on ethnocide and racial discrimination against the 20,000 Amerindians of the Rio Negro watershed. At the same time, extra-judicial measures contributed to the immediate outcome and to the lasting positive impacts on the lives of the victims of the trafficking. An exploration of the trial and the supplemental strategies around it together demonstrate the importance of a multifaceted approach in addressing human rights abuse and remediation.

At the center of the case was the alleged trafficking of young indigenous women from remote villages at the Colombian-Brazilian frontier to serve as household domestics in cities where they were given little or no pay. Advocacy for the women involved four different strategies whose impacts were cumulative: 1) appeal to an international human rights tribunal whose allegations of ethnocide received world-wide media exposure; 2) censure by the community of mission peers and authorities who condemned and ended the practice; 3) development of a network for the victims that involved rights awareness and mutual support; and 4) addressing problems of discrimination and self-determination in the source community. I will refer to the indigenous peoples collectively by the term Tukano, referring to the Eastern Tukanoan language family to which most of the women belong.

The case emerged within an authoritarian state focused on national security, in which the northern border areas were site of a tripartite alliance between the ecclesiastical mission complex, the military, and the strong nation-state. Throughout Brazil's history, frontier missions took on important military functions in defense of the frontier and in the conversion of Indians into Christian Brazilian citizens. This was the case for the missions of the Salesian Order, founded during the first quarter of the twentieth century on the feeder streams of the Rio Negro that define the Colombia-Brazilian border. The security function of the border missions was heightened in the mid-twentieth century during Brazil's military dictatorship, when missions located in border regions served the state's twin objectives of border security and the assimilation of indigenous peoples. From 1964 to 1985 the military government supplied the mission with goods and services, including much needed air transportation, at no cost to the mission. In return, the mission performed numerous informal services in support of the military. One of these services was acting as mediator in the supply of girls and women as domestic servants to military personnel.

According to the federal Indian Statute of 1973, indigenous peoples in Brazil were legally designated as "semi-capable" in a manner likened to minors, and placed under the guardianship (*tutela*) of the National Indian Foundation, FUNAI. In the remote regions of the northern hinterlands, the responsibility of guardianship was shared between FUNAI and the Salesian Missions. When that partnership was joined by the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), a powerful alliance between the Salesian Mission, FUNAI, and FAB, known as the Triangle of Integration, was firmly established.

## **TUKANOAN MIGRATION AND MANAUS**

The city of Manaus is located at the mouth of the Rio Negro, 1,200 kilometers southeast of the Tukanoan region at the Colombia-Brazil frontier. Between 1880 and 1915 Manaus occupied the world's attention as the center of Amazonian rubber commerce. Following the decline in Amazonian rubber at the beginning of the twentieth century, Manaus contracted to a fraction of its former size, its revenue sources limited to a few raw forest products with meager markets. This changed abruptly in 1964 with the installation of a military junta in Brasilia. Among the priorities of the highly centralized authoritarian regime were the strengthening of the northern frontiers and the integration of the Amazonian interior into the national economy. In 1967, therefore, the federal government created a duty free zone of 10,000 square kilometers known as the Zona Franca de Manaus. Federal Decree (Law, 288/67) outlined fiscal incentives to attract industrial assembly plants to the north by allowing exemptions on steep import duties within an otherwise protected economy.

Investors reacted quickly, transforming Manaus into a commercial hub and sparking a second boom – the less renowned, but no less significant, industrial boom. The riverfront city that stagnated after the collapse of the rubber boom was, by 1990, ranked as Brazil's largest manufacturing center after São Paulo (Chernela 2012). The industrial boom of Manaus surpassed the famed rubber boom both in duration as well as wealth creation. The centripetal force field of the tax-free zone with its federal backing lured rural residents in search of jobs. The population of Manaus surged from 173,343 in 1960 to 642,492 by 1980 (IBGE, 1981). Two-thirds of the formerly rural population of the state of Amazonas was now concentrated in the capital city. The few available records reflect a doubling in the city's indigenous population. Demographic figures and racial data for Manaus report an indigenous population of 27% for 1962, prior to the establishment of the Zona Franca, and 49% for 1983, over a decade after its inception (Santos et al. 1983).

With the creation of the duty free zone in the late 1960s, thousands of skilled laborers poured into Manaus from the industrial south and overseas. Competition for household labor was steep and indigenous labor, in particular, was in high demand. It was in this context that indigenous Tukanoan women from headwater streams of the Rio Negro along the Colombian-Brazilian border were transported some twelve hundred kilometers from their rain-forested villages in the Upper Rio Negro to Manaus for purposes of domestic labor. Many arrived without knowledge of the working conditions, and many found themselves unable to return home.

## **THE RIO NEGRO VINCULUM**

In the Lusophone Amazon colonization proceeded westward along the Amazon River from the coast, then up the tributary streams. With encroachment from colonists, many indigenous peoples found refuge in the headwater zones, out of reach of large-bodied river vessels. This includes the estimated twenty thousand speakers of Eastern Tukanoan languages who live along the feeder streams of the Rio Negro in Colombia, Brazil, and Venezuela. In the Brazilian portion, the Uaupés River (spelled Vaupés in Spanish orthography) and its affluents delineate the region that is home to about fifteen Tukanoan language groups, including the Desana, Tuyuka, Wanano (Kotiria), Tukano, Piratapua, Arapaço, and others.

As a border-crossing river, the Rio Negro links the Spanish-speaking New World in its upper reaches with the Lusophone New World in its lower portions. For this reason, the Upper Rio Negro has long been regarded as a strategically-sensitive region by competing sovereign powers. For two centuries, therefore, mission complexes that served simultaneously as military strongholds, centers of religious conversion, and agricultural production stations, have been crucial to state formation on the frontiers. In the Brazilian portion, Indians from throughout the Rio Negro were brought by force or attraction to such centers, known as *aldeias*, where they were schooled in Portuguese, the Catechism, and European trades. The three goals of the mission center—national integration, economic production, and religious conversion—were seen as parts of a single process of “improvement” in which the “uncivilized” Indian would become assimilated to Western ways and “benefit” spiritually and materially. The process was regarded by the state and mission alike as the making of a new Brazilian citizenry.

Although most mission centers in Brazil were closed in 1759 as a result of the general secularization and capitalization of production, they continued to operate in vulnerable border areas where the majority of inhabitants were indigenous. One of these regions was the Upper Rio Negro where, in 1914, at the height of the rubber boom and its associated atrocities, the Society of St. Francis of Sales created the Apostolic Prefecture of the Rio Negro in São Gabriel da Cachoeira. The Society, popularly known as 'the Salesians,' had been founded in urban Italy in 1859 at the height of the industrial revolution, with the central tenet *labor et temperantia* (work and temperance). Although the term *labor* is intended to refer to apostolic work, the Brotherhood sought to foster secular forms of duty and hard work, particularly among the young and the working class (Salesian Vocations, 2011).

On the periphery of mainstream society, the Salesian Society carried out its zealous project of conversion, assimilation, and national integration. The Society founded mission centers in the Upper Rio Negro at São Gabriel da Cachoeira in 1914, Taracua in 1924, Iauaretê in 1929, and Pari-Cachoeira in 1945 (Chernela 1998; 2012). At the center of the project were large boarding schools, renowned throughout the world for their excellence in education and vocational trades. Indigenous children were brought to the schools from their home villages to be immersed in the achievements of Western civilization and imbued with a pride in nationhood. In the spirit of *labor et temperantia*, the boys would be trained in vocational skills such as woodworking, agriculture, and animal husbandry. Indigenous girls, who had formerly been agriculturalists in their home villages, were schooled in Western household chores such as cleaning, ironing, laundering, and cooking: tasks deemed fitting for their gender, ethnicity, and class (Chernela 1998, 2014b).

With the mid-century surge in the population and economy of Manaus, the mission centers of the northern frontiers, strongly allied with the military, were well positioned to supply the sought-after commodity—indigenous labor—to their patrons and collaborators. The compulsory boarding schools had educated girls in the appropriate skills rendered as "female" as well as in the norms of obedience and subservience to patrons. From 1967 to 1980, when the practice was finally stopped, hundreds of girls trained in these tasks were flown to Manaus, where they were placed as domestics in the residences of military personnel.

As an anthropologist working in the Upper Rio Negro in 1979, I was asked to seek out the daughters and nieces of upriver families to deliver messages or gifts. Using the Manaus addresses provided by their families, I was surprised to discover the majority of these young women located in the barricaded residential compounds of the military. Although some of the women were living outside the military compound, most worked within it. These women were often treated poorly. Many were not permitted to leave the grounds of the households where they worked, the majority were not paid, and some were underfed. None were aware of their rights to compensation, days off, or a limited work-week. Together with two colleagues—one a Salesian seminarist and the other an international humanitarian aid worker—we decided to bring the matter before the forthcoming international human rights tribunal on indigenous matters.

## TRAFFICKING

The transport of young women 1,200 kilometers from indigenous villages and mission boarding schools along the Colombian-Brazilian border to urban households in Manaus lasted almost fifteen years. Over that period, from 1967 to 1980, several hundred women were affected. It is possible that the young girls who migrated to Manaus through the mission-military network may have acted voluntarily, agreeing to participate in response to idyllic promises. However, the pronounced stratification and power imbalances that marked an institutional arrangement in which the girls were subordinated, as well as the absence of full disclosure regarding their rights and alternatives, all served to obscure the distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration. The subordination of the girls and their lack of alternatives help to explain why outsiders who observed the practice regarded it as trafficking.

Leonardo Fígoli's 1982 study of Tukanoan migrants in Manaus captures the broader context of Tukanoan migration. Fígoli compared the migration trajectories of women and men and found noticeable differences. He found that 90% percent of the Tukanoan women he interviewed were flown directly to Manaus from the Upper Rio Negro by the Brazilian Air Force through arrangements made by the Salesian missionaries (Fígoli 1982, 48). Fígoli recounts dissatisfaction by the men, who complained that women were treated preferentially: "women go by plane and have work; men have to fend for themselves" (Fígoli 1982, 71; author's trans.). Some of his interviewees put it this way: "*As freiras mandam a trabalhar*" (1982, 76), which can be translated into English as "the Sisters put them to work," "the Sisters ordered them to work," or "the Sisters sent them to work." Fígoli goes on to say that, at least for the women, "the job chooses them," rather than the reverse. In assessing the case of the Tukanoan domestics, Fígoli concludes:

Strictly speaking, it can **not** be said that they [the women] are presented on the urban labor market as free workers, at least not when they gain access to it for the first time. In this sense, as Marx noted, the free worker, not having any other goods to offer for sale, 'must be free to dispose of his labor-power as his own [and only] commodity.' [Fígoli 1982, 77, translation and emphases mine]

Fígoli worked with 209 indigenous migrants from the Upper Rio Negro, collectively referred to by the ethnic term, "Tukano." Of his total population, 166 were economically active individuals, half of which were females over fourteen years of age. Fígoli found that 68% of economically active Tukanoan women in Manaus were engaged as household domestics. In 1980-81, the



period of his fieldwork and the end of the prolonged period of labor irregularities identified as trafficking by the Russell Tribunal, nearly half of that number (31%) were working as live-in domestic laborers in military households (Fígoli 1982, 79). Ninety percent of the women contacted by Fígoli came to the city directly through the auspices of the mission, and while a few had moved on to live with relatives or to work as domestics in the private sector, many continued to reside in the military compound (Fígoli 1982, 48).

