

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Violence against Women and Girls, Discrimination, and Women's Responses

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This essay reviews the following works:

Women's Place in the Andes: Engaging Decolonial Feminist Anthropology. By Florence E. Babb. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018. Pp. x + 304. \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520298170.

Más allá de la reparación: Protagonismo de mujeres mayas en las secuelas del daño genocida. By Alison Crosby and Brinton Lykes. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 2019. Pp. 335. Q 155. paper.

Writing Terror on the Bodies of Women: Media Coverage of Violence against Women in Guatemala. By Sarah England. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018. Pp. v + 434. \$144.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781498530798.

The Force of Witness: Contra Feminicide. By Rosa-Linda Fregoso. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023. Pp. x + 238. \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9781478019817.

Refusing Death: Immigrant Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice in LA. By Nadia Y. Kim. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 384. \$28.00 paper. ISBN: 9781503628175.

Vernacular Sovereignties: Indigenous Women Challenging World Politics. By Manuela Lavinás Picq. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018. Pp. xviii + 240. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780816540198.

Routledge Handbook of Law and Society in Latin America. Edited by Rachel Sieder, Karina Ansolabehere, and Tatiana Alfonso. New York: Routledge, 2019. Pp. xviii + 494. \$52.95 paper. ISBN: 9781032092461.

Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State. By Shannon Speed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. Pp. 176. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9781469653129.

The field of gendered violence, or violence against women and girls (VAWG), and movements to eradicate it has received widespread attention throughout the Americas. Feminicide, the killing of women with impunity, is an epidemic in Latin America.

Femicide implicates both individual and state perpetrators, encompassing systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence. It is a broader term than *femicide* in that it is “rooted in political, economic, cultural, and social inequalities, including the equally significant power relations based on class, race, and racial hierarchies.”¹ Here I use *femicide* unless I am citing specific laws that use the term *femicide*.

In 2021, at least 4,473 women were victims of femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean.² A majority of Latin American and Caribbean countries have passed laws making femicide a separate crime from homicide, with mandatory lengthy prison sentences as a form of deterrence. Thirteen of the countries that criminalize femicide also have comprehensive laws against violence. Despite the existence of these laws and in some countries, specialized court systems to adjudicate VAWG, justice remains elusive for many. Indeed, Rachel Nolan writes in a 2022 *LARR* review of books on reproductive justice that “women from all backgrounds have insufficient access to justice when they suffer from violence.”³ In Guatemala, for example, although there were almost 50,000 reports of violence against women (physical, psychological, and economic), 8,518 of rape, and 552 of femicide in 2022, only about 2 percent of those complaints make it into and through the specialized justice system.⁴ Eleven Latin American countries registered a rate equal to or greater than 1 victim of femicide or femicide per 100,000 women, including Guatemala. Of these countries “the highest rates of femicide or femicide were registered in Honduras (4.6 cases per 100,000 women), the Dominican Republic (2.7 cases per 100,000 women), and El Salvador (2.4 cases per 100,000 women).”⁵ Why, then, do VAWG and femicide continue at such a high rate in Latin America and the Caribbean, and what can be done about it? What are some of the current and historical structural conditions linked to femicide and VAWG in Latin America? What kinds of creative solutions are women and their allies using to collectively confront femicide and VAWG?

This group of books moves the field forward by addressing the historical complexity of the causes of VAWG and wider gender discrimination and suggesting how intersecting violences and inequalities act on women, men, trans people, and nonbinary people, their communities, and wider social relationships. Addressing VAWG in Latin America requires a broad framework that links gendered historical structures of colonialism, racism, discrimination, and economic inequality to the impunity toward gendered violence encountered today, despite significant progress in systems of justice. These books offer concrete lessons in the strategies women use collectively and individually to survive, highlighting the slower, quieter, multipronged and longer-term ways that survivance, collective care, and persistence allow women to protect, heal, and ultimately envision their futures. By implicitly connecting women’s bodies to the wider spaces they live and move in, these works point to “the weaving together . . . of body, land, and feminisms.”⁶

¹ Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 12.

² Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, “ECLAC: At Least 4,473 Women Were Victims of Femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2021” (press release), November 24, 2022, <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-least-4473-women-were-victims-femicide-latin-america-and-caribbean-2021>.

³ Rachel Nolan, “Reproductive Justice in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 57 (2022): 957.

⁴ Observatorio de la Mujeres, Ministerio Público, Guatemala, Portal Estadístico 2022, <https://observatorio.mp.gob.gt/portal-estadistico/>.

⁵ La Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (Cepal), Observatorio de Igualdad de Género de América Latina y el Caribe, 2021, <https://oig.cepal.org/es/indicadores/femicidio>.

