

# Violence in the Borderlands: A Dialogical Approach to Intimate Partner Violence among Migrant Women.

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In this article I explore the Dialogical Self (Hermans, 2012) as a framework to study the experience of undocumented victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). I argue that the concepts of multiplicity of selves, collective voices, and I-positioning in physical and imaginal spaces can be used to account for the fluidity and complexity of undocumented women's self as transnational migrants, embedded in gender narratives, articulated in a physical and imaginal transnational space fraught with power dynamics. Drawing on scholarship in migration studies (De Genova, 2002; Sigona, 2012), I will deploy elements of the Dialogical Self to show that conditions of 'everyday illegality' and deportability constitute physical and imaginal spaces for the undocumented, closely intertwined with the dynamics of power operating in the life of undocumented victims of IPV which are, in turn, part of the articulations of gender particular to their interpretative communities. Two biographical accounts of undocumented women will be used as illustration. In so doing, I will seek to contribute to Dialogical Self scholarship in matters of power and constraints.

*'I worked with one eye and I cried with the other'—Alicia, migrant woman from Mexico living in the United States.*

Undocumented women affected by violence stand at a liminal space, not only in the *borderlands* of the drama of US-Mexico migration, but also as it relates to discourses of mental health. On the one hand, studies tell us that their suffering meets diagnostic criteria for mental illness in the Western tradition (e.g. PTSD and depression)(Eisenman, Gelberg, Liu, & Shapiro, 2003; Fortuna, Porche, & Alegria, 2008). On the other, a wealth of scholarship indicates that these women underutilize mental health services (Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000; Huang, Appel, & Ai, 2011; Jones, Cason, & Bond, 2002; Nazroo, 2003; Snowden, 2003). Although a lack of access and information do play a crucial role in migrant women's underuse of services, other means of help are given priority when professional services are available, such as religious counsel and support from informal networks (Dutton et al., 2000). These women's preference for informal practices implies a certain irrelevance of the clinical setting for this population (Nagayama Hall, 2005; Pitkin, Bahney, Lurie, & Escarce, 2009).

The reported high prevalence of mental health disorders vis-à-vis the underutilization of available services speaks, at least, of a tension between different discourses of suffering and health coming together in a transnational space and of

the need to integrate such discourses in dialogue. Even more urgently, it underscores the problems that arise from the prevalence of psychological models that insist in abstracting the mind from its cultural context and human action (Wertsch, 1998).

Although context has been taken into account in IPV research, a sociocultural analysis of victim's psychological experience remains a necessary task. The field of IPV has shown us that social contexts such as cultural practices, institutions, and policies play an important role in shaping the manifestations of interpersonal violence at all levels of the social life (Bacigalupe, 2000; Heise, 1998). Frameworks such as the ecological model (Dutton, 1992; Heise, 1998) and intersectionality (Brownridge, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991; Erez, Adelman, & Gregory, 2009) have been profitably used to offer a complex analyses of IPV but conventional and ethnocentric notions of mental health at the individual or *ontogenic* level remain largely unchallenged. The experiences of violence of Latino migrant women invite us to question conventional notions of trauma and selfhood. These women's suffering is closely interweaved in their material conditions, highlighting the need to better incorporate an analysis of culture and context in the psychological analysis of their experience. Their victimization is life-long (Liendo, Wardell, Engebretson, & Reininger, 2011), marked by types of brutality not included in traditional screenings of trauma (Kaltman, Hurtado de Mendoza, Gonzales, Serrano, & Guarnaccia, 2011), and embedded in contexts characterized by oppressive dynamics at all levels of the social life (Erez et al., 2009). Furthermore, violence haunts these women in transnational spaces, being victimized in their homeland, the border, and the hostland (Kaltman et al., 2011; Yoshihama, 2001). Their resilience—their methods of coping—challenge common narratives of harmed and traumatized powerless victims (cf. Perilla, 1999). Despite their suffering and little resources, migrant women show agency, strategically resisting and subverting their circumstances (Dutton et al., 2000).

Despite the high rates of life-long violence among this population<sup>1</sup> and the severity of its manifestations (Hazen & Soriano, 2007), the experiences of violence of migrant women have a short history as a focus of analysis of IPV scholarship (Ingram et al., 2010). During the past decade we have learned that migration