## **REDRESS: INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE**

In early 1980 my colleagues and I compiled a dossier on the case for the forum “On the Rights of Indians of the Americas,” to be held by the Russell Tribunal in the Netherlands the same year. The humanitarian aid worker contributed leadership in international human rights law and case building. The seminarian provided an understanding of the worldwide Salesian brotherhood and the responsibilities of country delegations that shaped the framing of the issues. I served as a link between the victims of trafficking and the upriver communities from which they had come. The dossier was submitted with the signature of the well-known Brazilian playwright Marcio Souza and then presented with additional first-hand testimony by the indigenous Tukanoan spokesperson and then student, Alvaro Sampaio. At its hearing in December of 1980, the Russell Tribunal found the Salesians of the Upper Rio Negro in Brazil in violation of international conventions ILO #29 (1930) and #105 (1957) which prohibit “trafficking in persons for purposes of labour exploitation, in particular forced and compulsory labour and other slavery-like practices.”

Analysts for the Tribunal called the case, “the greatest trafficking in young girls from the Rio Negro to other parts [of Brazil].” On the basis of deliberations, the Tribunal concluded that the women had been transported against their will, withheld from knowing their destination of employment, and placed in unpaid or underpaid positions of domestic service. Moreover, the report alleged that the women were neither aware of their legal rights nor able to return to the indigenous region (Wright and Ismaelillo 1982, 17). After his testimony at the Tribunal, the Tukanoan spokesperson, Alvaro Sampaio, made this statement to the press:

The Tukano Indian population is suffering a nightmare....The signs are in the numbers of Indian women who have been abandoned with their children. They are the reminders of so-called ‘progress.’.... The work is hard and the hours long; they do not have Sundays or holidays off, and they do not receive a minimum salary.... Many of the women employed as domestics are not well-treated and are frequently humiliated.... In the end they become detribalized and have no way of forming a better and more secure future. They ... can only take care of the children of the lieutenants, captains, and brigadiers [whom they serve]. For the Indian child, there is nothing. The future of the Indian women who live this way is short. Woman has always been the basis of life for us... [But now] many of our Indian women will end up in dancing bars in Manaus. Some of them are acculturated to white life. Others drink beyond their limit and become an embarrassment to their people and to the missionaries who sent them there... I call this ethnocide. [Sampaio, cited in Wright and Ismaelillo 1982]

## THE TRIBUNAL

The Russell Tribunal is an independent initiative created in 1966 by British philosopher Bertrand Russell to apply the standards of the Geneva Conventions to contexts where they are neglected. Created and agreed upon by the member states of the UN in 1949, the Geneva Conventions are intended to ensure that crimes against humanity such as those committed during the Second World War will not recur. Legal measures to address grievances at the international level, however, are limited. By creating a public hearing, the Russell Tribunal brings public attention to abuses of international humanitarian rights that may be recognized normatively in the Geneva Conventions, but lie outside existing international jurisprudence. Neither the procedures nor the decisions of the Tribunal are recognized as having legal force. Since its findings remain allegations, all means of holding parties accountable for possible violations are located in, and subject to, the political will of the nations involved and the extrajudicial networks of advocacy surrounding a case. In order to end the named abuses, it is incumbent upon external entities to apply the public testimonials and decisions of the court strategically. In the case described here widespread international publicity through the support of international human rights organizations was a powerful tool.

The testimonials and rulings of the Russell Tribunal, (or People's Court, as it is also called), on Indigenous Peoples in the Americas, at which the case of trafficking in indigenous women of the Upper Rio Negro was argued, garnered international attention. The most significant responses came from members of the Salesian Order. The Order was especially vulnerable to the allegations of the Tribunal for several reasons. First, its presence in Brazil was conditional on its authorization in compliance with the domestic laws of the host nation. Second, its legitimization and maintenance rested on its membership in the worldwide Salesian Order and the transnational Church of Rome, of which it was a part. Actions by Salesians in any part of the world reflected on the Order as a whole and should, ideally, meet with its complicity and approval. In the case of trafficking in indigenous women the good standing of the Salesian Order was at stake.

By linking the local Salesians to the larger transnational body, the court called into question the reputation of all members of the Order. Their representation as advocates of indigenous peoples and impoverished classes, both in Brazil and elsewhere, was at stake. Unable to deny the activities of its Brazilian members, and not willing to normalize them, it was the Salesian peers who put an end to impunity and abolished the practice. Had the Salesian Order violated the international conventions of the ILO, as alleged by the Tribunal, the scandal would bring far-reaching embarrassment to the Salesian community.

The National Brazilian Catholic Church, which has a strong record of advocacy on issues concerning indigenous peoples, published this commentary on the tribunal:

The Salesians of the Rio Negro...have attempted to defend themselves against these accusations... [but] have never denied the actual 'cultural massacre' of the Indians of the region. (Many of these Indians are now migrating to Venezuela and Colombia, or have sought refuge in the outskirts of the city of Manaus, where they are ashamed to be recognized as Indians.) The Upper Rio Negro today has been transformed into a kind of 'Salesian feudalism.' ... Thousands of Indians in the region, considered to be the largest Indian area in the country, are losing their

culture, their traditions, their customs, their identity and even their languages. For Bishop Dom Miguel Alagna, this is called 'the integration of the Indian into the national community.' For the authors of the Tribunal case, it is ethnocide. [CIMI 1981]

Obtaining censure by the national community of mission peers and authorities who condemned the practice was a major achievement of the campaign. It resulted in profound changes within the Salesian Order and for the indigenous residents of the Upper Rio Negro. In 1981, less than a year after the hearing, the former Territorial Prelature of the Rio Negro, with its six large mission centers, was transferred to a newly created Diocese of São Gabriel da Cachoeira. The Salesian mission work was fundamentally transformed and the boarding schools dismantled. The first school to be closed was at the mission headquarters in São Gabriel da Cachoeira. Between 1985 and 1987 the boarding schools of Iauareté, Taracua, Pari-Cachoeira and Assunção of the Içana were closed, as was the female boarding school in São Gabriel da Cachoeira (Albert n.d.).

### **SUPPORT NETWORK: AMARN/NUMIA KURÁ**

Sent directly from distant villages, the women had come to the city without social contacts, support, or knowledge of the legalities surrounding employment rights. Without proper documentation that might have guaranteed them certain privileges and rights and without knowledge of their rights to obtain such documentation, the women were vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Working unofficially, many were confined behind locked gates and doors, denied freedom of movement and communication. They were cut off from information and kept unaware of their rights to a fair wage, to limitations of the work day, and to leisure time. Working in inhospitable conditions (several were fed a daily diet of flour and water) and in isolation, they lacked access to agents with political and social leverage through whom they might obtain information and exercise rights. They were not able to contact one another, and were frequently unaware of one another's whereabouts. For unscrupulous employers, undocumented workers were attractive targets. These employers transformed domestic work into domestic servitude.

Following the end of the Tribunal and their release from unlawful working conditions, a number of women returned to their upriver villages. Most, however, opted to stay in the city and to find more favorable working conditions in private family homes with guaranteed incomes and personal time.

Participation in the Tribunal provided the women with a broader understanding of their predicament and an awareness of others who shared their position. Although they were freed from their illegal working conditions following the decision of the Tribunal, they were left with no compensation or form of reparation. Marginalized and unassisted, they found that among the few resources available to them were the company of one another and the networks they might construct collectively to obtain crucial resources. Their recourse was to organize pro-actively to provide themselves with the resources they lacked.

In Brazil of 1981, civil society formation was a difficult and cumbersome procedure. Most indigenous associations that exist today in Brazil have their origins in the 1990s following the end of two decades of military rule and the creation of a new constitution in 1988 (de Almeida

and Sales 2009; de Paula 2008; Ramos 1997; Sacchi 2003). Among the few exceptions to the pattern is AMARN. Standing for *Associação de Mulheres Indígenas do Alto Rio Negro* (the Association of Women from the Upper Rio Negro), with the later addition Numia-Kurá (Tukanoan for “Clan of Women”), AMARN was founded in 1982 by the women who had worked together to bring the case of trafficking before the Russell Tribunal. Today AMARN is the oldest registered indigenous association in Brazil, as well as its longest-lived. Initially established as a refuge for the indigenous women who faced discrimination and unlawful restrictions on their rights and freedoms, it was created by the very women that it benefited.

AMARN’s origins in 1982 began with Sunday social gatherings in my home. In this casual atmosphere strong bonds developed among participants. It was an ideal context in which to comfortably exchange knowledge, share news and problems, and to evolve collective solutions to common problems in a manner referred to as *conscientização* by Brazilian education philosopher Paulo Freire (2007). Within two years the group obtained formal recognition as a not-for-profit organization: AMARN (Pereira, 2001).

An early member, interviewed by researchers from the Federal University of Amazonas, described the founding and development of AMARN this way:

We left our homes to study in the Boarding Schools of the Salesians. Many of us had completed our studies, others not, and we came to Manaus to serve as domestics in the homes of Air Force personnel and in residents of relatives of the Salesians. As newcomers directly from villages we had difficulties doing the chores and were discriminated upon by employers—sometimes put out onto the streets with no support and completely unaware of our rights. We were marginalized and lost, with no means of returning home. These factors were crucial to the founding of AMARN in 1984....The achievements of AMARN during its twenty-four years of activity have been: support of members, acquiring our own headquarters, building a crafts center, developing a network of partners, fund-raising, expansion of the headquarters for meetings and accommodation, creating a bilingual school, calling for the recognition of indigenous peoples' struggle, and generally building self-esteem for indigenous women and their children. [Trindade 2009]

Another founder explained AMARN's creation to Maria Silvia Cintra of the Federal University of São Carlos like this:

At that time, very little was known about an important and real subject: the presence of indigenous women in Manaus who left their communities to work as domestics in private homes and in the military compound. The majority worked for military pilots of the Air Force. Some had come with their family's permission; others were sent by the nuns to friends or people they knew; and some even came through their own acquaintances. Sometimes they found themselves in difficult situations due to abuses they suffered, often at the hands of members of the family where they worked. They had children or perhaps they didn't follow orders, and then they would be put out in the street. They were left without any place to live, nowhere to go. They couldn't maintain themselves and, even less, care for their children. They couldn't consider returning to their communities because of the certainty and frustration that their families wouldn't accept the situation

they were in. Really, these facts... [led to] ... the creation of the *Associação*...  
[Vasconcelos, 2012]

Speaking of AMARN twenty-five years later, Rosa Helena Dias da Silva, professor of the Federal University of Amazonas State in Manaus, described it this way: “It was one of the first spaces in the city where they [the indigenous women of the Upper Rio Negro] could be themselves” (de Carvalho 2007).

