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Human trafficking as a racialized economy and the exploitation of indigenous socio-spatial (im)mobility in North America

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The phrase "missing and murdered indigenous women" (MMIW) refers to the hundreds of deaths and disappearances of Native American women that occur each year. A growing human and sex trafficking industry that exploits indigenous women as forced sex workers is causing these numbers to increase year after year. Traffickers actively target tribal communities due to the increased likelihood of not being caught or prosecuted by an unjust legal-jurisdictional system that effectively invites traffickers onto Native American reservations. The disproportionate risks facing Native American women are a direct consequence of the now well documented historical injustices experienced by indigenous communities since contact with European colonists. Although scholarship on MMIW is growing, little attention has focused on the unique socio-spatial dynamics related to Native American (im)mobility patterns and the ways in which these dynamics enhance vulnerability to victimization by traffickers. This study empirically unpacks these dynamics in the context of North America. In the process, the industry that profits on trafficking indigenous women is conceptualized as a "racialized economy" that is constituted through an exploitative relationship between the city (the market for trafficked indigenous sex slaves) and the reservation. Here, the reservation becomes a virtual extension of the city, a relational understanding that foregrounds the urban dimension to this problem. We conclude by discussing how this analysis informs best practices that can be employed to mitigate against these (im)mobility-related risk factors and save lives.

KEYWORDS

political economy, race, colonialism, mobility, sex trafficking, Native American, gender

Introduction

The phrase "missing and murdered indigenous women" (MMIW) refers to the hundreds of deaths and disappearances of Native American women and girls that continue to plague tribal lands, rural communities, and cities in North America each year. Of course, this is not a new phenomenon: indigenous women have long been sexually exploited and subjugated, dating back to the early colonization of North America

by white Europeans (Deer, 2010; Mandeville, 2015; Campagna, 2016; Lucchesi, 2019; Joseph, 2021). However, it is an issue that has ascended to a crisis of "pandemic" proportions (Mandeville, 2015) due to a growing (and worldwide) human and sex trafficking industry that *actively* targets Native American reservations and indigenous populations (Mandeville, 2015; Lucchesi, 2019). In short, traffickers and sexual predators are less likely to be caught or prosecuted by an unjust legal-jurisdictional system which effectively invites such criminal behavior onto Native American reservations. This state of affairs, a product of persistent historical injustices (e.g., dispossession of ancestral lands and resources, continued government-induced poverty, institutional racism, and generational trauma), has resulted in a heightened predatory threat facing indigenous women and girls today (Campagna, 2016)[1].

In the context of MMIW, Native American women vanish three times: (1) when they relocate to the cities and rural communities from reservations, (2) when the media ignores their disappearance and/or murder (more than 95% of MMIW cases have never been covered by the media, see Lucchesi, 2019), and (3) when their disappearance and/or murder is never reported by law enforcement (Mandeville, 2015; Bruce, 2020). This is due, in part, to a form of structural racism that continues to pervade mainstream media, culture, and government agencies in North American and beyond, and which perpetuates neoliberal-informed myths of Native American poverty as being the result of their own cultural deficiencies and inabilities to assimilate (Mandeville, 2015; Lucchesi, 2019). As such, there is no accurate count of, or database that tracks, how many Native American women have gone missing (Nichols and Heil, 2015)[2].

This persistent institutional racism, however, is increasingly challenged, as evident in the backlash directed at the mainstream media in its nation-wide headlining coverage of the murder of Gabby Petito (who was white) in August, 2021. No such coverage has ever been put into the service of the disproportionately high number of non-white women who have suffered the same fate. In terms of what data does exist, murder is the third leading cause of death among indigenous women (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2016). And, when analyzing death certificates, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) reports that the rates of violence against indigenous women are sometimes ten times higher than the national average (i.e., when compared against other American women) (Bachman et al., 2018).

