NOTE TO READERS: First of all, thank you for reading this on such a short turn around. I am really looking forward to your comments on a truly new area of research for me. I wanted to give you a quick sense of what has brought me to this project on Central American asylum seekers. I concluded my recently published book, *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States*, with an epilogue on the imbrication of the North American Free Trade Accord (NAFTA) and the flourishing drug economy along the border, in which I argued, among other things, that the representation of Mexican migrants and drug dealers in the United States today borrows heavily from the characterization of *indios bárbaros*, or savage Indians, of the borderlands. *Indian Given* provides a genealogy of the discursive formation of the indio bárbaro in U.S. and Mexican history dating back to the colonial periods, and as such this epilogue was a fitting end for the book. But the epilogue is also a bridge to my next book project, *NAFTA and Narcos, or How Free Trade Brought Us the Drug Economy*. Over the last 20 years, I’ve immersed myself in researching the economic relationship among NAFTA, Mexican migration to the United States, the booming drug economy, and the particularly vicious Mexican cartels that emerged over the last decade. Then in 2014, the ongoing Central American refugee crisis began. I realized that I had set an artificial boundary around the U.S. and Mexican drug economy, that its impact was truly transnational, not bi-national. Central American revolutionary movements and their afterlives were the topic of my first book, and so I already had some insight into the ways in which these economies and populations would be vulnerable to drug trafficking. I decided that *NAFTA and Narcos* would have to include the Central American experience with drug trafficking and most importantly, with the gendered violence & migration that resulted from the spread of drug cartels. For political and intellectual reasons, I volunteered with a nonprofit that assists women and children held in detention at the Family Residential Unit in Dilley, TX, integrating participant observation and ethnography into my research method. These women's stories are overwhelming, as you may imagine. If they are overwhelming to listen to, what must they be to live through? I am grappling with the difficulty in conveying their experiences without pathologizing them or their countries of origin, of theorizing their place in this complicated story without instrumentalizing them. And so, I really look forward to your comments.

As part of its mandate, the Penn Program on Democracy, Citizenship and Constitutionalism focuses scholarly attention on "the rise of constitutional democracies" that are converting billions of people into rights-bearing citizens, while the theme of this year's workshop, "Citizenship on Edge: Sex/Gender/Race," asks participants to consider the limits that
might constrain the fulfillment of the constitutional rights of citizenship. The Central American
democracies that emerged in the 1980s and 90s, as the result of revolutionary triumph—in the
case of Nicaragua—or from UN-brokered peace agreements between guerrilla armies and right-
wing military dictatorships—in the case of Guatemala and El Salvador—certainly qualify as
emerging constitutional democracies. Concomitantly, the sharp rise of Central American women
and children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border seeking asylum over the last two years would
suggest that gender and sexuality are placing serious constraints on the exercise of their
citizenship. Yet they are not fleeing Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (Nicaragua is notably
not a sending country) because of an infringement of their freedom of speech or right to
assembly. They are not fleeing persecution because of their political affiliation or religious creed,
nor because of their race, nationality, or language use. They do not, in other words, form a social
group that is experiencing discrimination as such, and thus do not warrant special protection
from constitutional democracies, unless freedom from criminal violence is elevated to an
inviolable right of citizenship. Suffering discrimination as a social group would qualify these
women and their children for political asylum in a U.S. immigration court, however the UN-
mandated right to political asylum explicitly excludes persecution resulting from nonpolitical
crimes. And so in the cases of these women, targeted by gang violence because of their gender
and sexuality, we spot a first limitation to the promise of universal, democratic citizenship.

Before discussing the case of these Central American women who are seeking asylum in
the United States, I would first like to elaborate on another challenge to our understanding of
citizenship and constitutional democracy as nationally bounded principles, principles whose
protection requires the building of actual or virtual border walls. From the perspective of Latin
American nations, the path to constitutional democracy has been an obstructed one, with the
primary obstacle being, since 1848, the United States. As the ironies of history would have it, in 1976 the United States celebrated a double bicentennial: in two hundred years, our government had deployed the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marines to Latin American nations and seas a total of 200 times. The majority of those military deployments were to the countries of Central America and the Caribbean. From 1912 to 1928, the U.S. landed Marines in Nicaragua on three separate occasions, occupying the country almost continuously from their initial landing until 1933. After WWII, however, the United States' preferred method of preventing or overthrowing democratically elected governments was that of covert intervention. The most notorious cases of U.S.-orchestrated overthrows of democratically elected governments are those of Guatemala in 1954 and Chile in 1973.\(^1\) The overthrow of these civilian governments ushered in decades of military rule, with devastating loss of life and of civil liberties.\(^2\) In the case of Guatemala, the overthrow of Árbenz's government led to three decades of civil war. United States intelligence agencies and Southern Command played an outsized role in the Central American civil wars throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, supporting dictatorships that would easily have toppled