⁶ See Gabriela Valdivia, “Of Extractivist Wounds and Healing in the Americas,” *Latin American Research Review* 57 (2022): 963.

The worldviews and epistemologies of Indigenous women and women of color and decolonial feminisms are the common frames that tie together these works. Importantly, the books reviewed here update the field of decolonial feminist approaches and the study of VAWG by providing road maps for how to carry out deeply collaborative, self-reflexive, caring, and creative forms of scholarship that engage with the challenges of accompanying women who are survivors of violence, who are activists, and who insist on confronting the state.

Approaches to studying gendered violence and inequality with Indigenous women

Four of these books engage with the struggles and agency of Indigenous women, in Peru (Babb), Ecuador (Picq), Guatemala (Crosby and Lykes), and as Central American and Mexican migrants moving through Mexico into the United States (Speed). In each case, historical analysis requires engagement with the ongoing structures of colonialism, legacies of overt discrimination, and often extreme violence directed at Indigenous women. Shannon Speed uses the historical frame of settler colonialism from US, Australian, and Canadian Native studies and applies it to Latin America. While acknowledging that settler colonialism worked somewhat differently in Latin America than elsewhere, her analysis allows us to see how Indigenous peoples have been subject to the settler colonial logics of elimination and dispossession through time since the Spanish arrived in Latin America. Different settler-colonial structures have resulted in overlapping and disjunctive projects in different parts of Latin America.

Others have focused on a decolonial approach to studying Indigenous women. As Adriana Chira noted in her analysis of *On Decoloniality*, by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, the project of decoloniality has to do with “the afterlives of colonialism into the present and . . . conceiv[ing] of ways to upend them.”⁷ Efforts to decolonize research involve becoming aware of assumed abstract universals associated with modernity and European colonialism. Florence Babb’s *Women’s Place in the Andes* traces the intellectual and policy challenges that Indigenous women face and interrogates the ways that assumptions of gender complementarity (whereby households could be viewed as two-headed with male-female couples sharing power and responsibility) might coexist with gender inequalities and domestic violence. In the process, she seeks to foreground a decolonial feminist approach. She asks in her introduction, “Could a decolonial feminist view of complementarity bring greater recognition to the significant place of women in household economies based on an ethics of interdependence and reciprocity, as well as address gendered violence and exclusion where it occurs?” (12). Babb’s discussion of fifty years of debates regarding the status, gender roles, discrimination, and exclusions experienced by Andean women suggests the importance of being open to changing and hybrid models. Citing the longtime Peruvian urban feminist Virginia Vargas at the 2014 Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro held in Lima and the first Continental Summit of Indigenous Women held in Puno in 2009, Babb notes that both events addressed many of the same concerns: interculturality and sustainability, bodies and territories, and diverse feminisms that recognize colonial legacies and pluricultural cosmovisions. Babb suggests that these convergences offer hope for collaboration between feminist and Indigenous women’s movements.

Babb’s careful interrogation of her own and other people’s frameworks that embrace the Western dualisms often associated with coloniality (private-public, traditional-

⁷ Adriana Chira, “Race, Coloniality, and the Writing of Black and Indigenous Histories,” *Latin American Research Review* 58, no. 2 (2022): 10.

modern, informal-formal, and production-reproduction) and the incorporation of race, ethnicity, and gender into feminist analysis provides grounding for further developments in decolonial feminist and intersectional theorizing in Latin America. In *Women's Place in the Andes*, Babb includes detailed commentaries to provide context for the chapters included that cover some of her published work from 1985 to 2017. Indigenous and Black women from nonfeminist social movements, as documented by Babb, enrich dialogues and debates in venues ranging from nongovernmental and civil society organizations to international feminist *encuentros*. Babb also writes about Andean women as savvy social and economic actors who, for example as marketers, “traded on their gender and cultural identity in the tourist market” (149), suggesting how women work colonial tropes to their advantage. Engaging with both decolonial and intersectional feminisms, Babb suggests the value in both “historical perspectives on how gender and racial inequalities emerged (or deepened over time)” (154)—considering the work of María Lugones and intersectionality or “braided inequalities,” as has been theorized in the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw.⁸