Moreover, more than four out of five American Indian and Alaskan Native women have experienced some kind of violence inflicted against them in their lifetime (National Institute of Justice (NIJ), 2016). 56% of these women experienced sexual violence in particular, and 66% of them had experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner (National Institute of Justice, 2016). Indeed, while sex traffickers and predators are a major part of this phenomenon, indigenous women are frequently subjected to violence (psychological as well as physical) from their own intimate partners (in some cases traffickers lure women into the industry by becoming intimate partners as an initial strategy) (Bailey and Shayan, 2006; Burnette and Hefflinger, 2016). The National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center has alarmingly reported that "American Indians and Alaska Natives are 2.5 times as likely to experience violent crimes—and at least 2 times more likely to experience rape or sexual assault crimes—compared to all other races" (NCAI Policy Research Center, 2013)[3].

These statistics reveal a striking and disproportionate predatory threat facing indigenous women and girls. Yet, United States attorneys often decline prosecuting violent crimes against indigenous women and girls. A 2010 report from the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) revealed that 67% of sexual abuse cases filed from 2005–2009 in tribal communities were never prosecuted United States Government Accountability Office (2010). Reflecting the racial contours of this phenomenon, 83% of the perpetrators identified were male, and half were non-Native (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2016). Indeed, as stated by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2016), "most American Indian and Alaska Native victims have experienced at least one act of violence committed by an interracial perpetrator (97% of women and 90% of men). Fewer victims (35% of women and 33% of men) have experienced one or more acts of violence by an American Indian or Alaska Native perpetrator" (National Institute of Justice, 2016).

These racial and gendered disparities are particularly important due to a long-standing law *which prevents Tribal courts from prosecuting non-Native individuals of crimes committed on Tribal lands, even though indigenous people can be prosecuted in the United States criminal justice system for crimes committed off Tribal lands*. This legal condition, decided by the United States Supreme Court in Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe in 1978, effectively invites sexual predators and traffickers onto Native American

1 MMIW has emerged to a state of prominence in recent years in the national media in Canada (Jiwani and Young, 2006; Thobani, 2007; Campagna, 2016; Savarese, 2017; Hansen and Dim, 2019; Parsloe and Campbell, 2021). However, this issue has received very little media attention in the United States due, in part, to a perception that human/sex trafficking is an international (rather than domestic) problem (Mletsko et al., 2018).

2 A report done by the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) noted that there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Native Alaskan women and girls in 2016 [National Crime Information Center (NCIC), 2018]. Yet, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) at that same time logged only 116 cases [National Crime Information Center (NCIC), 2018; also see Koepplinger, 2008]. Beyond this, there is no federal database tracking MMIW.

3 33% of all Native American women will be raped in their lifetimes (NCAI Policy Research Center, 2013).

10.3389/frsc.2022.884195

reservations to explicitly target indigenous women and girls (Mandeville, 2015; Bruce, 2020). That this legal condition is allowed to exist for one more day is as shameful as it is abhorrent, an injustice of colossal proportions and outcome of a revolting mixture of persistent apathy, ignorance, and institutional racism that continues to impugn and subject this population group to ongoing and contemporary forms of neo-colonial domination.

Although scholarship on human/sex trafficking and MMIW is growing (Koepplinger, 2008; Mandeville, 2015; Lucchesi, 2019; Bruce, 2020; Joseph, 2021), little attention has focused on the unique spatial dynamics related to Native American (im)mobility patterns, and the ways in which these dynamics enhance vulnerability to victimization by traffickers and predators. This study empirically unpacks these dynamics through the lens of race and mobility. In what follows, we first summarize the multifaceted and interrelated socio-political conditions and historical processes that have and continue to produce the heightened and gendered risk that faces indigenous communities, i.e., the legacy of (post)colonial practices, the role of media in perpetuating racist myths and victim blaming attitudes, and discriminatory legal structures.

We then conceptualize the industry that profits from trafficking indigenous women as a "racial economy" (Wilson, 2009) that is constituted through an exploitative relationship between the (historically non-urban) reservation and the city (the market for trafficked indigenous sex slaves). Here, we engage with the mobilities literature to frame the spatial dynamics of this particular racial economy in a way that illuminates the reservation as a virtual extension of the city, or site of "extended urbanization" (Brenner and Schmid, 2014), a relational understanding that foregrounds the urban dimension to this phenomenon in ways that both extend and deepen our knowledge of the contemporary hyper-polarized (and racialized) city.