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\(^1\) From 1945 through 1954, the Guatemalan Revolution brought about mild socialist reforms under the sequential governments of Juan José Arévalo and Jácobo Árbenz. Their administrations redistributed lands to the indigenous peasantry, and expropriated, with compensation, the idle lands of the United Fruit Company, while leaving the vast majority of the economy in private hands. From 1970 to 73, Salvador Allende's socialist government nationalized, again with compensation, the foreign-owned copper industry. While these expropriations were put forth under the same principles that guided as the nationalization of the oil industry in Mexico in the 1940s—control of key sectors of the national economy under the principles of sovereignty, redistribution of wealth, and a mixed economy—they led to the CIA organization of the overthrow of both governments.

\(^2\) The Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Guatemala estimated that at least 250,000 civilians were killed during the Guatemalan Civil war that followed the overthrow of Árbenz's government and did not end until 1993. The vast majority of these killings were attributed to the Guatemalan military and paramilitary death squads, who targeted union leaders, student activists, priests and nuns, and the indigenous. Under the counter-revolutionary principle of "draining the sea" that gave the guerilla life, over 400 indigenous villages were razed by government forces. The Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Committee attributed over 3,000 political assassinations and disappearances to Pinochet's forces.
under the pressure of both armed and peaceful movements for democracy if not for our support of Central America's National Guards, paramilitaries, and counter-revolutionaries.³

Thus, while we in the United States are guaranteed a peaceful democratic transition despite Trump's rhetoric about contesting the election, from the perspective of Latin American populations, the "shining city on the hill" has used its privileged pinnacle to actively obstruct transitions to constitutional democracies in their countries and to violate the rights of their citizens. I am not rehearsing this well-known history of U.S. imperialism in Latin America as ritualized denunciation, but to demonstrate how the practice of democracy and citizenship is never a national affair. Rather, national citizenship and democracy exists in constitutive relationship to those of other nations. This constitutive relationship is not simply a philosophical one, as in the manner suggested by Balibar in his essay "Racism and Nationalism," where the formation of a national ethnos or community requires the sustaining presence of an external (and internal) racialized other threatening the borders of the community, though this racialized external threat is rhetorically conjured in Trump's images of murderous Mexican rapists and "bad hombres."⁴ Rather, the protection of the perceived rights of United States citizens—for example, the right to be free from an even a geographically remote threat of communism—has regularly required the mobilization of our military and intelligence apparatus for the explicit violation of the political and civil rights of Latin American citizens.

The purchase of U.S. citizenship rights at the expense of the citizenship rights of Central Americans in particular is not part of our waning imperial past, but present in our standing

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³ The human rights abuses committed by Central American National Guards were so severe and so well documented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, that the U.S. Congress was forced to ban military and intelligence aid to Guatemala and to the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries, and radically cut back aid to El Salvador.

immigration law, as well as in the electoral debate. While Obama, Clinton, and Trump may have different stances on the building of a wall between Mexico and the United States, all three are united around the principle of deporting criminals. They reiterate their commitment to do so at every opportunity. Indeed, you would be hard pressed to find a progressive person on the American left who did not agree to the principle that criminals should be deported to their country of origin, rather than jailed in the U.S. at the taxpayer's expense. United States citizens are presumed to enjoy the right to a life without crime, in other words, as well as the right to be spared the burden of taxation to cover the costs of our perpetual war on drugs, however to enjoy these rights we must export the conditions of criminality to other countries. To successfully exercise these rights, the United States exercises its imperial right to put the rights of citizens in other countries in jeopardy. El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala must accept these deportees, even though these gang members left at such young ages that they do not remember their origin countries, do not speak Spanish, and were trained in their criminal activity entirely on the streets of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C.