Deeply entrenched structures of racism, white or Spanish supremacy, nationalist narratives hitched to *mestizaje* and Ladinoization, and gender and racial hierarchies within these have permeated the social, political, educational, and legal structures of Latin America through time and are intimately linked to contemporary patterns of VAWG and feminicide. When Indigenous and other women of color succeed in penetrating such systems, their efforts may be unseen. Manuela Lavinás Picq documents one such case in Ecuador: the advocacy of the Red de Mujeres Kichwas de Chimborazo led to the adoption of gender clauses in Indigenous rights protections in Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution, which required “women’s participation with decision-making power” in the development of collective rights and the administration of justice and territory (127). As the author points out, this was the first time in the world that a justice system respected gender parity in the administration of justice. But this hard-won victory fought by Indigenous women who largely acted alone was not celebrated. It was invisible. Picq tells the story of how Kichwa women learned the ins and outs of national and international rights including those from the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) agreement adopted by the United Nations on women’s rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), an expansion of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization that guarantees Indigenous rights to self-determination through territorial sovereignty, political participation, and prior consultation, signed by many Latin American governments. Indigenous women have been engaged in transnational Indigenous activism in Latin America for some time, suggesting new ways of conceptualizing connections outside of the frameworks of nation states and rooted in Indigenous practices of solidarity and allyship.

Picq’s case study of Indigenous women who move between international, national, and Indigenous justice systems to construct vernacular sovereignty—using the legal anthropology scholar Sally Merry’s concept of the vernacularization of rights from global to local forms—shines a light on the experiences of many Indigenous and other social movements in Latin America that move between different governance and justice systems and redefine global concepts. As Picq concludes, “Kichwa women pursue a multi-directional politics that tackle coercive practices in both state and Indigenous politics and in the process successfully provincialize the state” and affirm nonexclusive forms of sovereignty (178–179). Her analysis is important in broadening concepts of Indigenous

⁸ María Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise* 2 (Spring 2008), <https://globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/projects/wko-gender>; María Lugones, “Towards a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742–759; Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–167.

sovereignty to include multiple models and acknowledge ways of constricting sovereignty within and outside of states through the creation of legal accountability among Indigenous law, international human rights norms, and national law.

The study of law and society in Latin America

Interlegalities, overlapping forms of justice, gaps between written encoded law and law in action, forms of legal mobilization, feminist legal theory, race and the law, gender and the law, transitional justice, and violence and the law are some of the themes in the *Routledge Handbook of Law and Society in Latin America*, edited by Rachel Sieder, Karina Ansolabehere, and Tatiana Alfonso that resonate with the study of VAWG and gender inequalities. But this book does much more. The articles emphasize Latin America as a place of interest, a site for the production for law and society studies and offering inspiring case studies of the law in action. As the editors note, there is a wide diversity of legal, social, and political trajectories in the region and many of the features of Latin American law are now global. The shared historical context joining the region includes “new constitutional realities, legal pluralism, spiraling violence, and the rise in the importance of human rights narratives, together with the consolidation of an increasingly professionalized and internationally connected socio-legal academy with Latin America” (2). Questions of the convergences between legality and illegality, the ways processes of state formation might be related to persistent violations of human rights and ongoing violence in the context of ever-increasing race, gender, and class inequalities, the ways that law and legal intuitions might either change or exacerbate these patterns, and whether newer constitutional rights can be enforced and lead to social transformation and greater equality, crosscut the chapters.

Part 1 of the book, “Law, Politics, and Society,” explores issues of Latin America’s constitutionalism (Roberto Gargarella), the state and the law (Lisa Hilbink and Janice Gallagher), legal pluralism, legality and illegality (Rachel Sieder), culture of non-compliance (Mauricio García-Villegas), violence as a central problem of the law (Julia Lemaitre), the technical and material dimensions of legal and bureaucratic knowledge (Leticia Barrera and Sergio Latorre), feminist legal theory (Isabel Jaramillo), race and law (Tanya Hernández), and law and development (Pedro Fortes), and Law and the State (Carlos Rivera Lugo). Part 2, “New Constitutional Models and Institutional Design,” includes themes of judicial politics (Jan González-Bertomeu), innovations in constitutional law (Francisca Pou), the study of public prosecutors (Verónica Michel), independence and efficiency in human rights ombudsmen (Fredrik Uggla), prison system detention and internal governance (Fiona Macaulay), police reform (Lucía Dammert), the legal profession and judicial reform (Manuel Gómez), domestic judicial forms and human rights (Karina Ansolabehere), and deglobalization and its impact on human rights regimes (Alexandre Huneeus).