This is then followed by an empirical examination of this relational understanding by discussing three individual cases that illustrate how the impacts of past and ongoing racially discriminatory practices shape Native American (im)mobility in ways that enhance risk for indigenous women and girls. In short, because many Native American people live on reservations and are poor, spatial accessibility (i.e., distance to travel, automobile accessibility) to the kind of resources and opportunities that pervade most urban regions is lacking, leading some to consider (otherwise avoidable) dangerous transportation options (especially for women), i.e., hitchhiking (Morton, 2016). Moreover, due to cultural expectations to participate in festivals, ceremonies, etc., those that do live in distant rural towns and urban centers tend to adopt comparatively broader scale mobility patterns that further enhances what is a simultaneously racialized and gendered risk of being victimized by human traffickers.

We conclude by briefly discussing the theoretical implications for the racial economy perspective as well as how this analysis informs best practices that can mitigate against these (im)mobility-related risk factors The study's emphasis on Native American (im)mobility patterns reveals a multi-scalar dynamic through which racial economies are (re)produced, extending the perspective beyond its typical application at the local urban scale through an engagement with the concept of planetary urbanization. With scant attention paid to this in both MMIW scholarship and activism, we emphasize the pro-active responses and practices (local, state, federal, and cross-jurisdictional) that can be promoted and deployed now, which could work to reduce this disproportionate, predatory, and gendered threat, and save lives.

MMIW risk-factors

It should be stressed that the variables that produce increased risk to emotional and physical violence among indigenous women are interrelated in that they tend to reinforce each other to produce a web of entangled sociopolitical, legal, historical, and spatial conditions that uniquely (and continue to negatively) impact tribal communities. In this section we briefly unpack these conditions in the context of the United States.

The legacy of colonialism

The colonial expansion of the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries necessitated the forced (and violent) removal of Native Americans from their ancestral lands, and placement on reservations. Of course, reservation lands were often properties that settlers did not desire (e.g., remote lands that lacked valuable resources). However, the federal government has also made more and more tribal land on reservations open to ownership by non-tribal people, slowly whittling away what tribal lands remain. The ongoing consequences of this history of violence—government-induced poverty, structural inequality, lack of opportunity, etc.—for tribal communities in North America are well documented (Razack, 2002, 2015; Thobani, 2007; De Leeuw, 2016; Morton, 2016).

As resource-starved reservations are typically far removed from major employment and educational centers, indigenous populations have been forced to leave the reservation and assimilate into a mainstream American (and urbanized) culture that is both foreign and often hostile to them (Lucchesi, 2019). Forced "relocation" policies (which continued into the 1970s) moved tribal people from reservation lands to cities as a means of facilitating assimilation. Boarding schools were part of this assimilation policy. In the worst cases, Native American children were forcibly abducted by government agents, sent

to schools hundreds of miles away, and beaten, starved or otherwise abused when they spoke their native languages. This process of removing Native American children from their homes continued until the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, and its enduring legacy continues to be felt today (Deer, 2010; Mandeville, 2015; Campagna, 2016; Bruce, 2020).

These relocation practices displaced, disrupted, and divided many Native American families. Following a report by the International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC) at Willamette University's College of Law (International Human Rights Clinic, 2014), this has resulted in a significantly increased rate of Native American children in foster care (many of whom become homeless). The report found that Native American children in Oregon are placed in foster care five times as frequently as whites. And in Multnomah County, OR the foster care placement of Native American children is twenty-four times higher than that of whites. It should not be surprising that factors such as foster care and homelessness serve to enhance one's vulnerability to the advances of traffickers.

There is also a lack of funding for traditional healing methods for Native Americans that have been victims of this kind of cultural genocide (i.e., the dislocation and isolation of population groups from their own culture, identity, and communities) and the generational trauma that results (Deer, 2010; Campagna, 2016). Following Bruce (2020), historical or generational trauma refers to the "soul wound," or the deep internalized pain that comes with the centuries of horrific (post)colonial practices that Native Americans have been forced to endure. Generational trauma is at the core of most significant ailments affecting Native Americans in the United States, e.g., substance abuse, disrupted family structures, high levels of domestic and sexual abuse, juvenile delinquency (Deer, 2010; Bruce, 2020). Each of these problems combine to render indigenous women particularly vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of predatory, physical, and emotional violence.

