In Our Hands: Community Accountability as Pedagogical Strategy
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don't wait for an angel to come down from the sky
to tell the authorities what they have to do.
You are the hands of god.
—Norma Ledezma Ortega, mother of Paloma Angélica Escobar Ledezma, who disappeared in Ciudad Juárez, March 2, 2002.

we were revolutionaries in the abstract,
not in our daily lives—Antonio Faundez

Foreword

In the fall of 2007, I was a second-year graduate student winding my way through a Master's in Ethnic Studies. I met Clarissa Rojas and quickly adopted her as my mentor, friend, colleague, and thesis-writing guide. Clarissa encouraged me to write with the intention of honoring my antiviolence political commitments. Her mentorship helped me to form, question, and reshape my relationship to and within the antiviolence community. When the spring semester approached and Clarissa offered me the opportunity to co-teach a class on the experiences of Latinas with state and interpersonal violence, I was honored and excited about what we could teach and learn together in a class that asked students to imagine building and living in a world without violence.

The story that follows changed us and our students. It changed us as students, teachers, community members, survivors, antiviolence activists, and friends. It forced us to rethink our views on community accountability, responding to violence, and how to learn and grow through a transformative experience. It taught us all about patience, respect, listening, and transforming anger and shock into action and solutions. It was real, messy, and difficult—but well worth it.

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Years after we co-taught this class, the story still came to mind. In 2010, we presented our work, alongside antiviolence activists Mimi Kim and Andrea Smith, at the Critical Race Studies Symposium at UCLA's School of Law. After so much time had passed, we had to undergo a process of unearthing memories. The work of sharing this story meant sitting down and retelling, reliving, and remembering it. One afternoon, I wrote down everything I could remember about the events that follow, resulting in almost 15 pages of typed notes and remembrances. Some of those reflections fill these pages. Phone conversations, coffee dates, as well as old e-mails and files gave testimony to our community and ensured that this transformative teaching/learning experience would be shared. I encourage readers to imagine themselves there, to become part of the "we," and to build upon our experience to spread a liberatory praxis of responding to and healing trauma within our communities. Also, imagine what we asked our students to do: envision a world without violence ... and what it would take to get us there.—*Katherine Ojeda Stewart*

The following story chose us to tell it. It could have been your story, your classroom, your family, or your community. It is about how we were made to listen to the ways we, as educators and members of a classroom-community, are deeply responsible for teaching survivance and healing, and for practicing the end of violence. We invite you to join us to consider the potential of the university classroom as an example of a space, among many others in our lives, where we may intervene and transform violence through community accountability. This approach marks the university classroom as a community space where phenomena are not only studied, but also actively made; this space is imbued with the possibility of violence and the potential of healing and transformation.

Community Accountability: Doing Something About It!

Our survival depends on being creative.—Gloria Anzaldúa

you see it, you don't like it, you can't
just sit around and complain about it!
you gotta do something about it!—Loira Limbal, Sista II Sista

Halfway through the spring semester of 2007, a student in the Raza Studies course we co-taught at San Francisco State announced that he had committed an act of sexual violence against another student. The class engaged in a profound *diálogo* about sexual violence that led to the pedagogical application of community accountability praxis.[1] Community accountability is the practice of imagining, creating, and applying alternative responses to violence from and within communities. In the United States, three decades of systematic laws criminalizing violence against women have made it "common sense" to respond to intimate violence by "calling the cops" (INCITE, 2004; Rojas, 2006).[2] For many communities, going to the cops is not an option; many have experienced harm at the hands of law enforcement. To

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many women of color, as well as to migrant, queer, trans, and gender nonconforming people of color and their communities, the semiotic resonance between violence and cops echoes as police brutality, sexual violation, deportation, incarceration, and labor exploitation (INCITE, 2004; Díaz-Cotto, 2006; Ritchie, 2006; Saucedo, 2006). As alternative responses, community accountability practices invite communities to create options for responding to violence from within and to envision and create violence-free spaces and relationships.

Community accountability practices emerge from critical consideration of the potential losses and dangers enabled by the criminalization of intimate violence. In the criminal process, a crime is construed as having been committed by an individual against the state (the plaintiff). In that equation, survivors of violence are effaced, relegated to the position of observer in a process handled by professionals (Roche, 2003). Proponents of alternate forms of justice, such as restorative justice models, argue that "the modern nation-state stole their conflicts" through criminalization (*Ibid.*). As it displaces the survivor, the process also isolates the survivor's experience and usurps potential healing by stripping from the survivor the power to set goals and determine what justice should look like. Criminalization individualizes the aggressor/perpetrator as the sole, sick, isolated problem. In this response, the supposed problem "disappears" as an aberration in an otherwise "nonviolent" normative society.

The state's response to violence is unidirectional, retributive, and uninterested in assessing the root causes of violence. Prison sentences for intimate violence help to populate prisons with hyper-inflated demographics of people and women of color, heightening their exposure to an institution invested in the practice of violence (Richie, 1999; Sudbury, 2005). Criminality and a prison sentence fail to transform the people and communities involved; instead, they injure a community's agency and therefore its capacity for social transformation. Reliance upon criminal justice responses seizes our creativity and the possibility of achieving profound social transformation at the roots of violence.

Community accountability strips away the deception of our current dependence on law enforcement and prisons. As we practice it, we are reminded that we are all implicated in the violence that occurs in our communities. We live, breathe, exist in, and help to create communities that are saturated with rape and violence. We are all affected and learn, model, ignore, and advance violence either consciously or unconsciously, even while we are simultaneously surviving it. Social structure inheres in our actions and relationships, which in turn reflect patterns of a sociality of violence (Davis, 2003; Das, 2007). CARA's model of accountability, which guided our class intervention, stresses the need to humanize *everyone* involved, rather than to dehumanize *anyone* involved because, "if we separate ourselves from the offenders by stigmatizing them, then we fail to see how we contributed to conditions that allow violence to happen" (Oropeza, 2005; CARA, 2006).