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<sup>1</sup> A series of representational studies of prevalence of IPV among 'Latino immigrant women' have indicated that 'lower levels of acculturation, education, and socioeconomic status' are associated with less victimization and identified as 'protective factors' against violence (e.g. Ingram, 2007; Klevens, 2007; Sabina, Cuevas, & Schally, 2013), spreading the idea that undocumented migrant women are less victimized than the rest of the US population. These findings have been theorized under the name of 'the immigrant paradox' whereby underprivileged populations are more protected from victimization. These findings should be considered with caution. As Brown (2009) observed, since the 1990s prevalence studies have shown a decline in victimization among Latinos. Brown attributes this trend to a generalized failure from researchers to access undocumented populations, who, by operating under the radar, are difficult to reach. In addition, these studies use aggregation of a diverse group of people under the label 'Latino' without consideration of legal immigration status. When legal immigration status is considered, the prevalence of IPV victimization is estimated at 49% (Hass, Dutton, & Orloff, 2000), compared to the 35.6% national average (Black et al., 2011).

constitutes a particular kind of vulnerability (Erez et al., 2009; Hass, Dutton, and Orloff, 2000; Raj & Jay, 2002). In the current US immigration context, immigration policies play a powerful role in determining the patterns of coercion employed by perpetrators, which take the form of systematic and active use of threats of deportation (Erez et al., 2009; see also Orloff, Isom, & Saballos, 2010). Fear of deportation and incarceration, along with a lack of information, language proficiency, and financial means, prevent victims from seeking informal and formal help and further isolates them (Decker, Raj, & Silverman, 2007; Dutton et al., 2000; Hass et al., 2000). However, conventional notions of selfhood as self-contained do not provide an adequate framework to translate these observations into a nuanced analysis of psychological phenomena (See Callero, 2003; Sampson, 1993) particularly with regard to the undocumented life. Further steps must be taken to incorporate a sociocultural analysis into the psychological study of migrant women victims of IPV.

In this article I will explore the concept of the Dialogical Self (Bhatia, 2002; Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Tappan, 2005) as a step toward such integration of sociocultural and political contexts in the analysis of the experience of migrant women affected by violence. Drawing on scholarship in cultural psychology (Bhatia, 2010; Shweder, 1990a, 1991; Wertsch, 1991) I will argue that such integration depends on the consideration of three issues of particular relevance for psychological research on migrant women, a) a more integrated view of selfhood and culture that moves beyond their interaction as discrete variables into one of co-constitution (Shweder, 1990a, 1991); b) an understanding of selfhood as situated in a transnational space (Hermans & Kempen, 1998); and c) an analysis of the ways in which the power dynamics operating in that transnational space shape the identity development and transformation of victims of IPV as migrant women (Bhatia, 2002, 2010; Tappan, 2005).

To illustrate, I will use excerpts of two biographical accounts of migrant women from rural poor Mexico, Alicia and Iris<sup>2</sup>, who currently live in the United States with undocumented status and were victims of violence in the past. Both stories will show us the ways in which self and culture co-construct each other through dialogical relationships fraught with power dynamics in transnational spaces. Their stories illustrate common themes that I have encountered throughout five years of interviewing migrant women in a forensic clinical setting in addition to my academic work. Their stories resonate with themes found in other in-depth studies of migrant women (e.g. Liendo et al., 2011; Sternberg & Barry, 2011). These accounts are part of a larger study exploring the religious narratives of suffering of migrant Latino women affected by violence who live under conditions of illegality in the United States. The methods for collecting these biographical accounts have been approved by the Ethics Committee of OCMS, a partner research centre of Middlesex University, London. When appropriate, I will complement their narratives with vignettes from clinical encounters with other undocumented women from Mexico

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<sup>2</sup> Each woman chose her own pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

living in the U.S.

It is out of the scope of this article to provide a theory of trauma for migrant women. This article will, in fact, leave us with more questions than answers. What I present is an exploratory synopsis to connect two fields that have been strangers to each other, IPV and cultural psychology.<sup>3</sup> My hope is that such 'networking' may encourage psychological theorizing that meets the complexity of migrant women's experiences. More specifically, I present the Dialogical Self as a theoretical device to extend the insights of intersectionality into an enquiry of the ways context and self intimately shape the subjective experience of migrant victims of IPV.<sup>4</sup> The words of a migrant woman from rural Mexico currently held in detention by Immigrant and Custom Enforcement (ICE) summarizes well the need to embrace complexity and to engage in dialogue, 'A ver, voy a ser sincera: allá no sabemos lo que es una depresión' [Well, I'll be honest, we don't know what 'depression' is over there] (R.G., personal communication, September, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013). This is not meant to reinforce unhelpful cultural dichotomies between rural Mexico and the U.S. In conditions of globalization and transnationality, local and global cultural understandings converge in the self (Hermans & Kempen, 1998) and narratives of suffering are not exempt. Rather, this statement is meant to illustrate how the narratives of suffering and selfhood of the American clinical world have little to offer migrant women and highlights the need to deploy models that can respond to the complexity of migrant