One of the greatest obstacles in the development of AMARN was obtaining articles of incorporation as a not-for-profit Civil Society Organization under Brazilian law. The procedure involved many arduous tasks and structural requirements that were especially unsuited to indigenous applicants. For example, to become a legal entity, the society was required to name a board of directors with a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The hierarchical structure, where a few are given governing power over the others, was at odds with Tukanoan traditional modes of decision-making. The members attempted to mollify the ill-effects of privileging some members over others by expanding the number of officers. Ten founding members had been actively involved in the work of obtaining certification. Since the designation of vice president could be filled by more than one person, seven persons were listed for that position. With three other officers, this extended officer status to all ten people actively engaged in the registration process.

One of the association's first projects involved obtaining access to medical and legal services. Recognizing the need for social capital, a network was created comprised of medical, legal, and other influential professionals within the community who could be called upon when needed. The “Friends of AMARN,” as the network was called, extended the social, economic, and political reach of members of AMARN so that they could secure sorely needed resources and services. The Friends network also provided AMARN with visibility in numerous arenas that proved critical for their economic survival and longevity. In 1982 there were very few development NGOs or other links between local grassroots entities and centers of power. The Association created vertical ties to individuals who were able to assist the Association in a manner paralleled today by linkages between grassroots organizations, large NGOs, and funders.

Another early project of AMARN was workers’ rights and security. Brazil’s Fair Labor Laws, established in 1934, guarantee workers compensation for services through a fair wage policy phrased in terms of a minimum monthly salary. All laborers, including domestic workers, are entitled to safe and healthy working conditions, a minimum wage, a limited work-day, remunerated vacations, and a weekly day off. A registered work document, known as a *Carteira de Trabalho*, provides legal oversight and the benefits of retirement compensation. In addition to sharing experiences informally, the founders of AMARN provided and compiled data on their life histories, labor procurement, compensation, and working conditions. These data showed that 14 of 19 founders who had worked as domestic laborers through the mission system prior to 1980 received no salary at all. Though five had received some monetary compensation, those wages were far below the legal minimum. Immediately following the Russell Tribunal, this trend reversed. Of fourteen women hired after 1980, the year of the Tribunal, all but two received salaries.

In order for the women to make use of existing legal mechanisms, they had to obtain juridical authorizations through a series of bureaucratic procedures. This process was further complicated by indigenous peoples' civic status as wards of the state in the early 1980's. Legal experts came to the center to educate the women about the choices available to them and how to go about pursuing them. Literate members were matched with non-literate ones so that each woman might obtain her necessary documentation. These simple procedures of information sharing, mutual assistance, and activating legal rights proved to have profound consequences for members.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, the newly democratic Brazil experienced a dramatic influx of international NGOs concerned with indigenous rights, human rights, women, and development. A new culture of multilateral financial institutions was emerging, with funds earmarked for "local" or "indigenous" projects. These were channeled through cosmopolitan NGOs who competed for the funds by proposing activities with local communities. In a process where transparency and accountability were highly valued, the few credentialed and registered indigenous organizations held a special advantage when proposing projects or applying for funding.

In 1984, therefore, AMARN applied for and received funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Besides enabling the service programs and organizational efforts of the early stages of the Association, the funding also made possible the purchase of its headquarters. A portion of the funding supported the participation of AMARN members at national and international meetings on women and on indigenous organizations, creating important conversations and connections with international political forums and organizations. This contributed to capacity building, network enhancement, and a growing sense of dignity and purpose among members.

The initial goals of AMARN—to increase autonomy and community among members—were achieved. Simple methods of knowledge sharing and networking did lead, eventually, to greater self-determination and access to services and resources. The members of AMARN were able to develop the skills and instruments to better manage their own lives. Today, the AMARN center provides a point of reference for indigenous women in Manaus. The women maintain a crafts cooperative that provides them with income for maintenance and wages. Grants from the Bank of Brazil Foundation (*Fundação Banco do Brasil*) and the multinational energy company, Petrobrás, support group projects including traveling exhibits and a bilingual school. A museum of indigenous women is in its planning stages. Rather than finding employment throughout the city, many women opted to live and work closer to the association headquarters, choosing employment in part for its proximity to the Center. Social ties and networking, it was discovered, were valued not as mere tools to obtain resources, but as important resources in their own right (Chernela 2014a).

## **PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND WOMEN**

The term "trafficking" refers to a variety of human rights violations, ranging from deception to force and kidnapping. In its *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (2000), the UN defined trafficking in persons this way: "Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of

power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

In 1980 there was little agreement on how to precisely define human trafficking, with the term applied to a wide range of actions and outcomes. The current definition, the forced migration of persons for purposes of illegal employment, allows us to parse the concept by considering the stages entailed in trafficking. These are: (1) recruitment, (2) transportation, and (3) workplace living conditions and control in the place of destination. In the case of the women of the Upper Rio Negro, travel and employment were arranged without full disclosure of workplace conditions or the rights of the women involved.

The condition of labor in which the Tukanoan women found themselves constituted a form of contract labor akin to indentured servitude. An indentured servant may enter into a labor contract voluntarily, or be subject to the contractual arrangements of others, including those that appear to the worker to be ‘advocates.’ When not prohibited by domestic law, the contract laborer often works in exchange for transportation, food, clothing, lodging and other necessities, rather than salaried compensation. These labor arrangements entail a condition of compulsory service, in which the laborer performs service against her will, due to force, threats, intimidation or other similar means of coercion and compulsion directed against her. In such cases, it is irrelevant whether the person initially agreed to render the service or perform the work voluntarily. If a willing laborer later desires to withdraw her labor and is unable to, her service becomes involuntary. Such systems were prohibited in 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms” (UN General Assembly 1948).

In describing their recruitment, transportation, and living-labor conditions, Tukanoan domestics interviewed by Fígoli characterized themselves as having been “enviada” by the missionaries (Fígoli 1982, 62). The Portuguese “enviada” in this context can be translated as “having been sent by” or having been “put to work” or “ordered to work” by the nuns. If we divide the process into the phases of recruitment, transportation, and service, we see deception, restricted access to information, and decreasing voluntarism, until the workers are unable to alter the conditions of their existence for lack of proper information and means to do so. In assessing the case of the Tukanoan domestics, Fígoli concluded that “Strictly speaking, it can not be said that they [the women] are presented on the urban labor market as free workers...” (Fígoli 1982, 77). Even if these women had initially entered the arrangement voluntarily, their knowledge of options was partial; later, the system essentially stripped them of their autonomy, creating a relationship that was decidedly involuntary.

The issue of trafficking is embedded in the wider challenges of improving employment opportunities, working conditions, and gender equality in society. Today human rights organizations recognize that domestic workers often find themselves victimized by trafficking or by a lack of access to legal mechanisms through which to protect their rights. Domestic labor has been notoriously exempt from national labor laws since employers argue that payment in room and board holds a value equivalent to a portion of the wage. Millions of women and girls pursuing the opportunities that domestic work provides are at risk, because their rights, equal human dignity, and autonomy are not adequately protected (ILO 2005). In order to ensure that

domestic workers are finally provided with equal protection of their labor rights, it is necessary to address the root causes of trafficking. Providing everyone with full, productive, and freely chosen decent work can attack the root causes of trafficking by making people less vulnerable to economic exploitation.

From the outset, the women who participated in the creation of AMARN brought their experiences and organizational skills to other endeavors. Members of AMARN are at the vanguard of the indigenous organization project in Brazil (de Almeida and Sales de Santos 2009). For example, AMARN women played distinguished, pioneering roles in the development of COIAB (*Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira* [Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon]) created in 1989, which has since grown to become the nation's largest indigenous federation (Carvalho 2007; Trindade 2009).

The association of AMARN and its members have served as a driving force and inspiration to women's indigenous associations throughout Brazil. In May 2001, AMARN was one of two associations invited to lead a course on networking and leadership for indigenous women at a large meeting of COIAB in Santarém (Verdum 2008, 10). The meeting led to the formation in 2002 of a Women's Department (DMI) within COIAB, whose objective was the insertion and promotion of the rights and interests of indigenous women within the indigenous movement..." (2008, 11). In June of 2002, the first Meeting of Indigenous Women of the Brazilian Amazon (*Encontro de Mulheres Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira*) was held in Manaus. The large meeting inaugurated the DMI as part of the structure of COIAB.

The step served to propel the dramatic growth of indigenous women's organizations throughout Brazil. In 2007 the Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo (*Povos Indígenas do Nordeste, Minas Gerais e Espírito Santo* [Apoimne]) called a meeting of indigenous women "warriors" (*guerreiras*). In the same year the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Southern Region (*Povos Indígenas da Região Sul* [Arpin-Sul]), called, for the first time, a meeting of indigenous women of the central south (Verdum 2008, 11). These achievements earned AMARN recognition from international funding institutions. Kristian Bengston, for example, Programme Officer for the Indigenous Peoples Programme of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) noted the far-reaching "political impacts of the organization" (Kristian Bengston, pers. com., Feb. 25, 2010) as one of the justifications of that agency's many years of funding support for AMARN.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Human trafficking is recognized by the United Nations as a global human rights concern that falls disproportionately on women and children (UNODC 2009). The ILO considers trafficking, a form of forced and compulsory labor, to be among the worst forms of exploitation. Trafficking in persons for purposes of labor exploitation, in particular forced and compulsory labor and other slavery-like practices, is covered by a number of ILO Conventions: Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), among others. The ILO estimates that at any given time, 2.4 million people throughout the world are lured into forced labor as a result of human trafficking (ILO 2005). Of this number, women and girls account for about 80% of victims (UNODC 2009). ILO Convention 189 Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers is a 2011 ground-breaking treaty that, for the first time, establishes



global labor standards for the millions of domestic workers worldwide, most of whom are female.

In the Tukanoan case, women were discriminated against in three ways: on the basis of race, on the basis of gender, and on the basis of class. In trafficking, gender, class, and racial discrimination converge intersectionally with institutional and economic power inequities to drive women and girls into situations where they are subject to constraints and abuses of their rights and freedoms. For its eradication, entities must be held accountable at national, regional, and global levels. The combined processes of international exposure, local pressure and cooperation among several types of advocates including anthropologists, humanitarian aid workers, and church workers, effectively brought about an end to the trafficking of indigenous women from the Rio Negro of Brazil.