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As a pedagogical strategy, community accountability builds on and extends critical and liberation pedagogies that engage the complex project of enlivening student social agency through collective and self-determined action. It aims to undo the state's pressure toward normative schooling that instills inequity and injustice (INCITE, 2005; Giroux, 2009). Methodologically, these pedagogies approach the task of creating liberatory learning spaces by centering the participation, voice, and action of marginalized communities (Darder et al., 2009). Those previously subjected become subjects when they transform that which oppresses and limits their lives (Freire, 1982; Sandoval, 2000; Noguera, 2006). Consistent with these approaches, community accountability offers a strategy for learners to become agents in the transformation of the pressures and constraints of violence and injustice acting in and on the classroom and its participants. As praxis technology, it becomes a vital decolonizing educational tool as it sets out to identify and transform power and violence; learning emerges through social transformation, and vice versa.

As pedagogical strategy, and in its multiple applications, community accountability praxis emerges among a wide variety of liberation-based projects. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis asserts that the prison abolition movement (one manifestation of community accountability) invokes a wide imagination of alternatives, all of which are linked to making our communities healthier, safer, and more loving. She writes:

> positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment—demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance.... To reiterate, rather than try to imagine one single alternative to the existing system of incarceration, we might envision an array of alternatives that will require radical transformations of many aspects of our society. Alternatives that fail to address racism, male dominance, homophobia, class bias, and other structures of domination will not, in the final analysis, lead to decareration and will not advance the goal of abolition (Davis, 2003).

Just as prison abolition is more than an anti-prison project, community accountability is more than an antiviolence project. It is a liberation project that creates the potential and space for autonomous radical transformation in our lives and communities, seeking to transform the roots of violence. An application of Chela Sandoval's oppositional consciousness, this liberatory method sets out toward the committed field of transformable subjectivities that promote social movement and are capable of transforming the terms of power (Noguera, 2006; Sandoval, 2000). As teachers, survivors of violence, and people committed to healing, transforming, and ending violence, we ask: How and where can violence be undone? Where are

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the places/spaces of healing and transformation for survivors, for those responsible for their suffering, and for the society that created them? How do we create and maintain these spaces?

Considering Violence

The state has an abiding investment in war, in owning and deploying the means of violence and coercion in the society.—Jacqui Alexander

All forms of power, of domination, of oppression are interrelated. They derive from, feed upon, and sustain one another.—Antonia Castañeda

The tremors of violence are constant at the conjunctures of nation, race, and poverty, where gender is concocted through acts that defile as they conjure racial and colonial sexualities. We are made through violence. Violence does not escape us; it is predictable and expected. Sexual violence is so pervasive that it codes Latinas as they cross into the United State; most likely, they will have injected or swallowed contraceptive cocktails before their journey to avoid pregnancy (Falcón, 2006). More than half the Latina migrants crossing the border from Guatemala into Mexico document their rape during their journey to the north (Marrujo, 2009; Garcia Bernal, 2010). Violence is the quotidian order of things, arranged institutionally in ties that bind: the school, prison, home, courtroom, and emergency room. We survive violent welfare policies, militarization and feminicide at the border, police and border patrol brutality and violation, dissolution of our families by child protective services, war, criminalizing drug laws, and much more. Every two minutes in the United States a rape occurs, while feminicide takes the lives of an average of four women a day in Mexico, and six in Guatemala (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007; Lagarde y De Los Rios, 2010). At the U.S.–Mexico border, nearly two migrants a day, usually women and children, die attempting to cross (Lagarde y De Los Rios, 2010).[3] These violent forces are strengthened and legitimated by many of the institutions that are allegedly designed to keep us "safe." The constellation of imperial projects and processes hinges on the exhibition of violence and the everyday reinvention of heteropatriarchy, nation, class, race, and gendered sexualities (McClintock, 1995).

Enunciated in, for, and through structures and relations of dominance, violence is the architect of the social, inescapably constituting even love and intimacy. Violence weaves the subject and we, and our classrooms, are undeniable sites of fabrication. As Latin American scholars in decolonial studies note, through coloniality omnipresence has become one of the most urgent features of violence (Moraña et al., 2008). Failing to recognize its multiple, wandering, and intersecting dimensions will keep us mired in propagation and survival. However, in the 1970s, the U.S. neoliberal state advanced its project of incorporating the antiviolence movement through narrowly defined conceptualizations and corresponding interventions in violence against women (Rojas, 2007).

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When the state enters the frame as an ally of the antiviolence movement, the omnipresence of violence is disregarded, allowing the state to evade scrutiny and accountability for its role in orchestrating and deploying countless forms of violence against Latinas, women of color, migrants, queer, and trans folks. Remaining unchallenged are policies that further border militarization, the criminalization of migrants, and the war on drugs—contexts in which rape for migrant women becomes predictable—because they are rhetorically framed outside the individualizing logic of notions of *privatized* violence that disregard the state as an agent of violence. In turn, the rhetoric of privatized violence allows harmful and dangerous state-sponsored policies to be labeled, as well as commonly understood and accepted, as potential remedies to violence. A state-centered response to intimate violence promotes the falsity that the state is a benign or even benevolent protector. For example, the criminal prosecutorial process calls attention to an individualized "incident," thereby quashing history and context, exonerating the multiple culprits, and narrowing the potential for a complex understanding of the magnitude, legacies, and constitutive amalgamations involved in the production of violence.

This process depletes our imaginative potential to transform violence. Single events are never single events: they sing of a thousand yesterdays, of histories born in places across temporal and material geographies (bodies, institutions, and lands) (Das, 2007). Is it possible to envision an end to violence while disregarding its omnipresence? Violence emerges as historically birthed utterances etched through the stitchings of time and in the social. Criminalization promotes the normative individualization of intimate violence, making it possible to disregard context and omnipresence; in this way, criminalization is a maneuver against history and as such, it threatens our capacity to end violence.

How can we conjure responses to violence capable of accounting for its pervasive proliferation, for its myriad meanderings across the social fabric? If violence is everywhere, capable of emerging in any place/space, how do we begin to imagine and build the possibilities of undoing and transforming it everywhere, in any and every space? How do we transform imperial and colonial legacies, as well as present colonialities, which conjure contemporary iterations of intimate violence and masculinities that do not know the difference between sex and rape?