The rival *Mara Salvatrucha* criminal gangs (MS-13 and MS-18) that now dominate life in the Northern Triangle—as El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have been christened by drug policy analysts—emerged on the streets of Los Angeles in the 1990s, made up entirely of the children of Central American refugees who fled their war-torn countries in the 1980s. The Maras emerged initially as a street gang in contradistinction to and protection from Mexican

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5 Al Valdez has clarified the origin of the term in his essay "The Origin of Southern California Latino Gangs." "Mara" is the name of an ant that is indigenous to Central America and known for its tenaciousness, "salva" stands for El Salvador, and "trucha" in Spanish slang means "reliable and alert." In *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, Thomas C. Brunea, Lucia Dammert and Elizabeth Skinner (eds), Austin, TX: UTexas P (2011): 23—42. The 13 and 18 indicate which of the two rival faction the gang member belongs to and is in reference to the street in Los Angeles on which the gang members respectively lived.
American street gangs in Los Angeles. But whereas the Mexican American street gangs of Los Angeles had been around for over a hundred years, their ranks made up of generations of U.S. citizens, the ranks of the newly formed MS-13 and MS-18 were primarily filled by undocumented boys and men. In 1996 the U.S. Congress passed the "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act" [IIRIRA] under Bill Clinton's administration, in response, in part, to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. The bombing was perpetrated by foreign terrorists, some of whom had entered the country illegally. IIRIRA toughed border control in a number of ways, making illegal entry a felony for the first time and changing federal law to allow for the deportation of undocumented aliens who commit crimes. While IIRIRA may have meant to target terrorists entering the country illegally, the bulk of its enforcement has been against Central American and Mexican immigrants. Under IIRIRA the United States has deported 40,000 MS-13 and MS-18 gang members to El Salvador alone. In 2015, El Salvador had the highest homicide rate in the world, at 105 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. These deportees to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala went on to form regional criminal organizations that now

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6 Again, the uneven distribution of citizenship rights is underscored by the undocumented status of the Maras. During the Central American civil wars, civilians fled in the greatest numbers from El Salvador and Guatemala. Many of these civilians were facing persecution for their political beliefs or activities, but because they fled right-wing dictatorships supported by the Reagan and Bush administrations, the U.S. refused to recognize they were fleeing repressive regimes, or grant them refugee status. Consequently, these immigrant families were never able to regularize their status and their children grew up undocumented and in poverty. Meanwhile, Nicaraguan civilians fled to the United States in much smaller numbers, but because the Reagan administration had declared the Sandinista government a repressive communist dictatorship, Nicaraguans fleeing to the U.S. were immediately recognized as political refugees and afforded the same rights afforded to Cuban immigrants: immediate citizenship status, financial aid, and employment opportunities. Not only did Nicaraguan children grow up with a greater wealth status than their Salvadoran and Guatemalan counterparts, once IIRIRA went into effect, criminals who may have been of Nicaraguan origin were in almost all cases U.S. citizens and not subject to deportation. Consequently, Nicaragua remains free of gang and drug violence.  

control large swaths of rural and urban territories throughout the Northern Triangle. It is this deep history of the imbrication of U.S. and Central American citizenship rights across national boundaries that brings us to the cases of the Central American women and their children who flee the targeted gendered violence of these two gangs in the Northern Triangle.

"Tu madre tiene la culpa, por dejar la puerta abierta [your mother is to blame, because she left the door ajar]" (flamenco lyric for Tientos)

Tens of thousands of Central Americans have fled the Northern Triangle in the last three years, but not all of them are detained by ICE. Those women and children who are caught by border patrol agents are subject to detention in the three "family residential centers" that currently exist in the U.S., one in Karnes, TX, one in Dilley, TX, and one in Berks County, PA.