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<sup>3</sup> The author would like to acknowledge the tensions that arise from taking a cultural perspective on any issue involving violence and women. For my purposes I take Shweder's (Shweder, 1990b) pluralistic view that a cultural perspective need not to relativize violence (emotivism) and a concern for victims of IPV need not to fall into 'liberal imperialism' (see Shweder, 2003). Instead, a pluralistic view recognizes the existence of moral commitments that are shared across different cultures, namely, the ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity (see Jensen, 2011, pp. 153-154). These ethics, while universal, are located culturally and historically. As such, they are given different emphases, and take different shapes. In the case of IPV, a pluralist view recognizes that intimate violence is wrong yet careful attention is given to understanding the web of meanings that sustain the practice of violence against women in a particular culture, and the moral questions it arises within that interpretative community in the community's own terms. One may not assume these meanings to be universal. In the U.S. for example, the understanding of IPV is embedded in the modern discourse of human rights (for a historical overview see Freedman, 2002), whereas in Latin America, feminist commitments tend to prioritize family, self-empowerment, and heritage (Freedman, 2002). While feminists in the Global South have rejected the myth of a 'global sisterhood' advocating for more flexible and diverse frameworks, their advocacy for local analyses of the condition of women has not translated into the psychological study of IPV worldwide. Instead, scholars often export the human rights discourse into the understanding of violence cross-culturally (cf. Sigal & Annan Jr., 2008). As for methodological practices, the fourth meaning of Shweder's *thinking through cultures* (Shweder, 1991) seems particularly useful for a cultural understanding of IPV: 'witnessing in the context of engagement with the other' (p. 2). Witnessing with the other implies an attitude of solidarity, a third way between emotivism and imperialism that recognizes the victim's vulnerability but in the terms of her interpretative community.

<sup>4</sup> The Dialogical Self, as developed by Hermans and colleagues has been criticized for failing to locate the self within its social and material context (See Barcinski & Kalia, 2005 and Falmagne, 2004). In this article I take the view of the Dialogical Self in its open-ended character, as a 'bridge theory' (Hermans & Gieser, 2011) that can profitably dialogue with models such as intersectionality and other feminist analyses.

women's social location.

***By way of Introduction: Iris and Alicia***

Iris, a migrant woman from rural Mexico, came to the U.S. escaping hunger and abject poverty. After becoming pregnant, she was disowned by her family. Once she gave birth, she was homeless and hungry. A man from her town offered to bring her to the U.S. Iris thought this was the opportunity to save her daughter from life-long hunger. Upon her arrival, the man sexually exploited her and began to physically and systematically abuse her after she became pregnant. At one point she could not get her pregnant body out of bed for two weeks due to the severity of the beatings. The man convinced her that no one could help her and that the police would deport her. One day a neighbour called the police, and despite Iris' denial, the evidence of her bruises prompted the police to arrest the man and assist Iris, who then understood for the first time that she had real options for help. After the man was released, he and a family member (a US citizen), managed to get Iris deported, which left her two children behind in the U.S. Iris was detained for 10 days, and spent 2 months in Tijuana. She crossed the border as soon as she could to find her children. Once in the U.S., Iris was able to reunite with them, and found a job. As she remade her life, she came to see herself differently, as a 'worthy woman'. Today, however, the fear of deportation constantly haunts her, as well as the fear of being found by her perpetrator whom she has managed to keep unsure of her current location. Iris' current self-understanding is negotiated between her concept as a hardworking woman—something 'the government wants,' as she explained—and her illegal status, which 'immigration [ICE] does not want.'

Alicia, our second protagonist, is a 60-year-old woman who came to the US escaping the brutal violence of years-long physical and sexual abuse by her husband in rural Mexico. As a young woman, her husband harassed her to become his partner under threats of gang rape. These threats were embedded in their local social context, where single women were vulnerable to becoming victims of 'el montón,' (gang rape) if they were not 'honourable' (in a monogamist heterosexual relationship or chaste). Alicia gave in to her mother and sister's pressure to become the man's girlfriend despite her desire to go work in the nearby city. She attempted to leave him several times over several years. Each time she left him, the man would find and beat her, often in public. When Alicia asked why he beat her, the answer given by her family members was 'so that everyone knows you are a married woman.' The one time she sought help from local authorities, they dismissed her on the grounds of a lack of evidence, as she did not present with bruises. Alicia decided to move to the U.S. After crossing the border, Alicia, who had recently found out her legal name was 'Emilia,' made a life in the U.S. *as if* she had papers, adopting the name Emilia as a sign of resilience. While in the U.S., she worked hard and put her children through school, bought a house, and enjoyed the appreciation of clients and supervisors at work. Her life in the U.S. developed in stark contrast to her life in Mexico, where she seemed to have no respite from the abuse and no legal protection. In the U.S., she felt 'trionfadora' [triumphant], but also vulnerable given her undocumented status.