Curander@s in the Classroom: We the Beholders, We the Healers of Violence

If we feel that things are calm, what must we forget in order to inhabit such a restful feeling?—Jasbir Puar

Any understanding of the project and practices that inform critical pedagogy has to begin with recognizing the forces at work in such contexts.
—Henry Giroux

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Teaching is a vital part of my social movement work; it is not separate. I began organizing not long after I immigrated to Chula Vista, California. I was 16 and the racism and violence I saw in the United States (at home, in the streets, at school) shook me to my roots. In the mid-1990s, I joined the antiviolence movement and since then have concentrated on popular education in Latin@ communities. My pedagogical approach in the classroom is engendered through popular education in communities.

In Chican@/Latin@ Studies, many students have witnessed the state's failure to keep them safe. Coming from families of migrants, they/we have survived xenophobic, racist, and punitive immigration policies; the communities of color they/we inhabit are under constant state surveillance. Many have survived military invasions, ethnic cleanings, and civil wars. Like most other university students, they have experienced or witnessed intimate violence in their own lives or in the lives of those they love. They are motivated to learn how to respond and reach the mostly shared goal of ending violence.

Our spring 2007 course offering, Raza Feminisms, focused on Chicana/Latina experiences, conceptualizations of violence, and relevant social movements across the Americas. The texts guiding our learning included Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood* (2005), Gioconda Belli's *The Country under My Skin* (2002), and *The Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (INCITE, 2006). The course addressed manifestations of violence in intimate relationships, communities, and the role of the state and colonialism in the production of violence. The texts and the course spoke to the interrelatedness of these multiple manifestations of violence. Instead of the disparate elements found in notions of private versus public violence, these texts and student and faculty *testimonios* viewed each sphere as reinforcing and reifying violence in the other.

That semester, we sought to build a classroom dynamic capable of nurturing survivor-centered discussions about violence against Latinas. To move toward the possibility of a space that was safe enough for survivors to tell their stories, we jointly developed ground rules that invited students to speak from experience with "I" statements and to respectfully and actively listen to each other, allowing time and space to speak.[4] We also agreed to practice recognizing, identifying, and intervening in subtle and overt abuses of power and violence that might emerge in the classroom. Students were invited to talk about violence in their communities and to identify ways to change the conditions within which violence persists. We sought to inspire social agency that would empower students to see themselves as principal actors in the work of building communities without violence. The class would have been incomplete had we failed to explore community accountability strategies that seek to transform communities and political conditions rather than buttress oppressive institutions that replicate violence.

Early in the semester, each student selected a course reading to present, teach, and facilitate to the class. Several methods were used to disrupt the teacher's

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dominance over the perspective and approach. By moving the desks into a large circle, we attempted to undo the physical and visual hierarchy of a classroom organization where all desks point in the direction of the teacher. Everyone could now see one another and speak face to face. That built a sense of community and facilitated accountability.

The readings included an essay entitled "Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies," by CARA (Communities Against Rape and Abuse, 2006), a grassroots anti-rape organizing project in Seattle. I provided opening remarks that covered INCITE! and community accountability movements in their relevant historical and social contexts. This built upon prior course content that addressed violence in various spheres and the failures of state-sponsored machineries of violence (i.e., the prison-industrial complex, law enforcement, the military) to respond to intimate violence. Our students were urged to rethink how we, as community members, can conceive of, articulate, and put into action strategies for antiviolence movement building and alternative responses. CARA's text is an extremely useful tool for teaching such a lesson because communities may creatively adapt its accountability principles in ways that are relevant to their unique settings and circumstances. Its general guidelines for community accountability are "the bones for each community-based process" (CARA, 2006). Detailed descriptions are provided, as are examples of how to apply the guidelines in real-life scenarios. That empowers participants to "identify their own unique goals, values, and actions that add flesh to their distinct safety/accountability models" (*Ibid.*).

A student named Gerardo[5] chose to present the CARA article to the class. This text, he said, meant a lot to him. In a quick breath, he said that he identified as a sexual violence aggressor, having committed an act of sexual violence against a fellow student at a MEChA conference.[6] With astonishment and anguish, he related that he never imagined himself to be capable of committing such an act of transgression or of being identified as the aggressor in an act of sexual violence. Gerardo was mortified and incredulous that he had committed this act. He spoke at length about his feelings and his shocking capacity to commit violence. His presentation of the article included only CARA's first principle: "Recognize the humanity of everyone involved" (*Ibid.*). Instead of continuing, Gerardo repeatedly stressed to the class—and to himself—the idea that aggressors are also human.

Another student, confused and alarmed by the admission, questioned Gerardo: "Are you telling us that you raped another student?" Gerardo had never explicitly used the word *rape*. When confronted with it, he immediately began to backpedal. Although prepared to present his own account, he stumbled when the class engaged his admission. His varying responses included that: (1) he could not remember what he had done to her or had no memory of the event; (2) he did not know whether he had raped her; (3) it was difficult for him to imagine that he did rape her; (4) he had been inebriated and woke up on top of her, feeling shocked and frightened. His contradictory statements caused increasing confusion and frustration in the class;

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they continued to push for clarity about the events. As Gerardo struggled with that reality, he shuffled and deflected the potential for self-accountability through denial and minimization; he depicted himself as a victim of a generational history of colonization, displacement, and alcohol abuse.

Everyone was stunned by the swiftly unfolding events. I was prepared to teach about the praxis of community accountability, but a classroom enactment of a pedagogy of community accountability is another matter. I asked the class to pause and take some breaths. It occurred to me that I knew the female student Gerardo had attacked; I had mentored her closely and supported her while healing after the attack. Next we slowed the process down and recognized that this public admission of sexual violence had likely triggered reactions in many of us who had experienced or witnessed violence, or knew someone who had.