In August, 2016, I volunteered with the CARA Family Detention Pro Bono Project at the "South Texas Family Residential Center" in Dilley, Texas. CARA is a non-profit made up of four member organizations, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, the American Immigration

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9 Detention and deportation are the new normal in immigration policy, but the policy is a recent phenomenon, dating back to the George W. Bush administration. Before 9/11, ICE practiced a "catch and release" policy with any immigrants caught crossing the border who stated they were fleeing credible fear in their countries of origin and were seeking asylum. These immigrants were granted court dates before immigration judges, and released on their own recognizance. After 9/11, the policy was changed to that of "detain and deport" policy was put into effect, and once again, a policy aimed at preventing terrorists from entering the country has mostly impacted Latin Americans leaving their countries for various reasons. Because of the number of immigrants who do claim asylum when caught at the border, President Bush mandated the construction of detention centers for families (or the conversion of prisons for this purpose). The population headed to these centers, however, ballooned in 2014 with the spike in Central American refugees. President Obama could have ordered a return to the "catch and release" policy, but instead opted to reinvigorate Bush's program, ordering the opening of new residential centers to house Central American refugees. While ICE maintains that the detention is not used as a deterrent to Central Americans, they make 99% of the immigrants sent to these centers.
Council, the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, and the American Immigration Lawyers Association. CARAs two goals are moving women and their children out of detention centers and into asylum proceedings as quickly as possible, and advocating for the end of family detention as a practice in the United States. As a CARA volunteer, I participated in two of their four modes of providing assistance at the detention centers. I gathered intake information from new arrivals to the detention center, ensuring that this information was entered into CARA's data base. This enables CARA volunteers to track these families across the three detention facilities (as families are often separated en route), and to ensure they are processed for release or deportation within 20 days. I also assisted with the preparation of these women for their Credible Fear Interviews (CFI) with ICE officials. In the week I spent in Dilley, CARA volunteers processed intake forms for 60 to 80 families per day. And I personally conducted an average of 7 CFI preps per day. In the last four weeks, CARA has lost its access to off-sight interpreters for its monolingual volunteers, and consequently they have called upon me to conduct remote CFI preps with women. In total, I have conducted 45 CFI preps, and the material that I present to you today is drawn from those interview sessions.\(^\text{10}\)

Of the forty-five CFI preps that I conducted, all but two presented credible, detailed evidence of their persecution, or the persecution of their children, by MS-13 and MS-18 gangs, or of domestic violence.\(^\text{11}\) These women can be broken up into three groups, though the boundaries between the groups are often blurred by particular cases: single mothers who run small businesses out of their homes; women who have themselves been selected to be

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\(^{10}\) In addition to working with these mothers in Dilley, I have worked as a remote translator for the psychologist who visits the Berks County center as well.

\(^{11}\) Victims of domestic violence do immediately qualify for refugee status under the "U" visa, that was established under the 2000 "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act." Of the four women who I helped prepare for the CFI, two brought proof of their spousal abuse.
concubines of the Maras, or have been pressured to turn over their pubescent daughters to the Maras as gang members and concubines; women who have suffered domestic violence. The majority of those with credible fear were women who ran "pulperias" [small bodegas] or food stalls, often out of their homes but also at public markets. These women were most often threatened with the rape or murder of themselves or their children once they were no longer able make extortion payments to the Maras, what they call "los impuestos de Guerra" [war tariffs] or simply "las taxas." Women who have families living in the United States are especially targeted for extortion, as the Maras expect them to have their families pay the taxes if women are unable to do so, as in the case of a woman in San Pedro Sula, Honduras:

I used to work, tranquilly. I had a stall of fruits and vegetables [in the market], but the gang members started charging rent. They kept raising the rent and I couldn't even buy stuff after they had taken all my money. I couldn't work, so I just went back to my house. But then they came around house, coming to the front door demanding money…Then, as my oldest daughter got older, they started demanding that I give them my girl when she turned ten. They would threaten me, telling me that they were going to take her out of school, to cook for them, or run drugs for them, or use her as their woman.

They started coming to her house during Holy Week (March)…I told them no, that my daughter wasn't going to do that, that I had her in school so that she could learn. They responded that even if I didn't like it they were going to go for her out of school, to cook for them, or run drugs for them, or use her as their woman."

Different gang members came two or three weeks later, asking for money because they knew that I had a sister in Houston and they told me that I had to pay $2000 limpira [Honduras' currency]. Every 15 days, we had to pay. I would ask it from my sister. They send different guys each time but they are the same MS gang.