The perpetuation of racial and gendered stereotypes

The mainstream media also perpetuates racist myths and stereotypes about Native American populations (and women in particular) (Jiwani and Young, 2006; Jiwani, 2009; Moeke-Pickering et al., 2018; Kulig and Butler, 2019; Johnson, 2020). Most strikingly is the deployment of language that (re)produces prejudicial victim-blaming discourses and/or perceptions of Native Americans as violent aggressors. For instance, emphasizing that victims used drugs, alcohol or were sex workers, or involved with gangs, highlights the victim's criminal history and works to lessen, or even excuse, the acts of the perpetrator (Pratt, 2005; Gilchrist, 2010; Razack, 2015; Morton, 2016). In short, they got what was coming to them, a kernel of a broader, structural phenomenon within the mainstream media that demonizes non-white populations by reducing entire population groups to the worst-case examples (Dreier, 2005).

This is not just a racial discourse, but a gendered one as well insofar as the victims are disproportionately female. The discourse propagated by the media consists of an overwhelming perception that the indigenous women that go missing are in the "sex trade" and that they are drug users. The result is a sense of apathy (at best) among the general population which means the worsening reality of MMIW is likely to be treated by media outlets as unworthy of substantive reporting. However, in the context of MMIW this is erroneous insofar as the term "sex worker" implies that their prostitution is voluntary: if trafficked victims do not comply with the wishes of their captors, they will often face considerably violent consequences, coercion, and threats to their life (that are sometimes fulfilled).

Moreover, indigenous women are frequently sexualized in popular media images (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2015; Campagna, 2016) which reproduce the myth/fantasy of the sexy Pocahontas in a one-strap dress. This is in stark contrast to actual traditional tribal regalia, in which women are covered from their necks to their ankles. Nonetheless, the continued propagation of this myth today via the media and entertainment industry perpetuates certain fetishes (i.e., the sexy Pocahontas) that, in part, constitute the demand to which traffickers who prey on indigenous women are responding.

Young indigenous women who are homeless or lack stable family relationships and support networks are particularly vulnerable as they are more easily lured into isolation and made dependent on their captors (International Human Rights Clinic, 2014). In fact, following Bailey and Shayan (2006), increasing prevalence of communication technology, i.e., social media, has only enhanced (virtual) access to the reservation, and this vulnerable population group, by predators/traffickers. In short, the work of taking captive susceptible victims can begin remotely to gain trust in advance of physically arriving on the reservation or, ideally, persuading victims to willingly (and unwittingly) participate in their own abduction[4]. This mode of recruitment has jumped significantly since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic: there has been an increase of 125% in reports of recruitment via Facebook in 2020, and 95% *via* Instagram (Polaris Project, 2020).

Legal and jurisdictional structures

All of the above is further complicated and exacerbated by the unique legal, jurisdictional, and paternalistic relationship

4 Cyber bullying *via* social media works to further lessen one's self-esteem which consequently makes one more vulnerable to predators/traffickers who prey on one's lack of self-worth (Bailey and Shayan, 2006).

that tribal communities continue to have with the United States government. As this history is substantively documented elsewhere (see Mandeville, 2015; Bruce, 2020), we limit our discussion here to the following four points. First, Federal Indian Law is particularly complex and notably confusing (Bruce, 2020). For example, the boundaries of many reservations overlap with other political boundaries (i.e., counties) which can lead to confusion and frequent disputes about who to call when certain kinds of crimes have been committed, and which political jurisdiction (e.g., tribal, county, or municipality) is implicated as the entity responsible for investigating crimes (Greer, 2013; Mandeville, 2015).

Second, non-tribal law enforcement agencies and county governments do not always recognize land as tribal, which has led to lawsuits [e.g., Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation v. Klickitat County, No. 19-35807 (9th Cir. 2021)]. In other cases, upon realizing that a crime involved indigenous people, non-tribal law enforcement personnel have been reported to cease the investigation even though it is in their jurisdiction and, thus, their legal obligation. Non-tribal communities and agencies do not always want to work with tribal communities, the result of multifaceted and deeply entrenched racial stereotypes, insensitivities, and ignorance to the brutally violent and discriminatory history that has long seared Native American populations (Mandeville, 2015; Bruce, 2020; for the Canadian context, see Campagna, 2016).