In time, ICE found her and issued a deportation order. At that moment Alicia felt that her life in the U.S. had been a fragile illusion, and found herself in between two narratives, 'Suffering Alicia' and 'Triumphant Emilia,' converging together in a transnational space.

As we will see, both of Alicia and Iris' selves emerge out of dialogical relationships with their context, making their subjective experience inseparable from it. In order to demonstrate this I will review the basic elements of Dialogical Self Theory (DST) keeping Alicia and Iris' accounts as our connecting threads throughout my argument.

### **THE DIALOGICAL SELF IN TRANSNATIONAL SPACES**

As these brief accounts show, the selves of Alicia and Iris emerge as intimately interwoven with their sociocultural and political context—not as unilaterally *determined by* structural constraints, but *shaped through* dialogical relations with them. The Dialogical Self, developed by Hermans and his colleagues (Hermans, 2012; Hermans et al., 1992; Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Salgado & Hermans, 2005) presents the self as multi-voiced, embodied, and intrinsically social (Hermans et al., 1992). Thus understood, the self is conceptualized as a 'mini-society of mind' (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) within a larger society. Multiple voices are represented in the self as relatively autonomous I-positions, each telling a story about *self* in dialogue, thus constituting a flexible and integrated narrative structure (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The Dialogical Self brings together two notions, *self*, understood in the western tradition as 'internal,' and *dialogue*, understood as 'external' (Hermans & Gieser, 2011, p. 2). Self and dialogue converge in the Dialogical Self, where 'the between is interiorized into the within and the within is exteriorized into the between' (Hermans & Gieser, 2011, p. 2). With this premise, Hermans and colleagues attempt to overcome the individual/society dichotomy, conceiving self and society as mutually articulating through dialogical relationships (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). DST draws from American pragmatism, particularly from James' distinction between the *I* and the *Me* (James, 1890) and reformulates it in narrative terms, where the *I* tells a story about *Me* as an actor. DST, however, goes beyond a narrative understanding of the self as a unified narrator by incorporating Bakhtin's dialogism producing a view of the self as dialogical, where simultaneously individual and collective voices engage in relationships of submission and domination (Hermans et al., 1992).

Bakhtin (Bakhtin & Emerson, 1984) developed his dialogical view of the self through his analysis of Dostoevsky's novels, in which there is not one but several authors, each coexisting in the same person with their own independent ideologies and voice, which might include oppositional voices. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky presented these dialogues in both temporal and spacial terms, side by side. Hermans et al., (1992) apply Bakhtin's metaphor of the polyphonic novel to

envision the self as multiplicity of I-positions in a physical and imaginal landscape. They tell us,

'The *I* has the possibility to move, as in a space, from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. The *I* fluctuates among different and even opposed positions. The *I* has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story. Once a character is set in motion in a story, the character takes on a life of its own and thus assumes a certain narrative necessity. Each character has a story to tell about experiences from its own stance. As different voices these characters exchange information about their respective *Mes* and their worlds, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self' (pp. 28-9).

This integration of temporal and spatial dimensions in the analysis of selfhood is of particular relevance for an exploration of how transnational spaces shape migrant women's selfhood and their subjective experiences. Migration implies, in its most rudimentary sense, a physical movement. To be sure, Hermans and colleagues have been criticized for neglecting the physical aspects of the Dialogical Self, anchoring their theorizing primarily in inter-subjective exchange (Cresswell & Baerveldt, 2011). Although they define the self as embodied, Hermans and colleagues (1992) conceive of this embodiment solely in terms of the power of the body and the physical world to shape our imaginal landscape. Formulated in this way, imagination is still the main locus of experience, which develops primarily through discourse. Instead, following Cresswell and Baerveldt's (2011) reading of Bakhtin's expressive realism (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981), I take the view that lived experience is at once 'social and corporeal' (Cresswell & Baerveldt, 2011, p. 266) and pay equal attention to both embodiment and discourse. Both violence and transnational movement cannot be abstracted from its physicality as much as they cannot be understood outside of the social narratives that engender such transnational locale.