In a room thick with tension, faces showed fear, anger, and discomfort. The customary, one-dimensional institutional roles had been abandoned, exposing contradictions and polyvalent personas that lie below the surface of the reductive masks we wear: a student as aggressor and survivor, other students as survivors and witnesses, and teachers as survivors. Our ardent engagement with an issue that touches the core of our humanity—intimate violence—had eroded the institutional power that divides us from ourselves. The screens had dissolved in these heated and unexpected moments of deep truths; with the masks off, we became whole, to ourselves and to each other. Previously, the counseling office, the confessional, or the courtroom had been deemed appropriate spaces to discuss experiences with violence, but not the classroom. The dominant juridical/medical rhetoric that imposes the imprimatur of appropriateness on those spaces also denies the violence implicit in these institutions, as well as the omnipresent violence in the social fabric. The matter is made awkward and it is even illegal to discuss in certain settings.

Since our books were open to an article on taking risks through community accountability strategies, we asked the students whether they wished to use CARA's principles to begin a process of community accountability. With nods from around the classroom, the students jumped in and boldly took the risk that CARA urges. To undo existing power arrangements in the process of creating consensus, we made participation voluntary. The process does not work if the participants are not interested in taking part. Only one student chose to leave. The remaining 28 students pushed forward as a community. They taught one another and worked together to implement an intervention in our classroom-community space.

One hour into our three-hour class, we discussed starting principles—to "recognize the humanity of everyone involved"—and set the day's goals for accountability. To ground our work and mark the beginning of our community accountability praxis, we shifted away from the dramatic confession, while holding the memory of the prior discussion. Students were encouraged to take the lead. Dialogue concerning the first principle reminded the group that the heat of the moment might trigger anger. That would be a justified response, but we should be careful not lose sight

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of the humanity of everyone involved in the process by resorting to dehumanizing language. We began with the recognition that Gerardo was asking for help, and that we believed it was possible for him to be transformed.

The situation was unique for community accountability in that the survivor was not present.[7] We remained committed to centering her voice and experience. How could we apply the principle, "prioritize the self-determination of the survivor"? Cynthia,[8] a student in the class, was a close friend of the survivor; we gave her a lot of space to speak. She asked the class to respect the survivor's wish not to involve law enforcement. We also centered the voices of other survivors in the classroom. This principle is central to the accountability process, as it ensures that the survivor's voice and needs are respected throughout.

Cynthia and other women in the class—many of whom were also survivors—spontaneously began what we later called *SurvivorSpeak*. These women provided a narrative and testimony of their own survival. They called out Gerardo for backpedaling, pointing out that he was co-opting accountability. Cynthia, one of the first to speak, looked Gerardo in the eyes and told him that he had violated her friend and knew what happened. She was there that night and the violence had had a resounding and devastating impact on her friend's life.

Gerardo disclosed that he was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. He added that as a Latino man, his actions should be understood within the larger context of his childhood experiences in the United States and Guatemala, with the relevant histories of violence and colonization. These contextual nuances are vital to understanding and transforming violence and helped the class to understand generational cycles of violence and connections to state and colonial violence. Yet the class also viewed Gerardo's recounting as a move away from accountability because his presentation of his own suffering was disconnected from the survivor's experience of suffering. The accountability process invited participants to find a balanced, joint commitment to the aggressor's humanity, while centering and respecting the survivor's experience of suffering engendered through the aggressor's actions. The class observed that Gerardo, and potentially others who use violence, may (consciously or unconsciously) use their experiences of surviving violence in ways that excuse or minimize their own acts of violence. Self-protection is an important skill when transforming violence, and it is understandable that it would emerge in accountability processes. Yet when self-protection becomes a manipulative dimension to evade responsibility, deter introspection, and deny the survivor's experiences, it moves away from the possibility of accountability.

Many thought Gerardo had used his experiences to influence the class into accepting an apology rather than true accountability. Accountability is not the pursuit of redemption or forgiveness. "To expect survivors to forgive is to heap yet another burden on them" (Minow, 1998). Forgiveness is not a right to be claimed; it is a gesture from the survivor. Another Latino student would play a very important role in the sessions, providing a model of how to hold another man accountable. He

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felt that Gerardo was co-opting the space and urged him to take full responsibility for his actions and to own the act of violence he had committed. The principle of humanization, he explained, urges us not to dehumanize the aggressor. However, the presence of colonial violence or past traumas does not mean that we should forgive and forget when someone in our community commits an act of violence without seeking resolution for the survivor and for the larger community.

The CARA article anchored our process, reminding us that community accountability also encompasses the creation of a transformative space capable of healing and community building. We applied another principle, to "identify a simultaneous plan for safety and support of the survivor as well as others." *SisterSpeak* called attention to the many survivors in the class and we discussed options for safety that included self-care and care for each other given the potential for triggering trauma. By consensus, the planned course content for the following three class meetings was suspended in favor of pursuing community accountability. It would take time, and we did not want to rush it.

After class, Gerardo wanted to speak with Katie and me. His statements retained a tinge of disavowal rather than a sincere attempt to reconcile with himself, the survivor, and his community. He seemed to be seeking recognition or a sympathetic appreciation of his disclosure. We told him that his statements may have minimized the violence of his transgression and pointed out his tendency to place his own experience and pain above that of the survivor. Yet we affirmed his disclosure by inviting him to continue the work begun in class and suggested that he spend time reviewing all the principles.

Reflections

In her classic essay on coalition politics, Bernice Johnson Reagon (2000) observed that the coalition process threatens a person to the core and such work makes you feel as though you are going to die. Community accountability for intimate violence is a particularly profound kind of coalition work. As those unequally divided through colonial violence and injustice attempt to take account and reconcile through collective and self-reflection, a form of death is beckoned in which the previous version of you/community might be deemed no longer viable. Transformation involves risking death of part of the self/selves that is no longer necessary. Decolonization implies a painful process of exposing deeply rooted weeds that may need to be removed. The process is frightening because one enters it without an exact destination; there might be a semblance of a path, method, or guide, but unknowns characterize the endpoint and places along the way. Fear has multiple triggers: past experiences with trauma and the possibility of new traumas. The process undeniably depends on courage in the face of an exhausting procession of sweaty palms, nausea, pressing silences, and tumultuous words and gestures. Yet it was as if a ribbon of faith floated above our class, somehow getting us through the difficult moments. There was light and laughter too. The feeling that we were

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going somewhere and that change was imminent lifted us and inspired the courage that let the fear fall away. When driving home across the Bay Bridge after class, I felt a heaviness that sank the pit of my stomach to the car floor and a lightness in my heart that felt like a cloud of neblina lifting me out of the car. In collective formations and praxis, the weight of suffering coexists alongside the lightness of the possibility of healing and transformation.