Third, the Major Crimes Act places certain crimes under federal jurisdiction and requires that "major crimes" be prosecuted by the federal government (18. U.S.C. § 1153). This means that when there is a crime like murder, manslaughter, rape or arson committed by Native Americans on tribal lands, the FBI must come onto the reservation to investigate the crime and the United States Attorney's Office is responsible to prosecute the cases However, as Bruce (2020) notes, it can be difficult to get FBI agents out to the reservation in a timely manner due to the remoteness of many tribal communities and lack of federal resources devoted to investigating and prosecuting such cases (also see Mandeville, 2015)[5]. In fact, a Supreme Court ruling just expanded the power of state governments in their ability to prosecute crimes committed by non-indigenous people on tribal lands (see Schubert, 2022). An in-depth discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper, though suffice it to say that all of the above contributes to the lack of data on individual cases related to MMIW.

Lastly, and perhaps the most outrageous and egregious of these legal structures, is the legacy of the 1978 decision by the United States Supreme Court in Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe that deprives tribal communities the right to prosecute crimes committed by non-indigenous people against indigenous victims. 435 U.S. 191. In short, non-tribal people (some of which live on reservations) are not subject to the same laws as tribal members. Following Mandeville (2015), that this decision has yet to be repealed essentially means that the United States government is complicit (wittingly or not) with emboldening a growing human/sex trafficking industry that finds the commodifying and trading of indigenous women a profitable and relatively risk-free venture, an example of institutional racism *par excellence* (also see Greer, 2013; Bruce, 2020).

Although critical awareness of these shortcomings in the context of MMIW is increasing among federal officials and legislators alike (Bruce, 2020; Joseph, 2021), the startling message to predators and traffickers continues to be clear: Native American reservations are free to exploit as a source of susceptible would-be victims (see Mandeville, 2015; Lucchesi, 2019). And when major crimes are committed by non-tribal people the above procedural gridlock, funding shortfalls, and jurisdictional dilemmas converge in favor of perpetrators who find it notably easy to evade capture and prosecution on reservations:

> "Criminal perpetrators are taking advantage of this confusion and they are targeting and exploiting Indian country as a base of operation, successfully exploiting the jurisdictional loopholes and lack of enforcement" (Mandeville, 2015, p. 188).

Perpetuators can be held and detained, but in-lieu of federal prosecution (which is rare), the most county sheriffs and deputies can do in many cases is take perpetrators to the boundary of the reservation and drop them off, only for them to immediately walk back onto tribal lands. In this way, reservations effectively function as "de-facto haven[s]" (Greer, 2013, p. 478) for violent/sex predators, and "inputs into production" for traffickers. It is in this context that we conceptualize this particular corner of the human/sex trafficking industry as a racial economy.

Racial economy, mobility, and the urban-reservation connection

Following Wilson (2009, p. 140), racial economy is a perspective that understands processes of economic development as inseparably connected to "political institutions, economic markets, and conceptions of race" (also see Pulido, 2000, 2006, 2015; Gilmore, 2002, 2006; Hankins et al., 2012; Bonds, 2013). Urban economies, to Anderson and Sternberg (2013, p. 437), are understood in this perspective as "critically shaped by how race and processes of racialization

5 Tribal communities struggle to recruit and retain well-trained and qualified law enforcement officials and lawyers as other non-tribal agencies (i.e., local and county) typically pay better wages (Bruce, 2020). Funding for tribal law enforcement and prosecution is also acutely limited, with tribal courts only being able to imprison convicts for up to 1 year and/or levy fines up to $5,000 [25 U.S.C. § 1302(7)].

10.3389/frsc.2022.884195

are conceptualized, deployed as semiotic resources, and humanly mediated." Processes of economic development, like human trafficking, are then understood as co-constituted, or dialectically fused, with evolving and deeply entrenched conceptions of race.