### ***Transnational Illegality as Imaginal and Physical Landscape***

As both physical and discourses social locations, transnational spaces shape the experiences of migrant women. In the context of U.S. migration, this transnational space has been referred to as *the borderlands*, the imaginal and physical space between the U.S. and Mexico, characterized by Alvarez as fraught with 'conflict and contradiction, material and ideational' (Alvarez Jr, 1995, p. 448). De Genova (2005), has characterized this space as *transnational illegality* (p. 8), highlighting the interplay of the physical and the social in shaping the social conditions of migrants both in Mexico and the US beyond these countries' formal borders. De Genova (2005) argues that the notion of 'illegality' in this transnational space is not just a legal figure that serves the purpose of deportation. 'Illegality,' instead, emerged within the context of the American system of labour and has been articulated as a discourse of race, particularly white supremacy. The key to 'illegality,' says De Genova (2005), is deportability. Thus, "'illegality" provides an apparatus for producing and sustaining the vulnerability and tractability of Mexican migrants as labor' (De Genova, 2005, p. 8). □ As such, transnational illegality is a 'spatialized

social condition' (p. 8); the physical and imaginal landscape—the *stage*— of the drama where the self of migrant women affected by violence emerges.

This 'spatialized social condition' can be translated into dialogical terms as *physical and imaginal landscape* where power dynamics at institutional and interpersonal levels operate through cultural narratives and practices that shape the self through ongoing dialogical I-positionings. The self of migrant women can thus be conceptualized as emerging through dialogical relations extended in physical spaces of transnational illegality that are socially produced (De Genova, 2005) and thus inseparable from their psychological experiences. Transnational mothers (see Sternberg & Barry, 2011), who migrate and mother their children from afar are a prime example of the ways the self is extended through such socio-physical space. Their everyday activities are organized around financially providing for their children in the home country and to reunite as fast as possible. Their *I* is constantly negotiating conflicting positions such as 'I-as the one who must raise my own children' against 'I-who needs to feed my children.' A woman who came to the United States two years before her children illustrates this conflict:

*'I felt I missed my children, I spoke to them daily. Everyday I would cry because they told me that my mother hit them, and I would begin remembering how my mother beat me, and I felt a terrible anxiety; I wanted to go back. I would not go back because I needed to gather enough money to bring my children. We worked at [grocery chain] every night of the week to gather enough money to bring the children' (L.C., personal communication, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014).*

This excerpt highlights the conflicting I-positions of *mother* and *provider* not only as extended in a transnational space but also as shaped by it. This transnational space operates as the physical and imaginal landscape of identity development (Bhatia & Ram, 2009), constructing identities as migrant 'undocumented' women (De Genova, 2002; Erez et al., 2009) and creating a particular kind of psychological vulnerability. For Iris, this psychological vulnerability was felt most intensely when she was deported and suddenly separated from her children for four weeks. In her words,

*'I had so many fears; not ever seeing my children again, not being able to cross again, and if I had to bring them back to Mexico, what would I do there? How would I feed them... the future is here [U.S.], right? I cried and cried each night...I felt it in my chest; like emptiness, as if something was stuck in there. It felt like my chest wanted to scream constantly. Like a pain; a heavy weight. When I saw them again that feeling went away; I felt peace... In my mind, all I could see was my children's little faces. I saw them, their little faces, needing me. That is why I said, "whatever has to happen will happen." I prayed much to God and here I am; thanks to Him and the Virgencita.'*

Iris' account shows us how her experience of psychological vulnerability can only be appreciated if understood as embedded within her spatialized social condition. In a clinical sense, her experience is not merely *anxiety* in its DSM-like meaning, but a kind of anxiety that emerges in the vulnerability of transnational illegality as a particular landscape of selfhood. The psychological positioning of migrants is thus inescapably influenced by structural and sociological forces (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; 2009). And in the case of migrants living in conditions of illegality, it is highly

constrained by them<sup>5</sup>.

In the case of migrants from Mexico and Central America, this dialogical positioning is produced within the vulnerability afforded by deportability as explained by De Genova (2002; 2005). This vulnerability deeply shapes migrants' social world. Illegality, as a condition of vulnerability, has an impact on the people and institutions with whom undocumented migrants interact, determining the span of daily activities, social relationships, and institutions with which they can engage (Sigona, 2012). Sigona (2012) has argued that 'illegality permeates migrants' everyday lives' (p. 50) gradually shaping their social world and community networks. This largely explains undocumented women's hesitation to call the police to report abuse, or to seek formal help through community clinics, resulting in a significant negative impact on their sense of hope and agency (Dutton, 1992; Dutton et al., 2000). Their experience as undocumented migrants is qualitatively different from the subjective experience of victimized women who enjoy a legal relationship with the State. Iris tells us, '*I could not function and live here like the rest of the people because he intimidated me telling me that the police and immigration would get me and would take away my children. I was terrified of that.*' Her terror was such that Iris did not seek help even after a beating that left her in bed for two weeks unable to move. Dialogically speaking, Iris' I-positioning was constantly moving between 'I-as a human being' whose dignity was being compromised; 'I-as a poor woman' who could not feed her child in Mexico; 'I-as a *good mother* who will do anything for my children,' 'I-as a deportable migrant woman,' 'I-as materially dependent of my perpetrator;' and 'I-as having no rights in the U.S. to keep my children.' Iris recounts:

*'He inculcated in me the fear of immigration and the police. He would threaten with reporting me to the police because I was illegal [...] And I was afraid because I had nothing here; I did not work, and I was dependent on him, you see? And then I opened my eyes, and now I work, I sustain my children and I feel proud of them [...] The moment I opened my eyes was when the police came [someone had called them due to the beatings] and I saw that they did not do anything bad to me—he had been lying to me! They took him and I lost the fear because I saw the officer took care of me. So I said, 'no more, no more, and no more!' because I will never let that happen again.'*

For Iris, her dialogical positioning as *mother*, *migrant*, and *woman* emerge in a transnational space that shapes the span of I-positions she can take and colour her psychological suffering in particular ways. Furthermore, her dependence on the abuser and her 'eye-opening' experience with the police, show how these dialogical processes are fraught with power dynamics and embedded in collective narratives of racism, illegality, and culturally sanctioned gender expectations. Power dynamics

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<sup>5</sup> The intimate connection between social conditions and psychological processes in migrants has been demonstrated by Bhatia & Ram's (2001; 2009) study of acculturation of members of the Indian diaspora in the US immediately after 9/11. Overnight, South Asian immigrants became racialized as 'looking like the enemy' and, otherwise structurally integrated members of the community, became treated as 'other' having an impact in their identity formation and process of acculturation. Social forces shape immigrants' identity through a series of dialogical positionings (Bhatia, 2002; 2010).

and collective narratives are intimately implicated in the particularity of her spatialized social location.

### ***Power Relations in the Dialogical Self***

Iris' story highlights the continuity of power dynamics from the systemic level all the way down to a more intimate one. For Iris, conditions of illegality and poverty are intertwined with the dynamics of IPV that gave way to her disempowerment. DST provides theoretical tools to analyse these power dynamics in the self by focusing on two elements: a) collective voices, derived from Bakhtin's (1984) concepts of utterance and ventriloquation; and b) the hierarchical yet fluid positioning of these voices in the self (Hermans, 1996; 2012). Collective voices in the self represent collective voices in society to which the self *answers* (Hermans, 2012). According to Hermans (2012), individual voices are embedded in a particular culture and are 'infiltrated' by it, including the culture's power structures. This location of voice within a particular culture is what Bakhtin (1984) referred to as *utterance*. Ventriloquation is thus understood as the simultaneous voicing of individual and collective utterances. Hermans (1996) tells us:

'Bakhtin (1929/1973) held that speakers always speak in social languages when producing unique utterances, and thus social languages shape, beyond awareness, what the individual voices can say. This simultaneity of individual and collective utterances involves a specific kind of multivoicedness that Bakhtin termed ventriloquation. With this term, he characterized the process in which one voice speaks through another voice or voice type as found in social language' (p. 46).

In this way, when a person speaks, she *ventriloquates* the beliefs, scripts, and languages of her community (Hermans, 2012). Therefore when Iris voices her determination to do anything for her children, she *ventriloquates*, in her utterance, the collective ideals of motherhood of her interpretative community. Voices within the self and between people are, therefore, simultaneously individual and collective.

In the Dialogical Self, these voices represent relatively autonomous I-positions that give the self a hierarchical structure (Hermans, 2012). Hermans (1996; 2012) argues that one position can take dominance over others reflecting changes in time and space. In this way, dominance and subordination are inherent to the dialogical self (Hermans, 1996), reproducing power dynamics found in society such as white/colored; rich/poor; citizen/alien. Hermans (2012) argues that the self *answers to* these opposites in society by conforming to them or not (p. 5). However, situations of heightened constraints such as IPV, significantly limit this dialogical capacity to answer; the dialogical processes between selves and within the self may, instead, become monological.

IPV presents a special case of dialogical relationships in which the voice of the perpetrator becomes a kind of authoritative discourse undermining dialogue. The defining feature of IPV is a *pattern of coercive control* (Pence & Paymar, 1993), in which violent as well as nonviolent tactics are systematically used by a perpetrator