Part 3, “Law and Social Movements,” centers on law and social movements and offers chapters on how social grievances and rights claims are transformed into legal claims and shape the law (Bruce Wilson and Camila Gianella), a case study of LGBTQI rights in Argentina (Laura Saldivia Menajovsky), advances and obstacles for reproductive rights and stopping domestic violence in Brazil (Marta Machado de Assis, Ana Luiza Villela de Viana Bandiera, and Fernanda Matsuda), and transitional justice studies (Elena Martínez Barahona and Marta Liliana Gutiérrez). Part 4 “Emergent Topics,” homes in on emerging topics such as the blurry relationship between legality and illegality, violence and impunity, and hyperlegality. Chapters include themes of urban regulation as negotiated between populations and authorities (Rodrigo Meneses), different approaches to property law in social and economic context (Tatiana Alfonso); corruption and organized crime

in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala (Linn Hammergren); the role of militaries in security affairs (Julio Ríos-Figueroa); and punitive enforcement of drug laws, militarization, and the social costs of drug policy (Alejandro Madrazos and Catalina Pérez Correa).

The handbook offers an impressive update to the study of law and society. Here I highlight insights from a few chapters that directly contribute to the overall theme of this essay, VAWG and wider gender discrimination in Latin America. Rachel Sieder's chapter explores Indigenous law and plural forms of governance and sovereignties that characterize many Latin American countries where three decades of multicultural legal reforms have resulted in Black and Indigenous peoples making significant gains in rights and protections. Such gains have often been limited by a framework of multicultural neoliberalism adopted by Latin American states that have divested from public goods and services and privatized public institutions and resources while simultaneously recognizing limited cultural rights. One of Sieder's important observations is how multicultural reforms to Latin American constitutions that provide limited possibilities for Indigenous sovereignty have yielded other openings for questioning dominant logics of extractivism as well as for reparations and affirmative action, such as racially targeted policies as in Colombia and Brazil, as suggested in Tanya Kateri Hernández's chapter "Law and Race in Latin America."

Isabel Cristina Jaramillo Sierra's chapter "Latin American Feminist Legal Theory" notes that feminist legal scholars in the region have not yet developed significant work about Black and Indigenous women that transcends many of the legal categories tied to legal liberalism. She discusses the influence of the Costa Rican legal scholar Alda Facio, confining her discussion of the importance of Facio's work to theoretical analyses of legal systems. Facio's influence has expanded through the incorporation of her ideas into legal protocols in seventeen countries that criminalize femicide. But murders of trans women are not contemplated as femicide in most countries, which suggests the continued transphobia that characterizes many Latin American legal regimes.

Laura Saldivia Menajovsky's chapter, "Society, the State, and Recognition of the Right to a Self-Perceived Gender Identity," traces the story of how Argentina came to be the first country in the world to recognize the right to a self-perceived gender identity. In many parts of the world, experts such as doctors, judges, and administrative authorities determine a person's true gender. Argentina also stands out as among the first countries to recognize marriage equality for LGBT people. Menajovsky's chapter offers insights into the ways that the relationships of gender, the material body, and body modification are shifting, moving away from ideas of sex and gender that equate genitals with gender. The law facilitates access to treatments that trans people deem essential to the implementation of their right to a gender identity they choose. This right is also codified in the law as a human right, thus requiring all who are obligated to defend human rights at local, regional, and national levels to defend this right as well. Following Argentina's law, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico City and eighteen Mexican states, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Bolivia have passed laws allowing changes to gender identities without conditions.⁹

When gender binaries, racism, and misogyny prevail: The law versus reality

Changes to how gender is conceptualized under the law and recognition of same-sex marriage in some Latin American countries represent a sea change in LGBTQI+ human

⁹ Monica Malta, Reynaldo Cardoso, Luiz Montenegro, Jaqueline Gomes de Jesus, Michele Seixas, Bruna Benevides, Maria das Dores Silva, Sara LeGrand, and Kathryn Whetten, "Sexual and Gender Minorities Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Multi-Country Evaluation," *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 19 (2019): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s1291401902173>.

rights. At the same time, laws recognizing different forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) currently on the books in seventeen Latin American countries are progressive but reinscribe gender binaries. And despite their existence, the laws are unable to protect a vast majority of women and girls who survive different forms of violence against them in the past and present or have died.

Four of the books included in this review, *Beyond Repair* (Crosby and Lykes), *Writing Terror on the Bodies of Women* (England), *The Force of Witness* (Fregoso), and *Incarcerated Stories* (Speed), help illuminate the gap between laws on the books and the femicide and violence that women and girls, particularly Indigenous women, confront in Central America, in Mexico, and as migrants fleeing across Mexico to the United States. Together, these books offer a view of the structural causes of that violence and also focus on the ways that particular women and groups of women heroically confront that violence by surviving and organizing. They reposition violence against women not as a private matter confined to domestic violence but as public violence linked to states, public actors, and institutions.