After the last time I gave them money, they asked for more money, but I didn't have it and so they told me that I had to give them her daughter then…This was in the middle of July, and my daughter was still going to school. They told me I would never see my daughter again because they were going to send her to the next town over…and that they were going to use her to sell drugs, or as their "mujer" or for whatever they wanted. That time there were 5 men that arrived at my house, heavily armed. So, they made it clear that it was either money or my daughter. So I left the 6 of August, as soon as she was able to get the money to come.
In the case of another Honduran woman, from Ciudad Seyva Atlantida, who ran a pulperia, her extortion payment took the form of providing daily lunch for Maras in her neighborhood for free:

I was threatened by the MS-18. I had a pulperia, a store in my house. I have had the business for about a year. Three MS-18 gang members would come at mid-day every day when I had my lunch prepared for my family, and they demanded that I give them food. I did, and I did that for several months. They would sit down right there in my house with my family to eat.

One day in July, I went to the market to buy inventory for my store. It was late when I got back and I hadn't had time to prepare any food when they [the MS-18 members] arrived demanding food. They got very angry that I didn't have the food ready. They told me that if I didn't give them food, other rules would apply. They didn't come back for a couple of weeks and I was very happy at first.

After that, they sent other men from the gang, men I didn't know. They pushed me in the store, threatening me, demanding that I give them 300 limpira, then two weeks they came demanding 600 limpira. Because I wouldn't pay them they threatened me that things were going to go very bad for me. After that, I had to escape, even though they told me that I couldn't escape them because they would follow them anywhere they went. I just left everything there in my house and store, abandoned... Generally, all the people they are making them leave their houses.

This woman expressed to me the belief that it was her house they were after all the while, to use as a safe house, or as a drug distribution center, as this is what she had witnessed in the case of her neighbors. The Maras extort all business people operating in their territories—male and female. Nevertheless, the gendered aspects of this extortion make women vulnerable in different ways than men. Women are expected to provide feminine succor to the Maras, in the archaic meaning of the word as "reinforcements for the troop." Women are expected to provide a broad form of reproductive labor as part of, or in substitution for, their war tax, in ways that simply would not be expected of male shop owners. In the case of the woman from Ciudad Seyva Atlantida, she was expected to provide home cooked meals for the neighborhood gang members, incorporating these men into the domestic sphere of her family, with whom they ate daily. In the
case of the woman from San Pedro Sula, she is expected to sacrifice her daughter to the troop, so that she may provide an array of domestic services to the Maras. In addition to acting as a lookout for the police, the daughter is expected to cook, clean, and sexually service the Maras.

Because the Maras recruit boys and girls, the mothers who flee face a Sophie's choice. There was another mother who fled with her daughter and her youngest son because the Maras had similarly demanded she turn over the girl as an extortion payment. As I was preparing her for her interview, she confessed that she had left her 16-year old son in El Salvador. I use the word "confessed" because of the tremendous sense of guilt she conveyed when she told me, about three quarters into the interview. She broke down in tears immediately, as did her daughter who was in the room with us, telling me she just didn't have the money to bring all three of her children. She assured me that her son would be alright because he was a good boy and an excellent student, but it was clear she was trying to reassure herself. The boy apparently was on good terms with the Maras, who for some reason had not pressured him to join the gang, perhaps because of childhood friendship with some of the members, the mother told me. To add insult to injury, the ICE officials reinforced her sense of shame and guilt.

All women are questioned by ICE officials upon their initial capture, to determine if they will be sent to detention centers or if they are eligible for immediate deportation. Apprehending ICE officers are supposed to ask these women if they have experienced persecution in their home countries, or are afraid to return for some other reason. Among the women we assisted in Dilley, most but not all had been asked. However, many women who were asked about credible fear informed us that the officers had intimidated them, pressuring them to "admit" they were not actually fleeing violence, in ways that bordered, in my view, on psychological torture. A Latina officer, for example, questioned this Salvadoran mother in Spanish. She told the Latina officer
about the 16-year old son she left behind, perhaps expecting solace. Instead, the mother explained to me, in a humiliated tone, the Latina officer started taunting her, repeatedly telling her that she was either lying or a terrible mother. The Latina officer told her that she too was a mother, and therefore she knew she was lying because no mother would ever leave one child behind if the situation were really as dangerous as the mother claimed.