Strategies to end the trafficking of indigenous women took several forms, beginning with international exposure through the Tribunal proceedings. Although the Russell Tribunal was clear in its condemnation, its findings lack formal legal status. For this reason, the Russell Tribunal is considered by its critics to be ineffectual. For example, Princeton University professor emeritus of international law Richard Falk, described the court as a “juridical farce” (Barat 2010). The case considered here, however, lends evidence to the important role of international exposure—a “politics of exposure”—when other judicial mechanisms are not available. Despite the weak legal standing of its findings, the rulings of the Tribunal had significant consequences in the case of the Tukanoan women. The success of the case must be attributed, at least in part, to the strategic targeting of international human rights advocates, including the international Salesian Brotherhood, whose members put an end to the abuses.

The Tribunal case and strategic advocacy for Tukanoan women in Manaus succeeded in several ways. The indigenous boarding schools that trained girls to be domestic servants were closed. AMARN, the Association founded by formerly trafficked women, grew to perform essential services for indigenous women in Manaus. Access to proper worker documentation, education, health services, and compensation was accomplished. In the long run, both the tribunal case and the Association served as catalysts toward the creation of a national Brazilian indigenous movement with women in the vanguard.

The outcome of the Tribunal, as well as the processes surrounding it, contributed to a growing literacy in human rights and the possibilities for invocation of these rights toward praxis and empowerment for the indigenous women at the center of the case. It contributed to their confidence and capacity in engendering an incipient indigenous movement in Amazonia that began, with their participation, in 1982. The same women who were brought to Manaus without awareness of their rights became leaders in local and national human rights efforts (Trindade 2009). The case served as a forum and practicum in international and domestic rights of indigenous peoples and laborers. The knowledge and awareness gained during and after the process provided the basis for actions, claims, and negotiations later deployed by the women to improve their lives and increase their participation in the new democratic society that soon followed.

In the title of this paper I referred to two levels – the universal and the local, or particular. By the phrase ‘universalizing the particular,’ I refer to the process through which an external standard is

applied to a particular local case where one sector of society is discriminated against or otherwise unfairly treated by another. This is the general process when international human rights law, based in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is applied to a particular case. By the phrase, 'particularizing the universal,' I refer to the converse process whereby a universal standard is shaped through interaction with various local moralities and codes of conduct to produce a version that may accurately merit the descriptor, 'universal.' A relationship of reciprocal influence between the universal and the particular is at the heart of an informed multicultural approach to human rights. It is the role of anthropologists concerned with a fair and unbiased system of human rights to mediate the Western and non-Western viewpoints to ensure that the rights of those at the periphery are not lost or submerged by a dominant Western worldview. Only by means of active local participation can we avoid a superimposition of the Western moral viewpoint on those of the periphery. An analysis of the case described here should find the source of its success in the combination of the local and the international.

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# **Safe Passages: Building on Cultural Traditions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence throughout the Life Course**

Rebecka Lundgren  
Melissa K. Adams

Georgetown University

## **Abstract**

Twenty years of conflict in Northern Uganda has resulted in high rates of gender-based violence, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, and a generation exposed to a lifetime of violence. Concerned with the loss of protective traditions, resettling communities seek opportunities to support their young people. Forty life histories conducted with adolescents at transitional life course stages and 40 in-depth interviews with significant adults revealed the critical role of gender inequality in supporting violence, as well as the influence of poverty, alcohol, and social inequality. Despite social norms legitimizing domestic violence, research revealed notable examples of individuals contesting these norms in the context of revitalizing Acholi cultural traditions in order to build more peaceful communities. Study results were used to develop complementary life-course specific interventions to support community efforts to rebuild protective traditions and challenge inequitable gender norms, thus supporting adolescents' healthy passage into adulthood.

## **Biography**

**Rebecka Lundgren** is the Director of Research for the Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) at Georgetown University. With over 25 years of comprehensive, hands-on experience in developing and testing reproductive health and behavior change programs, Rebecka is the Principal Investigator of Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation (GREAT), a five-year project aiming to facilitate the formation of gender equitable gender norms among 10-18-year-olds in Northern Uganda.

**Melissa K. Adams** has over 10 years of research and programmatic experience in HIV prevention, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, family planning, and gender-based violence with a focus on participatory research methodologies. As a Senior Program Officer for Research at IRH, Ms. Adams was a co-investigator on the Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation (GREAT) project.

## **SAFE PASSAGES: BUILDING ON CULTURAL TRADITIONS TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGHOUT THE LIFE COURSE**

Boys and girls and young women and men living in Northern Uganda perceive a world full of violence – in their homes, in the streets of their communities, and in relationships with friends and partners. Brought up in the midst of civil war, living in internally displaced person (IDP) camps where sexual and other acts of violence were common, these young people are now mostly resettled in their ancestral villages. In this paper we explore the ways that inequitable gender norms are associated with the acceptability of violence, as well as perceptions of appropriate responses to violent acts and situations. We also illustrate how adolescents resist hegemonic social norms and chart paths that lead to more equitable and peaceful relationships in the society they are rebuilding. This article draws upon data from life histories with adolescents (ages 10 to 19) and in-depth interviews with individuals they identified as influential in their lives. This study was designed to provide information to address the challenge of developing effective strategies to transform inequitable gender norms and reduce gender-based violence (GBV).

Globally, GBV is viewed as a key determinant of health as well as a grave violation of human and legal rights (WHO 2013). There is increasing recognition of the links between gender identity and culturally programmed sexual behavior and violence, exemplified in the correlation between male-dominance and forced sex in many cultures (Sanday 2003, Heise 1998). Recently, anthropologist Peggy Sanday (2010, 42) called for research on sexual violence and gender norms, stating: “The first step in bearing witness to sexual violence is to describe local socially agreed-upon understandings which are often shaped in single sex groups focused on promoting gender identity development and are played out in adolescent or childhood sexual games.” Eliminating GBV will depend on sustainable, widespread change of gender norms related to health and violence, which can best be achieved by harnessing the processes that transmit these norms and attitudes. Adolescence, and early adolescence in particular, represents an opportunity to promote more equitable norms and behaviors as it is during this life stage that gender norms and identities begin to coalesce.

### **BACKGROUND**

After many years of war, combined with long-term isolation and neglect from the Ugandan government, the northern region of Uganda—and specifically the women and men, and girls and boys of the Acholi and Lango sub-regions—face considerable challenges stemming from massive disruption of services, internal displacement, and erosion of traditional social and family structures. Young people are especially challenged, as 56% of the population are youth, with 28% orphaned, and there is a high incidence of GBV (Annan et al. 2006). A poverty rate of 63%, compared to 38% nationally, further constrains resources and opportunities for young people; access to skill-building and psychological support remains limited (Spittal 2008). Consequently up to 31% of girls aged 15-19 reported having received money in exchange for sex, while others curtail their education and enter into risky early childbearing to guarantee their basic economic and physical security (Akumu 2005).

GBV is widespread in Northern Uganda. More than half (60.6%) of women aged 15-49 in north central Uganda have experienced Intimate Partner Violence, and 18.7% of ever-pregnant women



report experiencing physical violence while pregnant (Uganda DHS 2011). High rates of induced abortion (1 in 5 pregnancies) reflect both this violence and low use of family planning, especially among adolescents: 39.5% of women ages 15-19 don't desire a pregnancy but only 6.8% use a method (Uganda DHS 2011). Early initiation of sexual activity (12.2% before age 15), engagement in transactional and intergenerational sex (9.6% of women aged 15-24), GBV, and lack of family planning and sexual and reproductive health information and services result in increased risk for unintended pregnancy and HIV infection among young women (Uganda DHS 2011; MOH/MACRO 2006).

This research took place in two districts of northern Uganda which are recovering from 20 years of civil war—Pader in the Acholi sub-region and Lira in the Lango sub-region. After more than a decade living in IDP camps, most families returned to their villages by January 2012 and are struggling to regain their economic capacity and re-establish cultural identities. Most Acholi and Lango youth entering adulthood today have not been fully socialized into traditional norms and practices, were exposed to tremendous violence, and now face severe economic constraints. To help adolescents and young adults overcome these challenges, community and cultural leaders are working with the government and NGOs to revitalize cultural traditions to support more equitable, peaceful relationships leading to healthier communities.

The Lango and Acholi tribes are the two largest in Northern Uganda. There are roughly 1.5 million Lango people and approximately 1.17 million Acholi living in Northern Uganda (Statistics 2010, viii; Lewis 2010). The Lango and Acholi primarily practice Christianity and traditional African religions, with a smaller percentage practicing Islam. Both are patrilineal tribes, passing ethnic and clan identities through the father. However, many Lango identify as Acholi because they were born in Acholiland. The two tribes form a tight-knit community who interact at clan functions, meetings and birth, marriage and death ceremonies (Davenport 2011). Both tribes speak Luo, and are ruled under Rwodi clan chief systems (Atkinson 1989). Cultural norms are passed down through dance, song, and proverbs. The war has impacted cultural traditions, and there is widespread regret over the shift in communal norms and celebrations due to the conflict and the inability to pass their traditions on to younger generations (Patel 2012).

## **GBV AND GENDER NORMS**

Although GBV, especially interpersonal and sexual violence, is of increasing interest to anthropologists, there is little research on the relationship between GBV and gender norms. Peggy Sanday (2010) suggests that anthropologists have avoided this topic because of their inclination to overlook harmful and violent aspects of the culture they study, and the difficulty of reconciling GBV with cultural relativism. Most literature is related to legal, policy, and practice issues (Wies 2008; Plesset 2006; Merry 2006). Notable exceptions include ethnographies by Laura McClusky (2001), Sonja Plesset (2006) and Peggy Sanday (2007). A small group of anthropologists today are contributing to understanding of intimate partner violence from a cross-cultural perspective (Merry 2009), however their work tends to focus on sexual violence rather than a broader view of violence from a continuum of verbal harassment and bullying to rape (Sanday 2007; Wies 2011). An additional gap in the literature is the paucity of data on the perspectives of men as either victims or perpetrators, or on women beyond their role as victims. Finally, there is little information on the perspectives and experiences of children, other than

retrospective accounts of child sexual abuse (Sanday 2010). The research discussed here contributes to efforts to address these gaps.

GBV is increasingly recognized as a significant barrier to reproductive health—preventing women, families, and countries from achieving their full potential. The first systematic review of the prevalence of violence against women worldwide reveals that 35% of women have experienced violence and links violence to significant health problems (WHO 2013). The new gender policy issued by the United States Agency for International Development in 2012 recognizes GBV as a pervasive public health problem with global policy and program implications. It is only in the last ten years that the prevalence of GBV has been well-documented. A seminal multi-country study by the World Health Organization found that the proportion of ever-partnered women who had experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in their lifetime, ranged from 15% to 71% (Ellsberg 2008). In Uganda, for example, recent data reveal that 54.3 percent of young women aged 15-19 report physical violence (DHS 2011).

The sheer magnitude of the number of women who experience GBV makes it a significant public health problem, with far reaching consequences. Evidence suggests that GBV is related to maternal and child morbidity and mortality, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unintended pregnancies (Heise 1994). Women who experience GBV often have difficulty using contraceptives effectively and may experience higher rates of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and adolescent pregnancies (Feldman 2010). Abuse during pregnancy poses risks to the mother and unborn child, and also increases chronic illness (Ronsmans 2006). Children of abused women have a higher risk of death before reaching age five, and violence during pregnancy is associated with low birth weight (WHO 2013). Forced and unprotected sex, and related trauma, increase the risk that women will be infected by STIs and HIV (Feldman 2010).