Rosa-Linda Fregoso highlights the courage, persistence, and tenacity of the collective organizing that women are engaging in to resist femicidal violence. Centering the role of different forms of witnessing through film, art, performance, journalism, and conventional forms of protest, *The Force of Witness* offers a powerful lens on the ways that femicide shatters lives and communities and inspires action. Fregoso applies her definition of femicide not only to cis-gendered women but also to trans and nonbinary people, clearly linking violence to state policies that expose people to multiple conditions of precarity framed by “the entanglement of racism, transphobia, heterosexism, colonialism and class bias” (75).

Fregoso’s book elevates the power of images as forms of witness: Frida Kahlo’s painting titled *A Few Small Nips*, of a man with a knife standing over the body of a woman on a blood-soaked bed (“But I only gave a few small nips. It wasn’t twenty stabs, Mister Judge”) (16); Diane Kahlo’s *Wall of Memories*, with portraits, bejeweled skeletons, and a virgin; Lourdes Portillo’s film *Señorita extraviada*, a documentary investigating the murder and disappearance of hundreds of girls and women in Ciudad Juárez. Each chapter interlude highlights a different artist, such as the work of Diane Kahlo, *ReDressing Injustice* designed by Irene Simmons and centered on hundreds of ornamented dresses hanging from pink crosses to represent femicides and disappearances in Juárez, and Verónica Leiton’s *Flor de arena* sculpture located on the land where the remains of eight women and girls were discovered in Juárez in 2003. Fregoso pushes readers to feel the poetics of transformation in visual art and film as viewers become “witnesses who must now bear part of the burden of responding to femicidal atrocities and demanding justice” (114).

Protective accompaniment as an ethical force and form of witnessing is the subject of another chapter highlighting Fregoso’s and others’ accompaniment for over a year of the activist Paula Flores and other mothers in monthly protest marches in front of Mexican government buildings. During the protests they installed crosses, cardboard figures, altars, dresses, photographs, and a large cross reading *Justicia* to reclaim public space, remember the victims, and hold the government accountable. As Fregoso emphasizes throughout the book, such reclamations also serve as sites of communal consciousness and healing. Chapter 5 focuses on a hearing on femicide and gender violence of the Permanent People’s Tribunal (PPT), an international opinion court to investigate and adjudicate state crimes against humanity. Terrifying cases of kidnapping, disappearance, femicide, homicide, massacres, and other kinds of violence leave Fregoso, who served as a judge, wondering if “agents of the state or organized crime groups were perpetrating crimes against humanity” (152). At times agents of the state just stood by as massacres happened. The tribunal condemned the Mexican government for femicides and gendered violence and for not guaranteeing the life, dignity, work, and freedom of women.

Fregoso's last chapter grew out of her work as an expert witness for asylum cases for survivors of gendered violence in US immigration courts and expansively questions a series of anti-immigrant and anti-asylee policies, some of which have been discontinued under Biden but many of which remain in place. She interrogates the category of refugee as a person who is a vulnerable victim lacking agency who should be able to seek sanctuary and shelter in another country—at least according to the 1951 Convention Related to the Status of Refugees. Today refugees are treated as undeserving fugitives. Fugitive practices of refusal and epistemic disobedience—like the organized mother protesting feminicide—may be a path to transformation.

In contrast to Fregoso's focus on transformational forms of witnessing and embodied forms of resistance, Sarah England's *Writing Terror on the Bodies of Women* focuses on the role that the Guatemalan media plays in the persistence of cultural ideologies that normalize VAWG in all levels of society and in all institutions, including the justice system. Her research is an important contribution to partially answering the question of why VAWG persists. She does this through a rich analysis of news reports of women who have been murdered, attacked, and beaten as well as of feminist attempts to counter this media with different forms of popular culture that place blame on machismo, patriarchy, and the state.

England engages in an analysis of the different frames used by the media to explain why women are the objects of different forms of violence. She analyzes more than 1,500 murder reports from newspapers from the period 2009–2014. The newspapers included in her analysis of femicide include *Nuestro Diario*, with some analysis from *Prensa Libre* for 2009–2010. These reports have a heavy focus on the different kinds of violence done to women's bodies and suggest that the murders are a part of generalized violence and insecurity with no context. The perpetrators remain largely invisible. She finds that many of the female murder victims are framed as either innocent or guilty victims (i.e., deserving or undeserving) of gangs, organized crime, or other undesirables. The media portray murdered women as easy targets, as cannon fodder manipulated to commit illicit acts who get caught in the crossfire, as killed as part of a message, or as having been headed down the wrong path linked to gangs. Some of these media frames suggest that women brought their own deaths upon themselves because of “bad” choices they made (236–237).