to establish control over his<sup>6</sup> partner. This pattern of coercive control is central to what Johnson called *intimate terrorism* (Johnson, 2005, 2008; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). In this kind of pattern the abuser has the power to create conditions of captivity over his partner by means of ‘force, intimidation, and enticement’ (Herman, 1997, p. 74). Central to these conditions is the perpetrator’s power to define reality (Herman, 1997). In dialogical terms, IPV can be characterized as an inter-subjective process that becomes monological, where an external position (e.g. ‘my partner’) takes dominance in such a rigid way as to silence dialogue within the self. External I-positions are internalized as a whole ‘thou’ as ‘the-other-in-the-self’ (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 265). This implies that the perpetrator’s voice, as an external I-position, can take dominance within the self of the victim, defining reality as ‘I am all powerful.’ While this position is dominant, the victim operates as if she has no escape. We saw this in Iris’ story. She genuinely believed there was no help until she ‘opened [her] eyes’ (see above). Other accounts of migrant women present a similar situation. The women in Liendo and colleagues’ (2011) study describe their experiences of IPV as being ‘blinded to it all.’ Here the Bakhtinian question ‘Who is talking?’ (Holquist, 1983) is particularly enlightening. The voice of the abuser is appropriated as external positioning and the victim believes what the abuser says about her Self. Furthermore, as a multi voiced process, the voice of the perpetrator speaks also the voice of the collective. In this way, the abuser positions his authoritative discourse through the strategic use of any collective narrative that may create vulnerability. For Iris, these narratives were *illegality* in the U.S. (De Genova, 2002) and her social condition of *abject poverty* in Mexico, both leading to different kinds of disempowerment that the perpetrator used to create dependence.

For Alicia, these narratives were collective narratives of gender in her context, such as ‘the good mother’ and ‘the chaste woman,’ characteristic of *marianismo* (Carranza, 2013; Stevens, 1973). In her hometown, single women were constantly vulnerable to suffer gang rape if they behaved in a manner deemed dishonourable. Therefore Alicia ‘agreed,’ under limited options, to become her husband’s partner in order to protect herself from *el montón*. She explained, ‘*Once I agreed to be his girlfriend, no one touched me; no one disrespected me.*’ Later, after the beatings began, Alicia asked a female co-worker for advice. Recounting her colleague’s advice Alicia recalls,

*‘And the lady told me, “Ay, muchacha, you must endure this for your children. Where will you go? You will hook up with another man and it is not the same for your children.” Look, my husband chased me even using knives to stab me! I kept asking other women and they all told me, “Oh, you have to put up with him; all men are the same... you always must please them.”’*

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<sup>6</sup> A central controversy in the field of IPV today is the issue of gender asymmetry, also known as ‘who is more violent?’ In this article I take Johnson’s (2008) view that gender tends to be associated with particular types of interpersonal violence. Johnson has identified three kinds of violence in couples: *Intimate terrorism*, *Situational Couple Violence*, and *Violent Resistance* (2008). Following his typology, in this article I will be referring to intimate terrorism, characterized by a pattern of coercive control, which is largely associated with female victimization.

Narratives such as the 'chaste woman' and 'good mother' were profitably used by both women's partners and supported by collective narratives and material social conditions like poverty and illegality. Moreover, the consistency of the advice that different women report receiving through friends and family members exemplify the *ventriloquation* of powerful collective gender prescriptions. For example, a migrant woman explained that when she was deciding whether or not to leave her partner, she would often hear her aunt's voice in her mind saying, '*You are Catholic; marriage is forever, you should stay.*' Another woman who was forced to marry her rapist in Mexico constantly felt shame as she remembered the words of her aunt: '*You are the one who opened your legs, now you have to put up with it.*' Abusive partners often use the rape they have perpetrated and turn it into a powerful narrative to keep victims in a position of psychological captivity (Herman, 1997). It is not uncommon for women to report repeating the abuser's words in their mind, '*You are damaged goods; no one will want you or help you now.*' The power of such utterance lies in its collective character as a shared ideology.

Following Wertsch (1998), Tappan (2005) considered the concept of ideology as a cultural tool that provides individuals with a coherent worldview that empowers and constraints by providing orientation. Thus understood, ideologies are implicated in *mediated action* (Wertsch, 1998) drawing our attention to the agentic use of collective narratives of domination and subordination. Tappan argued that 'internalized oppression' and 'internalized domination,' usually used to illustrate the processes of members of subordinate groups, are not merely psychological phenomena in the traditional sense of inner processes of individuals. Instead, they are forms of mediated action; a set of 'dispositions' acted in the 'day-to-day' world of power relations (p. 60). More than narratives, they are positionings that demand mastery and ownership of cultural tools leading to *ideological becoming*. Accordingly, Tappan (2005) switched the Vigotskian term *internalization* with Bakhtin's term *appropriation*, coining *appropriated oppression*, which 'results from the mastery and ownership of cultural tools that transmit oppressive messages and scripts' (Tappan, 2005, p. 60). These cultural tools are installed by the ideologies that are part of the dominant culture and appropriated by oppressed and privileged individuals alike (p. 61). Thus understood, both domination and oppression are dialogical and sociocultural phenomena (Tappan 2005). In this sense, migrant victims of violence as well as perpetrators dialogically appropriate shared narratives of gender and citizenship using them strategically for dominance or for survival. For Alicia, her positioning as 'honourable married woman' was in full concordance with 'good mother'—both ventriloquate the ideology of *marianismo*. Although 'honour' kept her in an abusive marriage, from Alicia's perspective it protected her from a greater harm. Thus the positions of 'honourable woman' and 'good mother' supported each other during the time Alicia stayed with her abusive husband. However, when she learned that her husband was molesting her toddler child 'honourable woman' entered into conflict with 'good mother.' The latter position took dominance and Alicia decided to leave.