Gender norms—social expectations of appropriate roles and behaviors for men/boys and women/girls, as well as the transmission of these norms by institutions and cultural practices—directly influence GBV and other health-related behaviors (Barker 2010; Courtenay 2005; Greene 2011; Whitehead 1997). Inequitable gender norms are related to a range of issues, including use of family planning, reproductive health decision making, unintended pregnancy, parenting practices, health-seeking behavior, and transmission of HIV and other STIs (IGWG 2011; Marsiglio 1988; Kirkman 2001; Marston and King 2006).

Women and girls living in conflict or post-conflict settings, such as Northern Uganda, are particularly vulnerable to GBV, unintended pregnancy, and STIs in part due to exacerbated gender inequalities brought about by armed conflict and its aftermath (McGinn and Purdin 2004; Okello and Hovil 2007).

Dramatic changes in the world in which Lango and Acholi men and women grow up and raise their children have significantly influenced the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values framing interpretations and meanings that underlie behaviors intimately related to reproductive health. As an important health determinant, there is substantial discourse regarding how conflict affects gender norms, largely focusing on men and the “crisis in masculinity” resulting from the displacement of gender-based roles and identity during conflict. Research suggests that the

conflict in northern Uganda has had significant consequences on local gender roles and identity. Traditional notions of Acholi masculinity are centered on fulfilling the roles of provider and protector in one's family (Spittal 2008). The massive displacement and subsequent economic impoverishment created by the conflict has made it nearly impossible for men to provide for their families. The large-scale violence, sexual abuse, and abductions perpetrated during the conflict also made it difficult for men to protect their wives and children. In *Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States: A Case Study of Northern Uganda*, Dolan (2002) posits that men's inability to live up to internalized and external expectations of the "normative" model of masculinity is a source of humiliation and leads some men to compensate by emphasizing other gendered expectations such as control or power over less powerful individuals, notably women and children. While men who are able to conform to the model benefit to an extent in terms of the power they wield over women and children, social expectations are onerous and many men feel oppressed by them.

The theoretical and empirical literature indicates that armed conflict and its aftermath (i.e. displacement, poverty, and demographic changes) affect gender relations. A study on gender relations and armed conflict conducted in five sub-Saharan African countries (Sudan, Uganda, Angola, Mali, and Somalia) found that in all study sites changes in gender roles occurred at the household level and led to greater economic dependence of men on women (El-Bushra 2003). The study further concluded that while gender roles shifted at the household level as a result of conflict, there were limited increases in women's decision-making power and political participation at community and national levels and that the ideological bases underpinning gender relations appeared unchanged or even reinforced. The conclusion reached by the researchers is that conflict does not appear to have led to shifts in gender identities but rather to growing tensions between people's ideals of masculinity and femininity and the reality available to them when their lives are restricted by violence, displacement, impoverishment, and personal loss. In fact, gender ideologies may become further entrenched. These findings, however, were not universal across all study sites: in the Tamasheq and Maure communities of Mali for example, both men and women valued the new skills and roles that women experienced as a result of displacement and few desired to return to previous ways of life.

## **RESEARCH SETTING**

The current precarious yet promising situation of many Northern Ugandans is due in large part to the years of conflict and displacement they have endured. The region is currently recovering from a 20-year war, which began in 1986 when a rebel group known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) took up arms to overthrow the Ugandan government. The LRA was unsuccessful in its attempts and the conflict remained largely confined to northern Ugandan districts. The Acholi and Lango tribes were deeply affected by this conflict, as they were subject to killing, looting, raping, and torture by the LRA. Youth were particularly affected: more than 20,000 children and adolescents were abducted to be used as combatants, and girls were used as both combatants and "bush wives" (Annan et al. 2006).

Over the course of the conflict nearly two million people—90% of the population in affected districts—were displaced (UNHCR 2007). Some of the displaced population moved to urban centers but the majority were settled into IDP camps, where they remained vulnerable to rebel attacks, cramped and unhygienic living conditions, and limited food and livelihood options.

Extended families were forced to live together in huts contrary to their traditions, in which adolescents live separately with their paternal grandmother who helps them transition into adulthood. Even more disruptive was the absence or death of their parents and other adult relatives due to labor migration, abduction or military service. Children were exposed to widespread violence including rape, and travelled long distances together each night to sleep without adult supervision for fear of abduction (Annan et al. 2006, 52). In addition, children growing up in camps did not have the opportunity to learn traditional subsistence techniques, instead learning to queue for food and scavenge for scarce necessities.

The government of Uganda and the LRA signed a formal cessation of hostilities in 2006, allowing Northern Uganda to begin the transition to a post-conflict state. Northern Uganda is currently in the process of this transition, but continues to suffer high levels of violence partially resulting from disruption of gender roles during the conflict. The government of Uganda has taken steps to address this issue: as a signatory on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it is committed to passing laws and regulations to ensure protection for women facing violence. In the late 1990s, a Ugandan Human Rights Commission (UHRC) was established to ensure full implementation of CEDAW in Uganda, although this commission has not been fully functional (Oxfam 2007, 14). Similarly, a coalition of the UHRC, the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MGLSD), and the Equal Opportunities Commission was created to advocate for the advancement of women. Due to limited funding however, this coalition has not been able to take significant action. Following the Beijing Platform for Action, the government of Uganda instituted the National Gender Policy (1997) and the National Action Plan on Women (1999). While these addressed issues such as poverty and reproductive health, they did not include GBV as a priority (Oxfam 2007, 35).

Under past Ugandan legislation, perpetrators of GBV could only be prosecuted for assault or homicide under the General Penal Code, meaning that sexual assault and other forms of violence could not be taken to court. Since 2007, a number of bills intended to address GBV have been passed, including the Uganda Gender Policy (2007), Domestic Violence Act (2010), Domestic Violence Regulations (2011), and Female Genital Mutilation Bill (2010). The Domestic Violence Act provides GBV-specific frameworks defining illegal acts and mandatory legal responses, and the Domestic Violence Regulations detail compliant procedures and services to be provided to victims of GBV. Recent legislation, while a step, has been limited in its effect on protection for women because of poor implementation. Further protections for women have been delayed, including the equal protection-focused Marriage and Divorce Bill that has been on the parliamentary table for over 14 years (FIDH 2012).

In an effort to expedite post-conflict reconstruction in Northern Uganda, the government of Uganda drafted a Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP). One of the multiple outcomes the PRDP seeks is to implement policies that are, “gender sensitive and take into account the need for women’s voices to be heard, to strengthen their visibility, address their specific needs and priorities and promote and protect women’s rights” (Uganda 2010, 25). The PRDP highlights the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) that requires the State to protect the rights of women, and the Uganda Gender Policy (2007), which notes that gender equity is an integral part of national development. PRDP created the Women’s Task Force to evaluate PRDP through the lens of women’s needs. This task force included women in the

decision-making sphere, advocated for gender empowerment and worked to ensure human and financial resources reach women. Nevertheless, the only mention of violence against women in the PRDP is a brief reference to efforts to raise awareness among men of the relationship between masculinity and violence. A number of NGO interventions in Northern Uganda have been directed at addressing this gap in post-conflict reconstruction, including Raising Voices, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), CARE, and Young, Empowered and Healthy (YEAH). The research presented in this paper was conducted as part of one such project: Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation (GREAT), funded by the United States Agency for International Development.

## **METHODS**

The study collected topical life histories focused on issues or events relevant to GBV and sexual and reproductive health from 40 adolescents (ages 10-19) at different life course stages. Adolescents were selected at key moments in the process of adopting new roles and responsibilities and constructing their gender identities: early adolescence when pubertal changes mark the onset of significant social changes; older adolescence when romantic attachments and intimate relationships begin to form; newly married when family formation and adult identity is in transition; and newly parenting when gender and adult identities begin to solidify. Ten life histories were collected from adolescents (five males and five females) in each of the phases mentioned above. Life history methodology is time-consuming, therefore this design was chosen to allow the research team to concentrate on a few cases in which the theoretical yield should be high—moments when identity is under construction or pressure (Cole 2001).

During the life histories, participants were asked to name one or two individuals influential in their lives. If they accepted, interviewers conducted in-depth interviews with these “significant others” to contribute to a better understanding of social influences. In-depth interviews were conducted with 40 “significant others” nominated by adolescents, including parents/guardians, relatives, siblings, peers, partners, teachers, health providers, and religious or community leaders.

Life history methodology was chosen because it is a preferred technique to amplify the voices of those whose experiences are often left out of research agendas, such as women, youth and elderly (Desjarlais 1997; Freidenberg 2000; Myerhoff 1978). One of the earliest and most popular narrative genres of ethnographers, life histories are often used to examine the relationship of an individual to their society or culture and to explore subjective experience and meaning, rather than provide a factual report of individual lives. Much of the groundbreaking work on gender, such as the concept of hegemonic masculinity, was based on use of life histories to document personal experiences and situate them within social structures, movements, and institutions (Connell 1995). Life histories provide a degree of depth, flexibility, and vitality often lacking in structured interviews (Amos and Wisniewski 1995). Nevertheless, it has been a controversial method, largely because of questions of reliability, validity, and representativeness (Caughey 2006). In recent years life histories have reemerged, largely in connection with reflexive and feminist anthropologies because they facilitate connections between individual biographies and larger cultural and institutional contexts (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007).