Colonial Intimate Violence: When Gerardo was 11 years old, Guatemala's 36-year-old genocidal war was coming to an end (Perea, 1993). But the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 did not end intimate violence against women, much less feminicide (Trujillo, 2010). The violence was mostly enacted by the state; the state police systematically used sexual violence as a weapon of war. Violence against women received immunity and was socially condoned: "A generation of young men forcibly recruited into the army was indoctrinated in the use of sexual violence as a weapon" (Chárazo et al., 2010). After the war, a truth commission investigating violence against women "concluded that rape was carried out as a show of power, a show of victory over adversaries ... and as war plunder" (Recovery of Historical Memory Project, 1999). In *Violence in War and Peace,* Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (2004) note that "most violence is not deviant behavior, not disapproved of, but to the contrary is defined as virtuous action in the service of generally applauded conventional social, economic, and political norms."

Gerardo described how he had witnessed and survived sexual violence and how his uncles had experienced near-death violence, but used it against their partners nonetheless. Understanding and transforming Gerardo's use of violence is impossible without recognizing the pervasiveness of state violence and its intimate expressions, which shaped, and continue to shape, him, his family, and communities. The multiple enactments and reenactments of colonial and neocolonial violence and their legacies are very much alive.

Gerardo's admission fluctuated between remorse and, to the participants, an interest in achieving power in the classroom. Neither approach amounted to being accountable for his abuse of power through sexual violation. Was his admission coded in "a show of power"? When the class refused to accept sexual violence or his admission, Gerardo employed multiple maneuvers to regain power. Was he caught in the normativity of violence, and was his quest for humanity an attempt to calibrate the register of normativity against the class-community's firm repudiation of violence? Moves that reinforce the normativity of violence and power support violence rather than accountability. As a mestizo, he had a privileged and protected position in a genocidal war primarily against Mayans, which was complicated by the fact that some within his family were members of the federal police force. A community accountability process can be challenged or undermined when an aggressor manipulates its commitment to humanization, shifting from accountability toward a claim for power or an effacing of responsibility.

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Gerardo's insistent affirmation only of the first principle spoke to a legacy of war and colonization that stripped the Guatemalan people of their humanity. Disclosing his own experience of surviving sexual assault was mired in the complexity of the polyvalent forces at play in his *testimonio*. Colonial histories and contemporary reenactments of sexual violence against men can potentially undo the heteropatriarchal "rape-nationalism" that engenders the masculine nation (Casteñeda, 2005; Das, 2007). That potential is compromised when discussion of the victimization of men emerges outside, or instead of, a critical accounting of heteropatriarchal violence.

The Church: Our process revealed the power of the colonial legacy of the Church in Latin@ communities and the ways in which it codes our behavior, violence, and responses to violence. Its influential and authoritative position within Latin@ communities was achieved through the sexual conquest of indigenous women, queer folks, and indigenous communities in the Americas, but to this day its program of denial and/or absolution of sexual violence impedes its own and our community's attempts at accountability.

La Mirada: Perhaps in light of the Church's legacy and ongoing creative forms of popular resistance, *la mirada*—the look, or staring down—became a very powerful symbolic tool of accountability. Hugely important in spaces where Latin@ communities are often silenced, as in churches, schools, or at home, it is invoked in phrases such as "ay te watcho," a Caló retake on "I'll be seeing you." It contains a hint of "I'm watching you" and community accountability, the sense that someone is looking out for you and making sure you are doing right. That evening, many students deeply and intensely sent *la mirada* Gerardo's way; it was perhaps as potent as any words said to inspire accountability.[9]

Group Dynamics: Although most of the class, and certainly the strongest voices in it, moved to hold Gerardo accountable, not everyone did. One young man made at least two comments that reflected his interest in protecting Gerardo's maneuverings. Two young women also condoned his disavowal, focusing repeatedly on what they called his courageous admission. Those who identified as survivors, or close friends or family of survivors, voiced the clearest opposition and concerns over his attempts to evade accountability. We attempted to ensure that everyone had a voice and repeatedly returned to the principles that anchored the progression of accountability by centering survivors. Facilitators invited participants to reflect on how the admission could either promote accountability or further condone violence and the violation of women.

According to Audre Lorde (1984), "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us." We hoped the class-community would reflect upon itself and the multiple ways in which we potentially collude with violence against women and along the way work toward accountability for

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Gerardo and all of us. Community accountability practices revealed that speaking about internal discord and violence was necessary for the class-community to transform that violence. Community accountability models help to recognize and apply the interconnectedness/interdependence between community and violation. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995) reminds us that "in the area of rape, for example, intersectionality provides a way of explaining why women of color must abandon the general argument that the interests of the community require the suppression of any confrontation around intraracial rape."

Outside the Classroom: After that class session, a stream of students poured in during office hours and sent e-mails. They spoke about their survival experiences, identified their triggers, and described their frustrations with Gerardo's maneuverings. Office hours were an important way for survivors to check in about their reactions to the accountability session and to address the issues of self-care and support. Katie and I identified plans for safety and support for survivors and communities. Check-ins informed our strategy on how to proceed. Spring break allowed us to rest, review, and rethink; self-care was important for participants and facilitators alike. After co-teachers and facilitators deliberated, an e-mail sent to the class summarized the day's events and reiterated a central tenet on survivors:

> A key aspect of the accountability model as posed by CARA and many others doing similar antiviolence work is that we center the voice and experience of the survivor in the process. As she was not in the room with us, I ask that we remember that important lesson, that a survivor's experience and voice, understanding and listening to her experience of violation and transgression is key for true accountability work, and that each of us do what we can to center the voices of survivors of violence ... in our work and in our lives (Rojas/Ojeda-Stewart follow-up letter).