In this context, the deliberate exploitation of the consequences of past *and ongoing* discriminatory practices (e.g., institutionalized poverty, generational trauma, substance-abuse, disrupted family structures), neoliberal-induced victim-blaming tendencies, entrenched objectification and sexualization of indigenous female bodies, and persistent (and outrageously racist) legal precedents by traffickers today effectively works to (re)produce these racist structures and injustices into the future[6]. But race not only functions as an input into production. It is also an output, as it is actively (re)worked, (re)made, and deepened (as a vital and valuable resource) through the production process—a process that commodifies trafficked indigenous women and girls as sex slaves within a simultaneously racialized and gendered economy predicated on simultaneously exploiting the consequences of the multifaceted discriminatory and racist history outlined above, and which renders the predation of indigenous women and girls a highly lucrative (and relatively risk-free) venture. According to the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe, in a global human trafficking industry worth $150 Billion and growing, the average annual profits generated by each woman who is forced into the commercial sex trade is $100,000 (Human Rights First, 2020).

Racial economy emphasizes the ways in which racialized power structures are continually (re)constituted through the unfolding of (formal, informal, or clandestine) capitalist economies. While this is not the place for a substantive review of this literature, we note that much of this research is focused on the local-urban scale dynamics of these processes and is weighted toward the African-American and Latino experience (Anderson and Sternberg, 2013). We extend this perspective into a new empirical context and trans-local dynamic: human trafficking in the context of MMIW. To do so we draw on the concept of mobility to frame the spatial dynamics to the (racialized) risk factors outlined above as the connective tissue that binds the reservation to the city. These factors converge to shape the unique (im)mobility patterns exhibited among indigenous women, and which are keenly exploited by traffickers.

6 Any doubt to the explicit and deliberate nature of the trafficking industry is thoroughly put to rest by Lucchesi (2019) analysis that includes direct quotes from the likely perpetuators themselves in response to the murder of two Inuit women in Montreal, Canada, as well as other known, white male murderers of indigenous women.

Socio-spatial (im)mobility and the urban-reservation connection

The "mobilities" literature is now voluminous and spans multiple disciplinary boundaries (Cresswell, 2006, 2010; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2006; Kwan and Schwanen, 2016; Adey, 2017; Sheller, 2017). Scholarship in mobilities is diverse and examines topics such as the movement of people, the progressive globalization of "flows and networks of information, goods, services and knowledges, and the details of circulation systems, from the infrastructure of transportation systems to the diffusion of ideas" (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014, p. 763). Much attention has been paid to the social dimension to these evolving spatial mobility patterns (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Taylor, 2012) in the sense that mobilities are "both productive of social relations and produced by them" (Cresswell, 2010: 21).

The concept of mobility has also been examined from a variety of conceptual orientations (in both social and spatial contexts) "concerned with the lived production of socio-material orders" (Buescher et al., 2016), from non-representational and actor-network theory (see Adey, 2017) to Foucauldian (Jensen, 2011; Sheller, 2016), relational (Cresswell, 2010), and feminist and decolonial approaches (Kwan and Schwanen, 2016; Cidro et al., 2020). In these contexts, the "ability to move and engage in certain types of movement" (e.g., by airplane, automobile, rail, bicycle, walking) is understood to be "socially differential and unevenly distributed" (Dufty-Jones, 2014, p. 204). This differential mobility and fixity, or (im)mobility, is shaped by a multiplicity of power relations (e.g., race, class, gender) that impact, for example, people's international migratory capacities (Schiller and Salazar, 2013; Lin et al., 2017), ability to effectively respond to (climate-induced) disasters (Cook and Butz, 2016), and access to different modes of transportation and resources (Sheller, 2015; Lucas et al., 2016).

At the core of this scholarship is "the question of the politics and [the] relations through and within which constellations of power operate" (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014, p. 763; Cresswell, 2010). In short, who gets to move and how, where to, and to what extent is this movement voluntary? Disparities in socio-economic inequality (and the broader structural drivers that underpin this inequality) relate to the varying (im)mobility of different population groups (Schiller and Salazar, 2013) and, consequently, their relative social exclusion from resources. As Jensen (2011, p. 255) notes, "mobility's different aspects appear and take place in particular spatial settings under the workings of diverse forms of power, and recognizing this informs us about the making of spatiali[z]ed mobility."