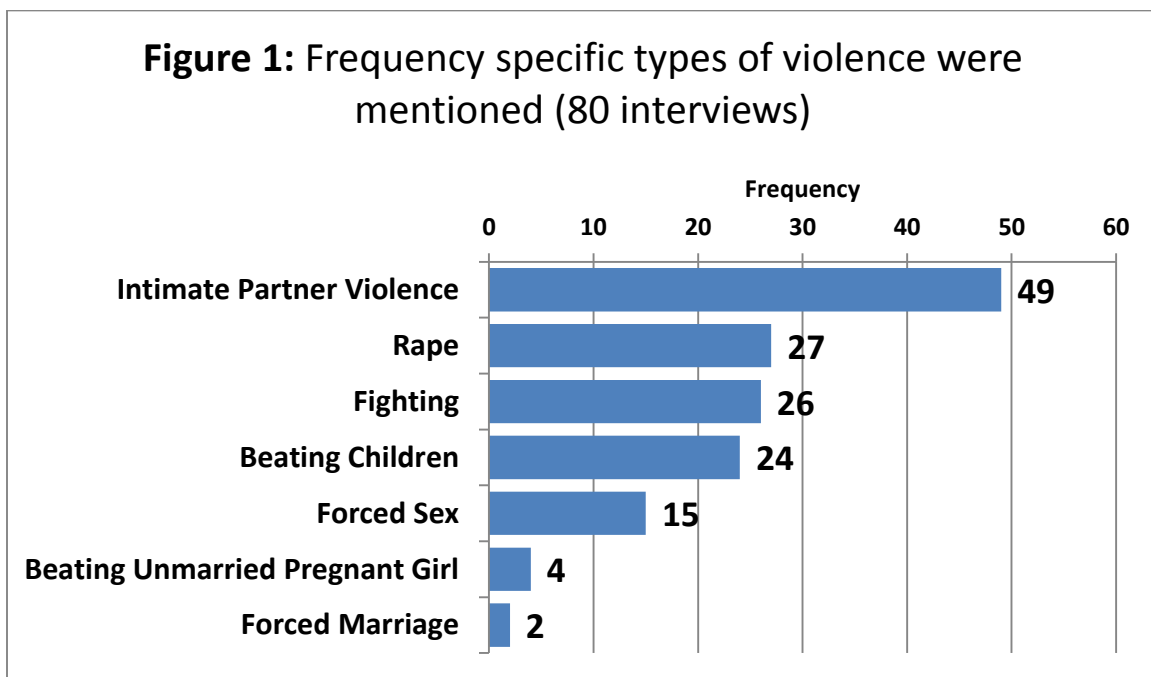
Ethical clearance was obtained from the Georgetown University Institutional Review Board, the Makerere University School of Public Health Institutional Review Board, and the Uganda

National Council of Science and Technology. Informed assent was obtained from the adolescents because of their status as minors (the legal age of majority in Uganda is 18), while their parents or legal guardians provided consent for their participation. Married or parenting adolescents are considered emancipated according to Ugandan law, so therefore provided consent for themselves.

## RESULTS

### Living in a violent world

The adolescents participating in this study view their world as a dangerous place with multiple forms of violence—verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual—surrounding them. The types of violence they describe fall on a continuum from insulting and belittling others through shouting, vulgar language, quarrelling, and slapping to fighting, poisoning/witchcraft, assault, beating to discipline or teach, coerced/forced sex and rape (See Figure 1). Of greatest concern to participants were rape, abuse of women and children, and fighting. Older adolescents were particularly concerned with fighting related to land disputes.



Domestic violence, defined by participants as intimate partner violence and corporal punishment of children in the home, is considered the most common and concerning form of violence. Most often study participants discussed beating perpetrated by the husband, but cases of women hitting their husbands also surfaced. Domestic violence primarily occurs in the privacy of the home, although verbal abuse and fighting may occur at the market or in other public venues. Mention of fathers beating or yelling at their daughters for burning dinner or not properly completing chores was common. Forced sex within a relationship was also raised. A 39-year-old woman explained, “Most of the men like forcing women into sex without a consensus... Most men take it that he has married a woman so at the minute that he wants it, even if both of them are not prepared...”

That is what I see happening and mostly we remain silent.” Concern about rape was widespread among all ages and both sexes; many noted specific places girls should avoid and suggested that girls should not leave their homes after dark.

An excerpt from 17-year-old Sarah provides a glimpse into the way adolescents view the violence around them, as well as their hopes for a more peaceful future.

I experienced many hardships growing up. My mother died, and my father moved away when I was very young. I was left in the care of my stepmother who never gave me food, and insulted and abused me. In our village, we have many forms of violence: land wrangles, quarreling, domestic violence, abuse, rape, fighting. Instead of allowing these forms of violence to continue, we should actively fight to end it. We need to increase dialogue among married couples to reduce domestic violence, and to foster understanding between the couple. I hope to see our community evolve to a place where men and women do not fight and struggle to live together, but rather, live happily and take responsibility where it is needed.

Study participants drew maps of their communities and discussed feelings of safety in various locations. Participants judged women most at risk in the town centers and places where people gather and drink, such as the video, movie, or dance hall. Men and women alike were concerned that girls might be raped or coerced into having sex in those venues considered especially risky because of widespread drinking. The borehole (water well), a place where girls and women visit daily, was also considered unsafe. The community was viewed as an environment which must be carefully negotiated in order to stay safe, especially by women, although men and boys also fear assault and fighting. Some blamed women for rape, such as this a newly married 16-year-old-girl: “Her movement in the night is the reason why men rape her because if she stayed home, slept and locked herself in the house, there wouldn’t be any person who would come to rape her.” On the other hand, some younger girls labeled their house on the map as an unsafe place “...because there is too much beating.” This often occurs in households where girls are taken in by relatives or step-parents or in the case of girls who have gotten pregnant “from home” (before marriage).

### **The (un)acceptability of violence**

In Uganda as elsewhere, gender norms which give men dominance over women are closely related to GBV. Traditional Acholi gender norms assert a hegemonic masculinity which mandates power and control over women. Ideal men are strong and protect their wives and family; they plan, control resources, and make decisions for the benefit of the household. An ideal woman cares for and protects her children. According to tradition, a wife is always subservient to her husband even if he has done something wrong or has been unfaithful. These gender norms are widespread across sex, age, and life course. While these expectations are consistent across the life span, the youngest participants are most hopeful that they will be able to fulfill their gender roles. Newly married and young parents are less optimistic. Boys, in particular, shifted from concern about becoming an “ideal” man to feeling inadequate for not fulfilling normative expectations as they became husbands and fathers.

In order to explore the range of masculinities and femininities accepted in Acholi culture, participants were asked to choose a toy animal to represent an ideal man and an ideal woman.

The resulting discussions revealed how closely gender norms are related to violence, especially domestic violence, as in this quote from an 18-year-old new wife:

I have selected a cow for an ideal woman because a cow is used by human beings; it cannot do anything until its owner says so, just like a woman who waits for information from her husband. A cow is a hard working animal and when a task is given it carries it out, although it doesn't want to. In a home sometimes there is misunderstanding and just like a cow is beaten when it fails to do tasks so is a woman beaten by her husband...and also a cow gives birth and feeds its own on milk just like a woman does. She also takes good care of her children.

Deeply rooted in Acholi culture is the value of respect, which can both prevent and exacerbate violence. While men must respect and protect women, women must also respect their husbands. In fact, women beating their husbands was considered unacceptable because of the disrespect it shows men. Regardless of a man's conduct, hitting a man would shame and belittle him, and would "spoil" a woman's name.

Although violence is widespread in study communities, the only form of violence widely accepted is linked to gender norms—that is, beating wives or children in a controlled and "proper" manner to teach, discipline, or punish. According to study participants, the man holds the authority in the home, and it is his responsibility to correct his wife if she fails to complete a chore or shows him disrespect. Moreover, since he brought his wife into his home and clan, it is his right (and obligation) to correct her as needed. Discipline is required if a woman disobeys her husband or fails to fulfill gender role expectations, such as neglecting to cook the evening meal or showing disrespect. There was general agreement that some women do not listen to their husbands; even if such a woman is corrected several times, she will not understand until she is beaten.

Respondents explained that beating must be done "properly," which entails explaining to the person what he or she had done wrong, allowing them to admit their mistake, and asking them to lie down to receive their punishment (to reduce possible injury). The process is described below by an 18-year-old new wife:

Interviewer: Do you think it's acceptable for a man to beat his wife?

Participant: Yes, when he is beating you in a good way.

Interviewer: What could have happened for it to be seen that a person was beaten in a good way?

Participant: When you have admitted your mistake and he asks you to lie down and you do so and he beats you. It's better than beating you while you are standing.

Most men would agree with this young woman, a 27-year-old community leader explained,

A husband beating his wife because she has delayed to cook is acceptable. Even myself, I once slapped my wife so badly at one moment, because my wife eats and goes to sleep. For me, when I come back and find nothing for me to eat, I beat you. I was relieved because there was some improvement afterwards. The next day I came back and found food was there.



Beating children to punish, prevent bad behavior, or instruct is also widely accepted. Many believe that children, like women, who do not learn when corrected, must be beaten. This sentiment was expressed by a 43-year-old woman, “Beating a child is not something that violates the rights of a child, it is correct and helps their future.” Many respondents believe that it is incumbent on parents and teachers to beat children to ensure that they complete their chores or obey their parents. Nevertheless, the prevailing view is that corporal punishment should only be used after alternative forms of discipline have been tried such as talking to the child about their behavior or asking a clan leader or family member to intervene. If a parent decides to beat the child, it must be done “properly” —in the same way women are beaten—asking the child to lie down, explaining why punishment is necessary, allowing the child to apologize, and then beating. Beating is not accepted if it is “excessive,” or causes injury to a child, although the definition of what is considered excessive is unclear. In such cases, a community member or relative may intervene.

There are new laws in place to prevent parents and teachers from caning children as a form of discipline, or to teach a lesson. Perhaps as a result of these laws, norms are beginning to shift, and some respondents find caning excessively violent and unacceptable. In general, adults were more accepting of corporal punishment than children, although most adolescents thought that beating children was appropriate if it was done with the intention to teach. In fact, one child indicated that he felt he was being overbeaten when he was young, but now understands that he was being trained. Those who disagreed with corporal punishment stated that children are physically weaker than adults, and beating is never acceptable. A few commented that beating children is an abuse of their rights.

The life histories revealed that it is not uncommon for individuals to question traditional norms regarding violence and gender roles. Although beating is generally viewed as a suitable way to enforce social norms and roles, some clan leaders and elders do not condone this practice because it can lead to serious injury, death, or may be directed at someone who unknowingly made a mistake. Some men expressed opposition to beating women based on the view that strong relationships, built on male and female equality, are peaceful while violence fractures families. According to a newly married young 18 year-old,

We do not have any misunderstanding since she gives her views and I also give mine and we come up with an agreement... If one of us had denied the other’s view, then there would have been a misunderstanding. To live a good life in a relationship, husbands and wives should be peaceful and not always have wrangles in their relationship and work together.

The excerpt below from the life history of Simon, a 39-year-old community leader, exemplifies central themes which emerged from the research, such as rejection of a range of violent acts and hopes for a more peaceful community.

Our community has been through a long period of violence that has drastically affected all of our lives. Many use the war as a reason to perpetuate violence; however, I believe that we must work together to come to agreements through avenues outside of violence. I believe that rape and the beating of children should never be accepted under any circumstance. Shouting at children is also unacceptable because it ruins their mindset and will not benefit the child. Rather than shouting, a parent should sit down with the child and speak to the child until

there is a mutual understanding. Finally, I hope that parents will use the money they get from the harvest to fund their children’s education; and that all families within our community can live together in peace.

These results reveal opportunities to build on attitudes which support gender equality and nonviolent conflict resolution. For example, very young adolescents viewed all forms of violence as wrong, regardless of the situation. These attitudes, however, evolve over the life course, with greater acceptance of GBV among newly married adolescents and young parents. This suggests that well-designed interventions could bring about changes in norms related to violence if they start early and include ongoing initiatives tailored to the life phase.