In the letter, we invited students to continue *SurvivorSpeak*, noting its impact and effectiveness. It was a way to express some of the strong reactions students still had to sexual violence and Gerardo's response. For an optional, ungraded assignment, students could write (in any shape or format, length, including freewrite, poems, stream of consciousness, etc.) and share (anonymously if they chose) anything they wanted to communicate about Gerardo's response, the experience of surviving violence, or the issue of intimate violence. To avoid any potential harm, students were to express the range of emotions they might feel while maintaining compassion.

"Se hace el camino al andar"—The path unfolds as you walk it

In the next class session, students deepened their collective ownership over the accountability process. The short-term suspension of planned course content, the optional ungraded assignment, and *SurvivorSpeak* strengthened the students' sense of the classroom and our meetings as a collective space and process. Gerardo listened intently while students, predominately women, spoke to him and the class about

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the consequences of his actions. Many of the women, engaging in *SurivivorSpeak*, looked Gerardo in the eyes as they shared their painful herstories of surviving intimate violence. Others simply told him that what he had done was wrong and that he needed to be fully accountable for his transgression. When this class ended, the students decided to apply the principle, "make sure everyone in the group is on the same page with their political analysis of sexual violence" (CARA, 2006). Although the day's content had focused on violence against Latinas, they asked for a lecture or discussion on the general history and politics of sexual violence against Latinas, noting the colonial legacies of gender and sexual politics.

After the lecture in the next session, the class selected the principles to be applied in the upcoming last session. Following CARA's principle, they discussed the importance of working with the aggressor's community to strengthen accountability. We decided to reach out to MEChA to work with us in the accountability process. The class-community decided it was ready to take on the following CARA principles: "Be clear and specific about what your group wants from the aggressor in terms of accountability" and "Let the aggressor know your analysis and your demands." The students' thoughtful dialogue on these principles reflected the concern that the complexity and multilayered conditioning that prompted his violation would not be undone overnight. That would require continued and persistent work to transform his understanding of himself and his sexuality. It was necessary, they believed, to work with a group whose political and cultural analysis encompassed the effect of colonial legacies of violence and war on Latin@s. Despite wavering on the issue, Gerardo expressed a willingness to meet the class accountability agreements. He was to:

- Complete service learning with Men Overcoming Violence;
- Begin counseling with Antonio Ramirez in Pocoví, a peer support and counseling group for Latino men who use violence;
- Continue to work with other men committed to antiviolence (in part, this work would be with MEChA);
- Work with Pocoví during the summer;
- Attend (with the entire class) a follow-up class lecture/*diálogo* on Peaceful Masculinities in Latin@ communities;
- Agree to adhere to these demands.

Our strategy for the lecture/*diálogo* was to build community by positioning everyone as learners responsible for the classroom—the relationships and communities we create. We paired the analytical work of understanding violence and Latin@ masculinities with the creative work of imagining and identifying peaceful and feminist expressions of Latin@ masculinities and sexualities. We discussed the political and historical conditions that produce violence. For example, we addressed how Latin American nation-building projects engender and embed

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violence against women in origin narratives of *mestizaje*, disregarding the full complexity of experiences, communities (i.e., indigenous), and histories, and extending normative heteropatriarchal *rape-nationalisms* through reference to, for example, *la chingada*/Malinche (Alarcón, 1990; Anderson, 1991; McClintock, 1995; Casteñeda, 2005; Romero and Harris, 2005).[10]

Reflections: We Plant the Seeds

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise....
We cannot do everything and there is
A sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something
And to do it very well....
We may never see the end results,
But that is the difference between
The master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders
Archbishop Oscar Romero
En un mundo descomunal siento mi fragilidad.—Nacha Pop

Accounting for Gerardo: Gerardo attended all community accountability sessions, including the peaceful masculinities lecture. He met all the class-community demands. We continued to meet with him after class, creating a secondary space for him to engage in self-reflection and consider the lessons learned. We also monitored his participation and attendance in community spaces. A few sessions after ending the classroom accountability process, Gerardo stopped coming to class. He said he had fallen behind in all of his schoolwork and requested an incomplete. Gerardo's completion of the demands allowed him to learn through praxis. The demands created an infrastructure of accountability for violence against women for him and the class-community. His social and activist spaces (MEChA), academic spaces (the class and service learning), and counseling and volunteer spaces (Pocoví) would hold him accountable. Many Latina immigrant survivors have explained that the intimate violence they experienced resulted in part from their isolation from extended kinship networks upon being displaced or migrating. They longed for a community (family, elders, back home) that would hold their partners accountable.

Survivor(s): I remained in contact with the survivor after the class, informing her about the community accountability sessions. She had interrupted her studies at the university partially because she did not feel safe on campus. Since Gerardo and she were pursuing the same major, she feared taking classes with him; also active in MEChA, her trust in the group as a safe space for women had diminished. A second painful violation occurred in MEChA when members cast doubt on her

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experience. MEChA had been her community, so she felt betrayed and isolated from the support she needed.

A year earlier, I had asked whether she wished to return to MEChA through an accountability process. Her three priorities were that she did not want to see Gerardo, involve the police, or let her family know. She feared that male members of her family could retaliate with serious violence. Turning to the police would have consequences for her and Gerardo. She chose to focus on her own healing and took a break from the university. Eventually, she told her family about the incident, completed her B.A. in Raza Studies, and returned to activism.[11]

The myth of the "ivory tower" as a safe haven was challenged in the 1980s when reports surfaced on the pervasiveness of date rape on college campuses (Giroux, 2007; Fisher et al., 2010).[12] Responding to allegations, university administrations entered self-protective mode by turning to discourses of criminality and psychology, which depict individual students as culprits with aberrant psychologies and rapes as anomalies.[13] Although assault is the second leading cause of death for college-age women in the United States, rarely do universities reflect on and account for the specific ways in which heteropatriarchal organization constitutes violence against women (Heron, 2007; Fisher et al., 2010).

By routinely focusing on survivors when discussing sexual violence, *testimonios* or narratives highlight experiences that are often silenced, hidden, and denied in heteropatriarchally organized institutions such as universities, families, and MEChA. This alone was a profound transformation in the culture of the classroom, and in our capacity for transformation. When a student related to the class that her friend had been attacked by a boyfriend, she received suggestions on how to give practical and emotional support. Students stated what had helped them or their friends and loved ones after being attacked. This dialogue supported a particular member of the class-community, but also affected the process and all participants by deepening everyone's understanding about a survivor's experience of violation and its aftermath, while creating a toolkit of support for survivors of violence.