Within this frame, comparatively little attention has been focused on the (im)mobility patterns of indigenous populations (Suliman et al., 2019). Much like historically marginalized populations in remote and rural regions in the global south (Hernandez and Titheridge, 2015; Blondin, 2020), indigenous communities around the world are often

 10.3389/frsc.2022.884195

afflicted with acute "transport poverty" (Lucas et al., 2016) insofar as their placement on reservations constituted a "spatial containment" strategy that has continually been practiced by settler colonial society (Lucchesi, 2019). Not only are indigenous populations living on reservations that are spatially remote, the transportation infrastructure (e.g., maintained roadways, public transit) required to connect them to (urban) centers of employment and basic services and resources (often in distant towns and cities off reservation) is sorely lacking, effectively constituting conditions of what Suliman et al. (2019) identify as the "fourth world," i.e., third world conditions situated in first world contexts. Consequently, indigenous populations are particularly immobile, constituting a vicious and racialized form of spatial injustice that continues to pervade indigenous communities, the result of centuries of persistent discrimination-induced structural poverty, racial inequality, and generational trauma.

In short, this has left indigenous communities with limited "mobility capital" (Kaufmann et al., 2004) for alleviating these unjust conditions of relative fixity, thereby prompting indigenous populations to consider what Morton (2016) calls "contentious mobilities," or forms of being mobile that transgress settler society's prevailing norms of what constitutes socially acceptable and respectable methods of transportation (also see Cidro et al., 2020). However, Taylor (2012) promotes the potential liberating effects of emergent innovations in communication (e.g., internet, smart phones, social media) on indigenous communities in Australia (and beyond), and how such connectivity is impacting the mobility of people on and off the reservation, enhancing access to resources, employment, and the like[7]. We add that insofar as indigenous communities have benefitted from such innovations, they have also served to deliver vulnerable indigenous women further into the hands of predators and traffickers, as explicitly noted above by Jiwani and Young (2006).

While there is an emergent literature examining indigenous mobility practices (see Suliman et al., 2019; Whyte et al., 2019), only Morton (2016) does so in the context of MMIW. Hitchhiking is the form of "contentious mobility" analyzed by Morton in her discourse analysis of billboards on the Highway of Tears in the remote expanse of rural British Columbia, Canada. The messages communicated through these government sponsored billboards urge indigenous women not to hitchhike, but, as Morton (2016) points out, make no alternative recommendations to indigenous women in terms of how they are otherwise supposed to access basic and vital resources (e.g., women's shelters, employment services, health services, and education) in a landscape bereft of such resources, and where other modes of transportation are not available (many indigenous women do not have access to a car).

We extend this analysis below to identify hitchhiking as just one component of a broader system of racialized and gendered mobility inequality facing indigenous communities, and which enhances one's risk to MMIW insofar as this inequality delivers potential victims into the very spaces in which predators and traffickers are actively hunting. Moreover, mobility is also a key aspect to the racial economy of transporting enslaved human beings (for whatever purposes) between sites of production, transaction points, and the more urban-oriented sites of consumption (Mletsko et al., 2018). Trafficking is an industry that relies on free-flowing mobility in and through specific kinds of spaces: interstate highways, truck stops, rest areas, casinos, cheap motels (in close proximity to highways), low-income communities (i.e., Native American reservations), etc., all of which become potential sites of extraction and/or transaction enroute to markets of consumers (International Human Rights Clinic, 2014; Mletsko et al., 2018). As such, this particular corner of the trafficking industry, as a racial economy, is constituted through a carefully cultivated and specialized commodity chain that stitches the reservation and the city together as opposing poles within a cohesive, yet heterogeneous, urban fabric and economic geography of producing indigenous women and girls as sex slaves.

It is in this context that we conceptualize the reservation as a site of what Brenner and Schmid (2014) characterize as "extended urbanization." The reservation, as the site of primary resource extraction, effectively becomes a virtual extension of the city. Much like how the oil and gas industry ties together seemingly "rural" landscapes into what is now a planetary urbanization process (Arboleda, 2016; Gilbertz et al., 2021), the reservation represents a site of extended urbanization constituted, in this case, through the further subjection of this historically marginalized population to worsening material violence and lasting emotional hardships, the by-product of a growing and callous (and metropolitan-based) trafficking industry, trans-local racial (and gendered) economy, and contemporary manifestation of neocolonial domination.

We now empirically unpack the spatial (im)mobility patterns of indigenous women that fuels this process of extended urbanization, a comparatively under-examined feature of the contemporary hyper-polarized and racialized city.