### Exploring the roots of violence

Men and women of all ages consider alcohol a primary cause of violence, although other factors such as scarce resources, gender inequities, male sexual needs, and land disputes were also identified. Table 1 presents the causes and responses related to each type of violence mentioned by study participants. Examples of violence included husbands beating their wives if they do not prepare a meal on time or there is no food in the home; disagreements over how household resources are utilized; and infidelity (perceived or real).

**Table 1: Perceptions of Types of Violence, Causes and Response**

Type of violence	Causes	Response
<b>Interpersonal violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Authority of men</li> <li>- Alcohol</li> <li>- Scarcity of food</li> <li>- Arguments over resources</li> <li>- Women disobey/ need instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intervention by community leader or NGO workers</li> <li>- Treatment</li> </ul>
<b>Forced sex</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of women’s rights</li> <li>- Women viewed as husband’s property</li> <li>- Uncontrollable male sexual urges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clan leaders mediate</li> <li>- Brothers punish boys</li> </ul>
<b>Fighting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Land disputes</li> <li>- Being teased or ridiculed</li> <li>- Fighting over water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fight broken up</li> <li>- Police called</li> <li>- Sent to hospital if injuries</li> </ul>
<b>Rape</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women/girls moving at night</li> <li>- Alcohol</li> <li>- Uncontrollable male sexual urges</li> <li>- Drug use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gossip about perpetrator and survivor</li> <li>- Pity for survivor</li> <li>- Vigilante justice</li> <li>- Police called</li> <li>- Hospital if injuries</li> </ul>

Study participants noted the relationship between gender norms and violence, explaining that life in the camps shifted gender roles and expectations, leaving men feeling vulnerable and emasculated. Many reported that men started drinking after returning from the camps because of unemployment and frustration with their inability to support their family, which is requisite to being an “ideal” man.

Men became drunkards and the only thing they knew was to drink because they were too frustrated. In the camp, to tell you the truth, the most mistreated people by soldiers were men. If a soldier wanted your wife, he could come and beat you. The rebels were also killing and mistreating men who they saw as spies for the government, and so men were frustrated. I see that men suffered most and they kept on drinking because of the problems that surrounded them. (28-year-old male)

Violence increases during periods of greater stress and alcohol consumption; it is highest in December and September during the Christmas holidays and Independence celebrations and during the harvest period when people struggle to feed their families.

The violence currently is fighting that men like exercising on women and children. Women and children are the ones who suffer. It happens because men are the heads of the family and therefore have authority. Some men are generally tough whenever they drink alcohol. Others are naturally tough even without the influence of alcohol. Violence is most frequent during the harvest season because the men usually want all the money for drinking alcohol and buying roasted meat. (42-year-old female)

Another type of violence, land wrangles, disproportionately affects women, especially older women. Disputes over land are very prevalent because families returned to their villages from the camps with little knowledge of legal property lines. Such disagreements sometimes occur when the patriarch of the family passes away without demarcating clear boundaries, making it difficult to determine legal ownership. Women often lose the rights to their land, depriving them of their livelihood.

Men and women believe that life in the camps brought increased violence, particularly sexual violence. Some of this was attributed to camp life which created a situation where young people passed their days with nothing to occupy themselves. After returning from the camps, many adolescents were no longer in school, as they had dropped out or could no longer afford school fees, and spent much of their time in the center of town. With little to occupy their time, respondents suggested that young people became involved in drinking, theft, rape, and fighting.

## **RESPONSE AND PREVENTION**

Our research shows that while traditional gender norms do enforce men’s power over women, closely-held Acholi values such as respect, love, and protection could also prevent violence. The Ugandan government and civil society are actively applying a human rights framework to reduce GBV, and adolescents and adults are familiar with human rights discourses, especially regarding the rights of children. This is likely a result of the intense efforts of NGOs to protect children and respond to widespread human rights abuses, especially those targeting children, during the war. However, our conversations suggest that adolescents and adults are less motivated by distant

human rights ideals than by a desire to embody traditional values such as respect and to create more peaceful communities. Study participants shared ideas on how to respond to and prevent violence. Table 2 presents suggested strategies by the broad categories of community sensitization, law enforcement, structural interventions, and service.

**Table 2: Response and Prevention Strategies Mentioned by Respondents**

Community Sensitization	Law Enforcement	Structural Interventions	Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue and discussion</li> <li>• Violence prevention training &amp; workshops</li> <li>• Clan leaders teaching the people not to be violent</li> <li>• Sensitization on rights and laws of Uganda</li> <li>• Train and sensitize community leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrest, beat, imprison the perpetrator</li> <li>• Enforce laws in local courts and by police</li> <li>• Clan leaders create and enforce laws</li> <li>• Create by-laws on land ownership, bride price and defilement</li> <li>• Build more police posts</li> </ul>	<p><u>Poverty</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide jobs, vocational training and skills building for women and older adolescents</li> <li>• Rehabilitate formerly abducted children with vocational training</li> </ul> <p><u>Alcohol</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitize the community on effects of alcohol and reducing consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request for better equipped and more financially and geographically accessible health care services</li> <li>• Provide recreational activities for adolescents – games, social clubs and projects – to prevent idleness</li> </ul>

### Response to Violence

GBV within the family is seen as a private problem that should first be addressed by family and clan leaders, and many express concerns about outsider involvement. Clan leaders are the first line of response to violence in the home or family. Community leaders, including the elected village leader or Local Counsel 1 (LC1), are expected to intervene in violent situations, mediate disputes, punish perpetrators, and model respectful, nonviolent behavior. Women and men facing violent situations generally first seek advice from LC1s and clan leaders, viewed by many as the only outsider who can legitimately mediate domestic disputes. Beyond clan leaders, respondents identified police, hospitals, and NGOs as organizations which respond to acts of violence. For domestic violence, community members and relatives provide support and advice as well, for example on whether or not to remain in a marriage. Attitudes toward police intervention in cases of domestic violence were mixed. While some considered increased police presence necessary to combat violence and punish perpetrators, many felt that police should not get involved in private family matters. At the same time, however, others recommended that police more strictly enforce laws that prohibit violence against women and children.

Study participants identified medical, community-based, legal, and other services available for violence survivors. In the case of physical violence or rape, clinics and hospitals provide treatment for injuries, post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent spread of HIV, emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy, and in some cases psychosocial counseling. Access to and use of health services, however, are impacted by affordability; local clinics are free but poorly stocked while hospitals offer greater resources at higher cost. Some NGOs offer medical care but are not easily accessible. In the case of severe violence, such as rape or where there is injury or death, victims seek the police for support or to arrest the perpetrator.

Deeply embedded cultural norms which support intimate partner violence sometimes prevent victims from seeking help or legal action, as do bureaucratic delays. For a woman to have the perpetrator arrested, she must first have a doctor send a letter to the police stating the extent of her injuries, and the necessity for compensation or punishment. The high cost of medical fees, as well as stigma related to violence, may prevent women from seeking punishment for the perpetrator. Structural constraints are also recognized; study participants pointed out that women who leave violent situations are often left with no support.

According to traditional norms, community members should endeavor to resolve conflicts peacefully through dialogue. Several parents remarked that they prefer talking with their children about their behavior to beating them. In the case of conflicts between children, parents suggested talking to the other parents involved rather than fighting. Among couples, some state that they try to resolve their differences through mutual respect and dialogue. Some remarked that mediation by elders or NGOs has resolved conflicts related to land disputes or domestic violence. Many respondents mentioned that they feel it is important to “forgive and forget” and move forward without holding grudges in order to interrupt the cycle of violence.

### **Violence prevention**

As part of the post-war rebuilding process, there have been widespread efforts to combat violence and raise awareness of human rights. Some study participants partook in violence prevention activities organized by the government or NGOs. One young man reported, “After we were trained, we went to the community and sensitized all the people in Pader and Kilak sub-county, and people learned how to protect the rights of children. Things that used to be done unknowingly which are now considered child abuse have been reduced.” Perhaps as a result of these efforts, respondents had many ideas about how to prevent violence, focused primarily on raising concern about the issue, teaching participants about their rights and responsibilities, and developing nonviolent conflict resolution skills. Community leaders are expected to take the lead in this work, along with the police and NGO workers.

Interventions conducted by NGOs to prevent and respond to violence were generally viewed positively. However, as mentioned earlier, NGO intervention is not always welcomed in the domain of domestic violence. In fact, a number of respondents criticized the work of NGOs to change discourse about the rights of women and children. An excerpt from the life history of 35-year-old Sarah reflects this point of view.

I am a primary school teacher and live at home with my three children. The war has greatly changed Acholi culture. Life in the camps prevented children from moving out to the garden [subsistence agriculture] and caused them to develop bad habits, to become thieves and do bad things. Children lost respect for the elders, and parts of Acholi culture vanished as we could not express our culture the way we did in the past. NGOs came to the camps and taught women about their rights, which made women very big-headed, telling their husbands that they have rights. With their new talk of rights, they do not respect their husbands, and it causes many problems.

Raising awareness that violence is a serious issue and teaching community members about existing laws was identified as an important part of violence prevention, along with ensuring laws are enforced. As a newly married 17-year-old woman remarked, “There is a law that if anyone fights his partner, they should be imprisoned for seven years. This scares them and they calm down. They should enforce the law.” Similarly, a 27-year-old man remarked, “The other thing that should be done is to find ways of sensitizing the community by teaching them about domestic violence, abuse of children’s rights, use of bad words, and issue of drunkenness.”

Suggestions for preventing violence went beyond awareness-raising to recognition of the need to address structural causes of violence, such as poverty and post-conflict rehabilitation, as well as idleness and excessive drinking. A young man recommended, “They should improve people’s lives, because what causes violence is poverty.” Study participants noted that when men are unemployed and have no means by which to provide for their family, or farm their land, violence increases. They identified improved economic opportunities for women and men as a critical element of violence prevention, and remarked that financial independence enables women to leave an abusive situation, and is an essential element of violence prevention.

Drinking and idleness were perceived as the primary causes of violence, and many emphasized the importance of sensitizing boys and men to drink less and providing activities to fill young people’s time. As a 50-year-old male suggested, “First of all, to reduce violence in homes, they can sensitize people to reduce their rate of taking alcohol, because that is the major cause of violence here.... Drink wisely.” Boys in particular emphasized the importance of activities to keep adolescents occupied. A 19-year-old new father stated, “When I am at the field, I play and get so tired. So, I go back home, read a little bit and sleep. The club has kept boys busy in the field instead of drinking alcohol which is good. Most times, if they are occupied they cannot be doing bad things.”

### **Opportunities for change**

Although GBV and the underlying inequitable gender norms that fuel violence are widespread, this research revealed promising pathways to gender norm transformation. Analysis of life histories collected during this study identified opportunities to build on existing awareness, concern and activism related to GBV in Northern Uganda. Examples of girls, boys, men, and women who strive to resolve conflict peacefully emerged; parents who counsel their children rather than beat them, couples who resolve their issues through dialogue, and men who respect their wives’ point of view. Many men and women in all phases of their lives expressed opposition to violence and voiced the desire to move beyond the violent reality they have experienced over the last two decades to construct a more peaceful and productive society.