Similarly, both Alicia and Iris rehearse the use of the narrative of *belonging* to try to overcome the *otherness* that the conditions of illegality place upon them. Alicia practiced living in the U.S. *as if* she had papers and Iris negotiates her identity as a hardworking, valuable woman against her spacialized social condition (De Genova, 2005) as undocumented. As Bhatia and Ram (2009) have suggested, their positioning in the U.S. is constantly being negotiated according to structural constraints. In Tappan's (2005) terms, these on-going positionings and repositionings within structures of domination at play in their transnational space express the process of ideological becoming. In this way, the selves of Alicia and Iris emerge out of particular dialogical relationships within their respective contexts. Their positionings as 'triumphant,' 'suffering,' or as 'worthy' came out of a series of dialogical movements in time (the narrative of their life story) and space (the transnational landscape).

## Conclusions

The Dialogical Self presents a promising line of enquiry into the subjective experience of IPV of migrant women. Unlike conventional theories of identity that formulate the self as discretely set apart yet interacting with its context, the Dialogical Self offers valuable resources for an analysis of subjective experience that is closely knit within and through its sociocultural and political environment. Its premise of self as embodied and intrinsically social (Hermans et al., 1992) opens avenues to theorize on inter-subjectivity and power dynamics—crucial elements in the study of IPV—honouring the fluidity and complexity of subjective experience and its movement across space and time. Furthermore, Hermans and colleagues' (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Hermans & Kempen, 1998) emphasis in globalization and hybridity allow for nuanced analysis of culture and self that avoid essentialism. This line of work on migrant identity has already been developed in the work of Bhatia (2002; 2010), constituting a fertile ground to expand theorizing on migrant women's experiences that goes against essentialising notions of 'ethnic minority' so prevalent in cross-cultural studies of IPV.<sup>7</sup>

In its current development, however, DST presents limitations with regard to the embodied dimension of the self. It is not clear in the work of Hermans and colleagues, how the body takes part in the dialogical self beyond its role as shaping the imaginal landscape (1992).<sup>8</sup> Embodiment is a central element in the subjective experience of violence. What is the role of *fleshiness* in identity formation? How do we address physical violence as a cultural tool of mediated action; as a bearer of meaning within structures of social dominance? How do we account for key elements of migrant women's experience such as beatings, miscarriages, and rape in their transnational location? These represent an important line of future inquiry.

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<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of methodological problems arising from cultural essentialism see Yoshishama, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> See Cresswell & Baerveldt (2011) for a critique.

Taking embodiment seriously may cast new light into the particular ways in which IPV is implicated in the three ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity (Jensen, 2011) in rural communities in Latin America and into how these are transformed in conditions of transnational illegality.

As a 'bridge theory' (Hermans & Gieser, 2011), DST presents great potential to foster collaboration with feminist approaches such as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) to further develop theorizing of the dialogical self in conditions of constraints. DST could be profitably used to study the effects of power dynamics in identity development for undocumented victims of IPV. Particularly how conditions of illegality specifically affect selfhood. Such understanding may lead to a more nuanced study of clinical manifestations of depression and PTSD, and consequently, to interventions that are more fit to this population.

More generally, DST provides tools for the study of the cultural narratives—including the power dynamics within cultural prescriptions—that sustain the local understandings of suffering in an interpretative community. What is at stake for the traumatized self of a woman from rural Mexico in conditions of social constraints may be quite different from what is at stake for more privileged individuals; even more so if these social constraints are part of a self that is in constant transformation in a transnational space. DST may help us discover new formulations of 'depression' or 'PTSD' that are particular to transnational victims of IPV.

In closing, DST provides a unique opportunity to bring together power, culture, and embodiment into the study of selfhood. The capacity to hold together these three elements, so central to the experience of undocumented women victim of IPV, may open new avenues to include aspects of the experience of undocumented women that have not been addressed adequately in psychological scholarship. What is the role of power dynamics and culture in a victim's process of decision-making? What is the role of power in the self and of advocacy in mental health treatment? What is the impact of undocumented status in clinical presentations and how should it be considered in research and in the design of psychological interventions? These questions are but a few examples of the ways DST could be used to inform research and hopefully foster mental health services that are more relevant to undocumented women affected by violence.

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