Class-Community

When asked for feedback on the application of community accountability in our classroom, students unequivocally responded that the process was tough, but they learned a great deal and felt it was empowering and fruitful. The final assignment was a manifesto. Students were to write about their community practicum experience in relation to their vision of a world without violence and how we might get there. Many students referenced community accountability as a necessary strategy for ending violence. Students completed evaluations at the end of the semester. As they trickled out one by one into the hall where I waited, they shared a gratitude I had not seen before in a classroom. The community accountability process, they said, was a life-changing experience that they would apply in their own lives.

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The pedagogical application of community accountability in the classroom invites assessment of the particular site of the university. Its implications for violence directly and indirectly shape our classroom-community and the potential for community accountability. The particular deployments of *el patriarcado chicano* historically colluded with university colonial heteropatriarchal violence when its campus student organization formations, pre-MEChA and MEChA, as well as Chicano Studies configurations, practiced gender apartheid and condoned sexual harassment and violations of Latinas, including sexual initiation rites (Blackwell, 2011). Community accountability practices shed light on this, thereby facilitating a transformation toward Chicano campus activist masculinities that are accountable to their communities (women, queer, Spanish-speaking, etc.). Since their inception at CSU Long Beach, Chicana student groups such as Hijas de Cuauhtémoc and, most recently, Conciencia Femenil have made significant attempts to contest these formations. MEChA student organizations across the United States have also taken up the challenge to assess and transform historically unequal practices and structures (*Ibid.*). In the case of MEChA San Pancho, the organization accepted the challenge to build a culture of accountability and transformation with regard to its gender/sexual politics. It served as a contiguous space to our classroom, making greater infrastructural transformation and accountability possible. MEChA invited my mentorship through their process and worked closely with Pocoví, a Latino men's antiviolence project in San Francisco. MEChA San Pancho brought heightened attention to the issue of violence against Latinas when they hosted the MEChA Statewide Conference.

Community Accountability as Pedagogical Strategy

> *[We] are human beings because [we] are historically constituted as beings of praxis, and in the process [we] have become capable of transforming the world.*— Paolo Freire

> *We are not going to cut through the* mierda *by sweeping the dirt under the rug.*—Gloria Anzaldúa

As *curanderas* in the classroom and participants in a community accountability process, we behold testimonies of violence, and we heal and seek to transform our trauma and our communities. Our task is to read the etchings of violence no matter how faint; as the musical ear, we sense every note and reckon with the presence of its magnitude, similitude, and its persistent refrain. If we miss so much as a single uttering, its seed will multiply. We clean as *curanderas*, comb and sift through time, through terror, through nights of make-believe. We render the invisible visible, the unspoken spoken, and deliver the trespasses delivered against us. In doing community accountability work, we resolve to point out the proverbial elephant in every room. The skill of the committed participant/observer finely tunes a

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panorama of peripheralities, and every site, word, and gesture carries the culprit of the potential of violence. We seek to see, name, and transform it. In the practice of community accountability, we are beholden to praxis and each other; we are the beholders of violations, of survival, of healing. It is in our hands.

Like the practice of community accountability, critical pedagogies are grounded in a disclosure of historical forces and contexts that are hidden by dominant normative and disciplining processes, such as criminalization, marking agency as emergent through a process of engaging these silenced truths (Anzaldúa, 1987). As hooks (1994) notes, they "necessarily embrace experience and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important vital dimensions of any learning process."

According to liberatory education praxis, as the oppressed pursue their humanity by rebelling, challenging, or removing the power of the oppressor to dominate and suppress, they also restore the oppressor's humanity. Community accountability activities such as *SurvivorSpeak*, and the principle of centering survivors in processes of accountability, move the notion of humanization beyond the prevention of further injury to the restoration of the aggressor's humanity, which was lost by enacting violence. Further, in our case study the intersection of liberatory pedagogies and community accountability deepened the humanity of the oppressed/survivors when they assumed responsibility for holding Gerardo accountable. When we do not engage in social transformation after gaining such awareness, we move from inheriting an unjust system to reproducing it (Torres, 2003). By practicing community accountability, survivors in the classroom engaged the "committed involvement" necessary for praxis and the transformation of society (Freire, 1982).

Because violence so profoundly shapes, limits, and inhibits the possibility of social agency, praxis becomes an important step toward liberation. As Freire noted, "liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it." For him, liberatory education poignantly addresses the subject of violence, for acts of violence historically engender each manifestation of inequality and oppression (*Ibid.*). The practice of community accountability as a pedagogical strategy sets out to respond to and transform violence, thereby disrupting manifestations of inequality and oppression (in the classroom and beyond).

Conditions that help to make transformative praxis possible in the classroom include collective teaching strategies, heightened academic freedom and teacher autonomy, and a structured valuing of creative approaches (to curriculum, teaching pedagogies, etc.). Our pedagogical innovations emerged in part because Katie and I approached our teaching relationship collaboratively, allowing us to think intensively about pedagogy and to support each other in the process. San Francisco State's College of Ethnic Studies, and especially Raza Studies, were creative formations that intervened against exclusionary and Eurocentric approaches to education. Classrooms in Raza Studies contest decolonization, assert the silenced narratives of our communities, and carve liberatory spaces amid the ongoing colonial violence

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of universities. As a community accountability project, Ethnic Studies has sought to transform the (epistemic and exclusionary) violence of the university. Similarly, community accountability as a pedagogical strategy challenges the legacy of colonial violence in the university by transforming an oppressive classroom into a liberatory space where self-determination, self-reflection, and self-accountability on the part of marginalized communities are mobilized alongside a nurturing of collective community sensibility. Building on liberatory pedagogies, community accountability practices invite students to understand their role in the promulgation of injustice, violence, and social transformation (Giroux, 2009). Efforts such as these to account for intra-community violence are a key tactic within institutions that are actively engaged in co-opting communities because they transform communities that were previously divided by the internalization and reenactments of colonial violence.