The second set of media frames England uses represents VAWG as the result of different kinds of domestic violence perpetrated by husbands, boyfriends, or ex-partners. These include men exerting control or punishing women for transgressions including refusing to obey, attempting to leave the relationship, or having new lovers. The reports she examines for this framework do little to explain larger patterns of VAWG or the social, economic, and historical context behind individual incidents.

A third media frame she invokes blames cultures of machismo and patriarchy as causes of violence. Her data for this last media frame includes hundreds of articles from *Nuestro Diario*, *Prensa Libre*, and *La Hora* that report on femicide and violence, often including interviews with members of women's organizations. These articles tend to be more critical of the state through pointing out problems throughout the justice system and issues of impunity. England concludes, after her in-depth analysis, that despite Guatemala's antifemicide and antiviolenence laws, not much has changed since the 1980s: “gendered terrorism is part and parcel of the system of power and hierarchy in Guatemala . . . and will persist until the whole system of impunity has been dismantled” (386).

Reframing women as protagonists and combatting severe gendered violence

Alison Crosby and Brynton Lykes begin their discussion of violence against Indigenous women from below. Starting from the experiences of Mayan women who were the targets

of “racialized gendered harm, including sexual harm as a part of the genocidal violence perpetrated by the Guatemalan state from 1960–1996” (14), the authors document the struggles for redress of fifty-three Mayan women, including twenty-one Q’eqchi’ protagonists in the Sepur Zarco case, where two former military commanders were found guilty of crimes against humanity, including sexual violence and domestic and sexual slavery in 2016; fourteen Kaqchikel women from the department of Chimaltenango who fled multiple forms of violence, and nineteen Mam Chuj, and Popti women from the department of Huehuetenango who fled after massacres in nearby communities, some of whom suffered rape and violence at the hands of both Guatemalan soldiers and guerilla fighters. The Sepur Zarco case centers on women who were living in and around a military post built in 1982 as a recreational center for Guatemalan soldiers in the small Indigenous community of Sepur Zarco, located in the municipality of El Estor in the Department of Izabal, Guatemala.

Crosby’s and Lykes’s use of the term *protagonists* is deliberate, chosen to work against representations of women as victims: “They narrated new, mobile embodied meanings of ‘the Mayan woman,’ repositioning themselves at the interstices of multiple communities and through their participation in actions seeking redress for harm suffered” (12). Protagonism is linked to the way that knowledge is constructed through a “multiplicity of actors who co-construct meanings and transformative possibilities” in specific contexts (12). Their approach connects with a variety of concepts in legal and cultural anthropology, emphasizing the role of intermediaries (including themselves), interpreters, feminists, lawyers, psychologists, and researchers, and processes of vernacularization of human rights discourses (see the earlier discussion of Picq’s work). The importance of emotional connection and the work of accompaniment and allyship in these authors’ book resonates with Fregoso’s discussion of “accompaniment as an ethical force of witnessing” (121).

Crosby and Lykes also explore how subjectivity is shaped by the micro- and macroentanglements of transnational networks of people and power. “Soy un milagro, porque sobreviví” (I’m a miracle, because I survived), states one of the Q’eqchi’ protagonists (17). Surviving and being part of a collective miracle defines the space between the living and the dead that the protagonists inhabit, and their experiences are linked to embodied memories. Wanting to avoid the “spectacles of suffering” (147), Crosby and Lykes (as well as Speed), wrote the avoidance of stories of violence and harm into their informed consent forms and as part of the conditions of participation in their research. They drew on feminist participatory action research and their research techniques included participatory workshops, drawing, body movement, storytelling, dramatization, and Mayan beliefs and practices. Crosby and Lykes carefully consider their own positions as white, feminist coresearchers from the Global North throughout the book.

Crosby and Lykes organize their book chapters around different dimensions of protagonism: documenting protagonism through inviting women to draw their experiences before and after they became part of an organized group; recounting protagonism through an analysis of women’s participation in the Tribunal of Conscience for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence during the Armed Conflict in Guatemala in 2010, which allowed protagonists to testify about their experiences of violence and laid the groundwork for more formal prosecutions in Guatemalan courts; judicializing protagonism through analysis and documentation of the fourteen Q’eqchi’ protagonists’ testimonies and that of others in the Sepur Zarco court case; and repairing protagonism through looking at what reparations mean for Mayan women and what the everyday work of repair entails by exploring what people feel are adequate amends and the acts or objects involved in making amends. Reparation demands for the Sepur Zarco case include access to land, capital, housing, health care, and guarantees of no violence for future generations.