While it is likely that fathers would experience similar anguish over making this kind of choice between children, it is unlikely that they would be subjected to similar shaming on the basis of the cultural and gendered identifications presumed and manipulated by this Latina ICE officer. Gendered and sexual biases are operative in the heteronormative assumptions deployed by Maras and ICE agents alike. These women are, in most cases, single heads of household, making them more vulnerable to extortion, as well as to unique forms of intimidation. These mothers do not have male surrogates to mediate between their families and the Maras, a fact not lost on the gangs, it appeared to me. Moreover, as they are the sole providers for their families, they live in conditions of greater financial precarity than households with two bread winners, again making it more likely that they will find it more difficult to pay the war tax. Most importantly, it is the threat of sexual violation—for themselves, but especially for their daughters—that finally triggers flight. These mothers had already withstood considerable threats and violence, extortion and psychological torture, made against their persons and their property by the Maras. This is the status quo in their home countries, one that they were prepared to live with, but once the Maras demanded their daughters as sexual slaves, they decided to flee.12

12 Another mother, for example, had sent her two oldest sons to the United States by themselves at ages 16 and 14, but when the Maras came for her 12-year old daughter, the mother decided to leave with her rather than send her alone and risk her being sexually violated on the trip.
The case of a young Guatemalan mother best illustrates the manner in which heteronormative imperatives of gender and sexuality adversely affect women's lives under the Maras and force them into migration. To make the story easier to follow, I will call this woman Clara. Clara's mother had moved to the United States to earn a living, leaving Clara and Clara's daughter in the care of the grandparents and an uncle. The grandparents lived on a small ranch on the outskirts of Guatemala City, and the uncle worked at Walmart, but when the uncle was killed in a motorcycle accident on the way to work, their troubles began. The uncle had not only paid the war tax charged by the Maras on the ranch, but also assisted Clara financially with the raising of her daughter. Once the family lost the uncle's protection, however, Clara, her daughter, and her grandparents were forced to abandon the ranch for rural town where another uncle lived.

Things went from bad to worse for Clara and her daughter with the move:

All of us were crammed into the house. Next to my uncle's house, there is a beer hall, and on the weekends there were brawls, gunshots. And all week long, though, the Maras would be there, they would make cat calls at me, whistling. They would come by the house asking my aunt [her uncle's wife] about me. I got a job helping a hairdresser, but I had to walk there, past all these men who were always at the beer hall, and I became too afraid to do so because of the horrible things they said to me. I was afraid they would kidnap me and my child. Whenever I would leave the house, three or four men would be there saying things to me, and if I didn't respond, they would call me a "perra" [a dog, but in Spanish slang this carries the connotation of being a bitch or a slut]. They would ask me who did I think I was? Why was I so full of myself that I thought I wasn't good enough for them? Because I wouldn't reciprocate their interest, they started making threats to me like "tenga cuidado cuando salgas [you better be careful when you go out]," or "vamos hacer que tu niña cresca antes de tiempo [we are going to make your daughter grow up before her time]." About me they said, "que me hiban hacer engordar porque estas muy flaca [that they were going to make me grow fat because I was too skinny]." That they were going to rape me and my daughter, basically, and get me and my daughter pregnant. I felt very threatened by these men. It got to the point where I wouldn't leave the house, I was a prisoner. And because the house didn't belong to me, but to my aunt, I basically was made to do all the work around the house. My aunt felt like she was the master of the house and that she could order me and my daughter around. I would not leave the house alone, only very infrequently with my uncle. And inside the house, I was trapped and abused by my aunt. Finally, on June 2nd I left. My mother was helping the whole family sending money because I couldn't work or leave the house, and finally I was so threatened and afraid that I fled [with her mother's money].
Clara's life in Guatemala's went from manageable to unlivable in a matter of months. Without the protection of the unmarried uncle, who fulfilled the role of surrogate husband, Clara became fair game to the Maras. And whereas she had lived as an equal member of the household at her grandparent's home, at her new home Clara and her daughter were treated as servants, expected to perform the tasks usually reserved for dependent female relations, out of respect for the hierarchy established by the conjugal relations between her uncle and aunt. But as in all these cases, it was the escalating verbal threats of sexual violence against herself and her daughter that triggered Clara's decision to leave.