The Ethnic Studies and Raza Studies curricula emerged through teachers who for the first time approached content with an innovative, creative spirit that valued and encouraged thinking guided by a praxis of love and social justice. As Ethnic Studies becomes increasingly professionalized, this culture is at risk. For example, when teaching the subject of violence and community accountability praxis, we hear echoes of the state's responses to violence. Professionalization promotes specialization, and counseling licenses emerge as cautionary reasons to deter these subjects and approaches. This displaces a community's capacity to participate, guide, or create social transformation. Increasing pressures toward administrative centralization in the neoliberal university (disguised as the need to impose fiscal discipline) threaten the vitality of creative curricula and pedagogy. Instead, we see heightened surveillance and scrutiny that undermines creative innovation. This is detrimental to the project of Ethnic Studies: communities of color remain under attack, as do our academic formations. Meanwhile, our survival depends on our creativity. It is crucial for Ethnic Studies to practice and deepen its commitment to curricular innovation and openness.

We cannot overlook the impact of intimate violence on Latina college students. As this story portrays, intimate violence can deter young Latinas from continuing with their educations and from engaging in social activism. The fallout from intimate violence may isolate them and lead to multiple experiences with trauma. Liberatory pedagogical approaches are flawed if they do not consider the pervasive issue of how intimate violence affects students' capacities for learning, participation, and graduation. Concerns over how tracking, high-stakes testing, language, and citizenship affect learning must be coupled with attention to the consequences of intimate violence on the well-being of students, their relationships, and families. It is a vital step in our efforts to bring justice and transformation into the classroom, to decolonize education and our communities.

Finally, this experience revealed the porosity of the classroom. The community forged in the classroom also takes external form. Since the violence addressed here occurred in a space that functioned as an extension of the university within

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statewide MEChA conferences, the legacies, continuities, and contestations of its masculinist framework carved a space for violence against women. The intersecting and contiguous sites of MEChA, student conferences, university housing, the Department of Chicano Studies, the larger Chicano movement from which Ethnic Studies departments emerge, and the university administration shape and collude with one another, forging institutional alliances that form an infrastructure that engenders violence against Latinas. As the class-community demands illustrate, an awareness emerged that community accountability processes in the classroom, among participants and the aggressor, had to extend beyond those limits. Multiple spaces had to be incorporated to create an infrastructure of contiguous spaces of accountability. Transcending the immediate classroom space shifted tendencies away from violence to conjure an even greater possibility of social transformation. This final lesson serves as a reminder to consider developing responses to violence in all the spaces in our lives. At each step we must ask: How are each of us implicated? All of us are constituted or made by and in violence. How does our participation in the social fabric make us complicit? What, then, is our commitment to the transformation of violence?

NOTES

1. Paulo Freire's use of *diálogo/dialogue* is useful because it stresses the urgency to maintain "faith and hope in humankind," that we can transform the world. *Diálogo* is a vital aspect of the practice of community accountability. To Freire, *diálogo* is the path to *concientización*, the profound insight we must fight and work toward for our liberation. Liberation is a process that emerges through praxis (reflection *and* action) in *concientización*. When *diálogo* is absent, dominance perseveres. *Diálogo* facilitates becoming a subject and is a vital tool in community accountability praxis, the process of rehumanization.

2. I purposefully use the term "intimate" instead of "interpersonal" because the latter term overemphasizes the *personal* at the expense of showing the ways in which public violence shapes and produces intimate forms of violence. By calling it *personal*, we narrow the scope of analysis to an individualized account. Violence is never just *personal*. The term "intimate violence" in this context should not obscure or diminish the gendered dimensions of the deployment of violence.

3. Fregoso and Bejarano (2010: 5) define "feminicide" as the murders of women and girls because they are women or girls. This form of gender-based violence is public and private, implicating the state and individual actors in systematic, widespread, and everyday violence. It is understood as gendered violence emerging intersectionally along class and racial axes in global contexts.

4. See Veena Das (2007) on Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of the subject as the condition of experience. Our work on understanding violence, she suggests, must attempt to locate the subject through experience.

5. This is a pseudonym.

6. "Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) is a student organization that promotes higher education, cultura, and historia. MEChA was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of our people." See *www.nationalmecha.org/*.

7. The survivor had taken a leave of absence from the university.

8. This is a pseudonym.

9. Das comments on expressing experiences with violence outside the narrative form. Difficult to contain, to name beginning and end, the limits of violence sometimes manifest gestures (corporal or

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language-based) that act to show the experience rather than tell it. Instead of subscribing to the dominant questions regarding disclosure and silences, Das (2007) suggests that the memory of violence is not hidden, but "very much on the surface" and perhaps legible in different forms.

10. The term *rape-nationalism* is introduced here to elucidate the myriad mobilizations of nation-building projects and imaginaries through heteropatriarchal sexual violence. The term is used cohesively and without separation to illustrate the profound embeddedness of violence in the nation. Following Das on the differing legibilities of violence on the surface, rape is always on the surface of and inheres in the nation project. Perhaps appearing illegible in the narrative form, it is shown in a continuum of iterations from references to a nation's foundation myth of rape to the performance of nation through the rape of undocumented migrant women on the nation's borders. "The bodies of women [are] the surface on which the text of the nation is written" (Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem, 1999; Das, 2004).

11. This article was shared with the survivor prior to publication. She expressed her full support for it, hoping that her story and experience can help other survivors to heal.

12. Violence saturates the university. It produces epistemic violences that deploy narratives of domination enacted through the erasure of the other, the persistent subjugation of the other driven by the classificatory objectification of the other, and the structural-institutional legitimation of this order. As Edward Said (1979: 2) reminds us, "the most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one." Giroux details the history, and contemporary post-September 11 formation, of the military-industrial-academic complex. President Eisenhower originally drafted the phrase as such, but dropped the term "academic" in a move that disingenuously evokes the university as benignly neutral or objective. Alvarez et al. (2010: 179) document the recent surges of racial and heteropatriarchal violence on college campuses.

13. Both authors have had multiple experiences with university administrations that concealed and minimized violence against women.

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