Part of the book also analyzes the testimonies of Q'eqchi' men who supported the women who testified in Sepur Zarco court case. The men's words offer insights into multiple dimensions of loss, including of their masculine and Indigenous authority and of their wives, children, and other family members. The inclusion of men's testimonies, including of one former Indigenous soldier, is an important element of their analysis. The basis of conflict for the harm wrought upon the men and women of Sepur Zarco was the community's ongoing land petitions to regain lost territories. Men who were the husbands of the Q'eqchi women plaintiffs and other disappeared men were confirmed to be named in the records of the National Institute for Agrarian Transformation (INTA, Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agraria).

Shannon Speed's *Incarcerated Stories* focuses on the structural and historical dimensions of the violences that mark the lives of Indigenous women migrants from Mexico and Central America, but at the same time, she portrays Indigenous women as strong protagonists by bringing readers directly into their stories. Speed's book takes readers on a journey beginning with the intersectional violence women experience before they begin their migrations to the United States. The book is centered on women with whom she interacted while providing accompaniment to migrants detained at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center (a detention center run by a private prison corporation now known as CoreCivic) and to monitor human rights conditions there. Speed quickly observed that these incarcerated women wanted to tell their stories and that doing so repositioned their sense of themselves: "I came to understand that in many senses, their power to control their own lives had been taken from them repeatedly through acts of violence, and that telling their stories allowed them to recover that past" (7). These stories are portals to understanding processes of settler colonialism and the embodied experiences of the women to whom Speed listened. Their stories are also road maps for understanding how interpersonal, family, and domestic violence, as well as criminal and state violence, are mutually constituted.

Speed suggests that, historically, the settler logics of colonial states and then independent liberal and neoliberal states have produced the multiple vulnerabilities Indigenous women migrants experience through interrelated forms of violence. Her concept of neoliberal multicriminalism links neoliberal settler states to illegal markets and organized crime. She describes how the US, Mexican, Guatemalan, and Honduran states together generate the context for impunity and violation of national and international laws and rights that result in murder, femicide, and different forms of gendered violence that migrant women bear in their bodies and stories. The women's stories describe different structures of caging and incarceration in their families, relationships, communities, in transit on trains, on foot, in shelters, and then finally in places and processes of detention and deportation in the United States. They confront these structures day after day.

Speed takes readers through the different spaces and experiences Indigenous women occupy on their journeys to seek a life free of violence. For example, Marisol from Ixcán, Guatemala, and Estrella from San Marcos, Guatemala, share how they fled multiple forms of violence, including severe beatings and rape, how they experienced further violence in Mexico from gangs, and how they then turned themselves into the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Their stories illuminate the ways that all forms of violence are connected and mutually constitutive.

Chapter 4, on incarceration in US detention facilities, is the heart of Speed's book. By centering the role of US immigration and detention policies and systems, she completes the loop, linking together the US and Central American states. Her ethnographic work is based in three of these carceral spaces, which often have misleading names such as "residential facilities." The hope for safety and support articulated by women seeking asylum was quickly shattered when they were detained with their children in Hutto and

other detention facilities. Hutto has been the subject of two federal investigations for sexual abuse with a former guard pleading guilty to sexually assaulting detained women. The physical and mental health of women and children detained in such facilities deteriorates rapidly. Prolonged detention, miserable conditions, and lack of medical attention has led women to act. In 2015, dozens of women participated in a hunger strike at the Karnes County Residential Center. Speed documents how women were retaliated against for their roles in the hunger strike. Given everything that women and children have endured to arrive to “safety,” the conditions of detention and then deportation for some shatter any illusion of relief and become one more phase of a horrible journey.

Indigenous women are even more vulnerable in such conditions, as information is communicated in Spanish, a language some do not speak fluently, and most do not even know how to get a credible fear hearing, which is the first step on the road to asylum. Indigenous women learn from one another, support one another, and organize even when incarcerated. Speed analyzes US immigration and detention policy as a tool for the United States to control and manage undesirable populations. The creation of perpetually marginalized populations has been and continues to be necessary for the interlinked economies of the United States, Central American countries, and Mexico.

Nadia Kim’s ethnography *Refusing Death* continues Speed’s analysis by looking at how Latinx and Asian immigrants settled in the seaport-industrial belt of South Bay in Los Angeles and Long Beach are being killed and harmed by high levels of pollution from oil refineries, freeways, and port traffic. While Los Angeles is the dream for many who are fleeing violence, economic hardship, and climate disasters elsewhere, it turns out that this corner of “La-La Land” (a reference to the Academy Award-winning film) is more of a nightmare, as Kim documents.