As part of their CFIs, mothers will be asked by ICE officials if they went to the police to report the threats or acts of violence committed against them by the Maras, and consequently we prepare them for this question. I believe that ICE asks about this for two different reasons: 1) to establish that the fear was so serious that they reported it to the police, or 2) to establish that the police were unable to protect them. While the majority of the women from all three countries said, simply, that the police were corrupted by the Maras, or worked in cahoots with them, a surprising number of the city-dwellers had reported the harassment to the police. However, in each of these cases, these women told me that this only caused them more problems. As one woman explained, "The police can't just take my word for it, they have to investigate." Once the police went to their neighborhoods to investigate their claims, the women were marked by the Maras as squealers, and were targeted for more violent harassment or not death, thereby hastening their decisions to flee. Another woman did not go to the police to report her crime, but she insisted that she did not think the police in her country were corrupt. While she did not believe the police would protect, she explained, sympathetically, "The police are human too."
They are just as afraid of the Maras as we are. They have families too, and the Maras will just as easily kill their families as they will kill mine if they try to arrest them."

This question about police protection alerted me to the various ways in which citizenship is transnationally contingent. Certainly, police shootings of black men make it evident that, even in the United States, police protection is contingent on factors such as race. However, police in the Northern Triangle are not discriminating against these women as a social group; the police are not, as in the case of the United States, violating the civil rights of a single group. Indeed, the women who went to the police to report Mara threats of violation were expressing their belief in their right to safety. And those police who investigated these threats were also performing their belief in this right, as well as their responsibility to fulfill this right. Both these women and the police, in other words, enacted faith in the constitutional democracies of their respective countries, and yet, in the very performance of this faith, both women and the police exposed themselves to more the danger. However, I am not sure that this indicates an internal "failure" in the constitutional democracies of these countries. Everyone involved in these cases was dutifully performing her or his rights and obligations as citizens, nevertheless, transnational modes of governmentality and belonging trump these small acts of citizenship. The Maras belong to a transnational syndicate of drug cartels that stretches from Central America to the United States, providing them with firepower, drugs, financial liquidity, and mobility. Their origins in California provide them with extensive kinship structures that enable them to return, legally and illegally, to the United States when they face criminal charges by police or death threats from rival gangs. Or simply when the drug business requires them to do so. The Maras developed their gang culture and their penchant for drug distribution while in the United States. The Maras are a U.S. export, the living, circulating product of the United States' long history of intervention in
Central America. The domestic police forces of Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran police are simply outmatched by them.

This brings me to the most obvious, and yet more subtle, way in which citizenship is transnationally contingent. Clearly, the right to be safe in one's own home—a right that most but not all U.S. citizen's take for granted—is entirely dependent on which country in the Americas that home is located. Though Central Americans do live in functioning constitutional democracies, they do not live with the expectation of safety in their homes or neighborhoods. To the contrary, living in a constant state of danger appears to be the form that citizenship takes in the Northern Triangle. The experiences these women shared with me also made it evident that the gang violence of the street does stops at the threshold of the Central American front door. To the contrary, what characterizes the Mara violence experienced by these women is its ability to confound the division between the public and private sphere. One the one hand, the Maras convert the domestic sphere of these women into the site for the public performance of reproductive labor. They invade their homes, expecting lunch, laundry services, and care. On the other hand, they simultaneously converted other homes into the sites of productive labor. Several women gave me detailed accounts of how the Maras invaded their homes, using them as safe houses for fugitive gang members; as lookouts for rival gang members and police; as depositories for guns; as distribution centers for drugs; and in one spectacular case, as the radio dispatch and internet station, where the Maras conducted business meetings with each other, but also virtually with other gang members across Central America. And on the third hand—there is always a third hand—Maras also convert the public street into the domestic sphere for reproductive sex when they threaten these mothers with the kidnapping of their daughters on their way to work; when they stalk these daughter at their schools or on their bus rides homes;
and when they psychologically abuse mothers and daughters with their lewd taunts and threats of sexual violation. The Maras have converted the streets of Central American cities and towns into public stage for their sexual prowess and military power. And given that they were "Made in the USA" it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the safety of mothers and children in the United States has been purchased at the expense of the safety of these women and their children. As long as our immigration policy promotes the deportation of criminals, this will continue to be the case.

I would like to conclude by stating that it is very likely that President Hillary Clinton will fulfill her promise to close family detention centers and return us to a policy of "catch and release." This executive action on her part, however, should not alleviate the responsibility that we have as academics and as activists to continue to tease out the transnational character of citizenship and democratic constitutionalism. I believe that it is only by examining the historic, economic, and philosophical emergence of citizenship as a transnational event that we might further an agenda of social justice, and rid ourselves of the illusion that by liberating women and children from family detention we will have addressed our culpability in promoting hemispheric violence through our unending drug war.