This moment in history provides a unique opportunity for Acholi and Lango communities to address inequitable gender norms which contribute to violence. Although religious and clan leaders are often assumed to be committed to maintaining the status quo, they hold the power to facilitate cultural transformation. An encouraging result of this research is the number of leaders who recognize the need to reinvigorate their culture by forming children according to cultural traditions which are relevant and adaptive for today's society.

**TABLE 3: Causes of GBV identified by study participants and intervention opportunities and Barriers**

CAUSES	OPPORTUNITIES	BARRIERS
<b>Alcohol abuse</b>	- Recognized as a factor contributing to violence	- Highly prevalent/used to socialize and escape from frustrations
<b>High prevalence of violence</b>	- Awareness of the problem - Many types of violence considered unacceptable - Adolescents less accepting of violence - Desire to protect children - Ongoing efforts to prevent/respond to violence - Interest in sensitization activities - Some individuals oppose beating women and children	- Outside interference not always considered appropriate - Few services available - Closely tied to gender identity and cultural norms
<b>Cultural norms</b>	- Respect and advice giving valued - Clan leaders empowered to intervene - Peaceful resolution valued - Acceptance of evolving norms to reduce violence ( <i>wang-oo</i> , role of advice giving, clans)	- Beating to discipline women and children widely accepted - Interference in domestic affairs not considered appropriate
<b>Gender norms</b>	- Men responsible for protecting their family - Gender norms evolving	- Man considered authority in household - Women marry into husband's clan - Inappropriate for women to question their husbands
<b>Structural issues</b>	- Government and NGO initiatives to support post-conflict reconstruction - Desire to rebuild community post IDP camp	- Poverty - Unemployment - Land disputes - Gender disparities (resources, education, power) - Women do not inherit property

Table 3 presents the causes of GBV identified by study respondents and corresponding barriers and opportunities to address them. The primary factors associated with GBV according to study participants were cultural and gender norms, drinking, and structural issues such as poverty, unemployment, and war. Intervention opportunities emerging from the research include activities to raise awareness of violence and the contributing role of alcohol, address structural issues, and form more equitable gender norms. Barriers to intervention efforts include ambivalence about the role of outside organizations and reluctance to intervene in private family matters, as well as entrenched gender norms which contribute to widespread acceptance of beating as a form of discipline. Perhaps most challenging to address are structural factors such as land disputes, unemployment, and the rights of women to inherit property.

The role of adults and parents as change agents will be instrumental in achieving lasting change. Advice-giving is paramount in Acholi and Lango culture, and adults take their formative role seriously. A young woman remarked, “It was my parents who always advised me, encouraged me, and from school, the teachers... when you listen, your life might be changed.” Although many traditions, such as the wang-oo (fireside chat) have faded, there is interest in reviving them in order to provide adolescents needed guidance. A 54-year-old man reminisced, “Being close to children is very important and that is why I encourage parents to get close to their children and bring back the culture of an evening fire. We need to shape our children, not by beating them, but by talking to them.”

This research highlighted the potential power of individuals to transform their communities, illustrated by the two examples below. In the first life history excerpt, 18-year-old Paul relates his experiences as a role model and youth advocate.

My family was significantly affected by the war, in which my father and brothers were captured by the rebels. When I finally returned home at the age of 16, I got married. We have a positive relationship and work together to build our home. I spend my weekdays working in the garden and playing board games and football with my friends. On the weekends, I also work in the garden and attend church. Additionally, I am a member of German Agro, a group that comes together to plant produce such as tomatoes and onions. This group allows me to teach younger boys and influence their lives. The greatest influences in my life were my parents and uncle because they taught me, kept me in school and gave me advice. This helped me create a strong future. The strength has helped me in difficult times, such as when I suffered a serious beating. However, I realized that keeping such anger at one’s perpetrator can only bring death. Therefore, I decided to forgive the attacker and move on with my life, because I cannot pay one wrong doing with another. I want to emphasize the importance of providing a good example for children and teaching them how to build strong homes.

Joyce’s story below demonstrates the pivotal role parents can play by modeling non-violent conflict resolution.

I am 34 years old. I was married at the age of 18 and have since been caring for my own children, my stepchildren, and orphans in the community. An orphan myself, I know how it feels to be abandoned, and although individuals in the community tell me to desert the orphans, I will not. When they make mistakes, I do not beat them, but rather talk to them and explain why the action was wrong. My greatest influences were my parents. Like I now do



with my children, my mother would not beat me as a child, but would hold discussions with me. These are the lessons I now pass down to my children. My father also had a significant impact on my life. He introduced me to the concept of non-violent conflict resolution. The day he adopted me, we set ground rules which governed the home. Asking that I listen to him, in exchange for offering me respect, we had no fights in our home. If a dispute arose, my father called me into the room, we discussed the event, he explained the consequences and then we forgave one another and moved on. My hopes for the community are that youth will be taught how to avoid violence.

## **CONCLUSIONS: PROGRAMMING TO PREVENT VIOLENCE**

The acceptability of GBV in study communities is far from universal; the results of this research reveal opportunities to amplify the voices and extend the influence of individuals committed to ending violence. Positive role models such as Joyce and Paul may be able to realize their hopes for an end of violence in their community if they are given the support needed to join with others to spread their examples widely. These results reveal multiple entry points to address GBV including the desire of communities to heal from the effects of conflict and displacement and the conceptualization of an “ideal” man as someone who protects and provides for his family. Strategies to address GBV include awareness raising, structural interventions, services, and law enforcement.

***Awareness raising.*** Efforts to prevent violence must tackle the challenge of transforming gender norms. However, this challenge can only be met successfully with broad community support. It is essential to work with clan leaders to help them comprehensively address domestic violence, a domain where they have legitimate influence. A good starting point would be to work with leaders who already oppose violence, especially clan and religious leaders with vested authority in that sphere. Approaches that encourage reflection on the negative impacts of violence on family and community wellbeing may be more effective than rights-based approaches, given that domestic violence is currently viewed as unacceptable only when it is excessive, uncontrolled, or causes significant physical harm to victim.

Study results identified a number of opportunities to address GBV through existing cultural traditions, including:

1. Harness processes such as modeling, teaching, and advice-giving to reshape gender norms and roles;
2. Rebuild cultural and family structures which support adolescents and socialize them into adult roles;
3. Mobilize communities to reflect on gender and violence through dance gatherings, village wang-ooos and other activities; and
4. Engage religious, elected, and clan leaders in reflection and action to strengthen their capacity to promote and sustain behavior change.

***Structural interventions.*** Gender disparities in educational opportunities and property rights shape gender norms associated with violence. Interventions must address issues such as girls’ education, women’s access to resources, poverty, land rights, and unemployment, in addition to underlying gender norms. This research also suggests that alcohol abuse is a significant driver of GBV in Northern Uganda and must be addressed.

***Services and law enforcement.*** Healthcare providers could be trained to incorporate violence prevention and treatment into their services (e.g. counseling, post-exposure prophylaxis), given that there are few support services for survivors. Police and clan leaders need training to streamline access to treatment. It is also important to strengthen established enforcement institutions which address domestic violence. In fact, police training was seen by study participants as an important violence prevention strategy.

The results reported here have been translated into approaches designed to resonate positively with communities in Northern Uganda. The researchers, in collaboration with Save the Children and Pathfinder International staff, designed tailored yet complementary interventions that target adolescents at critical moments of passage from childhood to adulthood, and aim to create an environment that supports the elimination of GBV. These interventions, implemented as part of the GREAT project, address a continuum of violence ranging from teasing and bullying to rape. GREAT is anchored on a serial radio drama that poses challenging dilemmas through intergenerational stories which generate reflection and dialogue to bring about more equitable gender attitudes, decrease tolerance of all kinds of violence, encourage nonviolent conflict resolution, and model positive child discipline practices. The storyline incorporates key research results, such as the value of rebuilding community and revitalizing culture in a more gender-equitable way. It is accompanied by a toolkit of scalable products designed to be rolled out by community members through existing platforms such as child clubs, village savings and loans, farmer's associations and youth groups. Use of the products enable groups to reflect and dialogue on the radio drama plot, extrapolate the themes to their own life experiences, and move into action. The momentum generated by the radio drama and small group reflection will be reinforced by collaboration with community, religious, and clan leaders. Cutting across these activities, GREAT will recognize and celebrate people who demonstrate commitment to gender equitable behaviors and ensure linkages with health services.

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

Shannon Speed

University of Texas at Austin

## **Abstract**

This article explores conceptualizations of gender violence through the experience of indigenous women migrants. Departing from three oral histories that reflect the myriad forms of violence these women face, I apply an intersectional analysis to demonstrate the interrelated and mutually-constitutive nature of that violence. I argue that conceptualizations of a “continuum of gender violence,” while beneficially addressing the public private divide, cannot fully take into account the interrelated nature of different forms of violence. I suggest that gender violence might be better understood as a mosaic, in which in which distinct forms are assembled and the overall picture created by their juxtaposition can only be fully comprehended by contemplating them all together. This shifts our thinking away from linear conceptualizations by emphasizing that each individual shard, like each form of oppression or violence, is always part of a much larger social assemblage that defines its meaning. Moving away from linear models not only helps us to better understand the dynamic of gender violence, but maintains all social actors as part of the analysis.

## **Biography**

Shannon Speed (Chickasaw) is an Associate Professor of Anthropology and the Director of Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) at the University of Texas at Austin. She has worked for the last two decades in Mexico, and her research and teaching interests include indigenous politics, human rights, neoliberalism, gender, indigenous migration, and activist research. She has published five books and edited volumes, including *Rights in Rebellion: Human Rights and Indigenous Struggle in Chiapas* (Stanford 2007), *Human Rights in the Maya Region: Global Politics, Moral Engagements, and Cultural Contentions* (Duke 2008), and *Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas* (University of Texas 2006). Her current research is with indigenous women migrants in Central Texas, and she has a book in progress entitled, *States of Violence: Indigenous Women Migrants and Human Rights in the Era of Neoliberal Multicriminalism*.



## **A DREADFUL MOSAIC: RETHINKING GENDER VIOLENCE THROUGH THE LIVES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN MIGRANTS**

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 interpellation<sup>1</sup> 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 (Cockburn 2004, Moser 2001, 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?<sup>2</sup> 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 (Bourgois 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: <sup>3</sup>**

#### **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 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 violatable.

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 multicriminal 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 feminicide. 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 feminicide (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 feminicide analyses fail to incorporate race and class, a few usefully forefront them, particularly class (Olivera 2009, Weissman 2009). Most importantly, scholars highlight the 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 criminals<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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 to 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 aspects, 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 actor's "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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> “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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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\\_correcctio.html/](http://www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/blotter/entries/2011/09/07/former_supervisor_at_correcctio.html/)

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