Kim calls for a transcorporeal perspective, exploring how bodies and environments interact. In her analysis of Asian and Latina immigrant women, she documents how they forge at once an embodied, ecological, and affective engagement with nature and the built environment. She draws on Kari Norgaard’s and Ron Reed’s research on the Karuk Native people of Northern California, which centers the critical relationship between nature and emotions, putting people and territories into one frame.¹⁰

The Los Angeles activists Kim documents want to dramatically decrease the amount of toxins that enter their lungs daily by pushing regulators to enforce existing regulations. They want to prevent the expansion of a freeway that would exacerbate asthma, cancer, and death by greatly increasing the number of eighteen-wheelers passing by every day (21). Her interviews with immigrant women are centered through collaborations with the People’s Community Organization for Reform and Environment (CORE or PCORE), which was founded and staffed by Filipino/a Americans and serves them and other groups in the city of Carson; the Long Beach Alliance for Children and Asthma (LBACA), primarily serving Latino/as; and Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), serving Latino/as and other communities of color in Huntington Park and other surrounding cities. Kim also worked with three other Latinx-serving organizations.

Pollution and sickness are carried in people’s bodies. Embodied memories of damaged eyes from refinery pollution, allergies, asthma, coughing, and difficulty breathing are all linked to physical manifestations of pollution: blackened windows on houses, sticky dust, and black skies. “Street science” (128), cultivated through embodied conditions and collective knowledge, offers alternatives to freeway expansion such as pedestrian and

¹⁰ Kari M. Norgaard and Ron Reed, “Emotional Impacts of Environmental Decline: What Can Native Cosmologies Teach Sociology about Emotions and Environmental Justice?,” *Theory and Society* 46 (2017): 463–495. See also Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020). See also Valdivia, “Of Extractivist Wounds and Healing in the Americas.”

bikeways, public transit, river improvements, and expanded open spaces. Lack of mobility and spaces to move in constrain many members of community-based organizations.

The activist women Kim focuses on identify strongly as mothers, and many see their environmental justice work as part of the care they provide for their children and others. Many use stories of the difficulties they face as mothers of children with asthma, autism, or other conditions exacerbated by the toxic environmental conditions they live in to try and connect with city, state, and corporate officials. In workshops on public testimonies, women practice not just what they say but how they say it. There is a kinship between the strategies these women use to emotionally connect with the mostly white, middle-class, and elite men they try to confront in their organizing and that of the mothers and families who demand accountability from the state for the disappearances and feminicides in Juárez. As Kim notes, the Mothers of East Los Angeles in the 1980s waged a campaign to stop local prison construction and an oil pipeline by appealing to the importance of family and community.

The environmental activists Kim accompanies also speak frankly about the men in their lives. Some try to forbid their wives from attending meetings, wanting them to stay at home. Many of the women resist this, and some invite their husbands to come and see what they are doing, converting a few into activists themselves. More typically they communicate with the men in their lives and work with them to slowly change their views of women's activism and see how it benefits their families and communities. The focus that Kim has on the importance of emotion in the politics of environmental justice movements builds on the power of emotional communities created through shared trauma and connection such as those documented by Fregoso and Crosby and Lykes.

Conclusion

Together these books have much to offer to contemporary gender analysis of different forms of violence (femicide, rape, physical, emotional, and economic, and environmental), gender discrimination, and the ways that women as protagonists confront these violences collectively and work to improve their lives and those of others around them. The social scientists accompanying these women and documenting their lives, experiences, and ideas have offered different analytical frames for understanding these forms of violence. What we see when we look at these works together is that explanations need to consider histories of settler and other colonialisms, liberal and neoliberal economics, state policies, crime, and media coverage as well as the coexistence of contradictions such as gender parallelism and gender inequality and intersectional forms of oppression such as racism, white supremacy, patriarchy, class, and differential ethnic and racial identities. Some such as Fregoso suggest the importance of seeking solutions outside of imprisonment that do not further the carceral state. And many emphasize the importance of emotions and the power of protest, accompaniment, and witnessing. These authors' studies of trauma, violence, and women's responses to it in Latin America and in Latinx communities in the United States take us to deeply intimate, painful, and vulnerable places but also to the incredible protagonism, survivance, and persistent hope that life can get better. Listening, paying close attention to women's stories and narratives, and taking seriously their explanations, collective knowledge, and epistemologies is an important place to begin.

More detailed studies of the different contexts VAWG takes place in and more studies of the ways that men and boys are socialized to accept gendered violence and impunity and can serve as actual and potential allies are needed. A focus on violence against nonbinary and transwomen and transgender people can help to illuminate the implicit gender binaries found in laws to protect "women and girls." Drawing transgender studies

frameworks into research on gendered violence and detailed case studies of successful cases of breaking local cycles of violence against women, girls, trans, and nonbinary people will continue to move this field forward.

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