7 Yet, Oliva (2010) also warns that such enhanced mobility (that stems from de-tethering people from places *via* communications technology) can lead to in-migrants disrupting stable place-based relations and identities in rural regions. In short, innovations in communication technology is a double-edge sword, as noted by Aikau and Corntassel (2014, p. 2014) in that "contemporary forms of connectivity and 'virtual' political activism establish important links across space and time," but "they are limited in terms of restoring and regenerating a place-based existence".

The spatial dynamics of contentious indigenous (im)mobility

As noted by Morton (2016), indigenous populations are often forced into adopting various forms of contentious mobility, such as hitchhiking. But hitchhiking is just one aspect within a broader and multifaceted landscape of indigenous (im)mobility. Beyond the method of transportation, indigenous populations often travel long distances when compared to other population segments, and frequently. Due to the history of forced relocation and assimilation, youths growing up in foster care and boarding schools, and inadequate access to health care (see Lucchesi, 2019; Cidro et al., 2020), families are often geographically dispersed from remote reservations to dense urban centers. This means that, whether it be for social activities, ceremonies, health care, relocating for employment or education, more routine long-distance traveling puts Native Americans more regularly in harm's way, especially young women (Quinless and Manmohan, 2016).

Historical connections to cities

After World War II, a series of federal policies known as "Termination and Relocation" propelled many Native Americans into "preselected urban locations where, it was assumed, they would become employed and assimilated into the mainstream of American society" (Rhoades, 2000, p. 45). From 1952 to 1972, an estimated 100,000 Native Americans were relocated to a relatively small number of cities as relocation sites: Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay, Dallas, Seattle, and Chicago (see Figure 1).

This history has had a major influence on the Native American settlement patterns we see today. In 1926 fewer than 10,000 Native Americans lived in cities. According to the U.S. Census, by 1960 about 160,000 Native Americans were found in urban areas. By 1970, this number had climbed to 340,000 (Rhoades, 2000).

The legacy of this period is fractured family structures and, consequently, considerable movement between reservations and these cities in particular. Rather than seamless assimilation, Native Americans faced continued discrimination, limited access to housing and employment (redlining, prejudice in the labor market, etc.), and normalized hostility directed at them. For those coming out of foster care, alienation, substance abuse, and even homelessness has not been uncommon, as noted above—all conditions associated with increased susceptibility to victimization by predators and traffickers. Reservations are also profoundly resource starved, plagued by persistent government-induced poverty and lack of opportunities. Women often find themselves trapped in this landscape, effectively "contained" by past discriminatory practices. Access to automobiles and public transit options have historically been lacking as well. As such, because indigenous women are particularly immobile, they are prompted to consider alternative, or "contentious," modes of mobility that they might otherwise not consider, merely to acquire basic services (e.g., groceries, laundry).

Contentious indigenous mobility

Many indigenous women have been abducted and murdered in the act of hitchhiking (see Morton, 2016), perhaps most notably reflected in the relatively high-profile case of Amber Tuccaro, who was abducted and murdered on the outskirts of Edmonton, Alberta, in 2010 (see Savarese, 2017). What evidence exists about Amber's life suggests she was close to her mother and son, Jacob. She was also known to be an active and sincere woman with a positive attitude and sense of humor (Savarese, 2017). Yet, like many indigenous women, Amber traveled frequently which placed her at increased risk to victimization by traffickers/predators. Amber's mother, Vivian, knew that "Amber was in harm's way because she failed to maintain contact with her 'number one priority,' her son Jacob" (Savarese, 2017, p. 171).

It is suspected that Amber was murdered by a serial killer. She is also one of four indigenous women whose remains were located in the same 4 km area in the Leduc/Nisku region of northern Alberta, indicating the racialized nature of these crimes in particular, and the broader phenomenon of MMIW in general. Despite Amber's engagement in contentious forms of mobility, one wonders if she would still be alive today if she had not been visibly indigenous. And despite her positive qualities as described by her family, after her mother reported her missing, law enforcement concluded that Amber had probably been "partying" and would likely return home, and that there was no reason to believe [Amber was in] any danger" (Savarese, 2017, p. 167). Law enforcement even claimed "that Amber was seen in Edmonton at a time when she was already deceased," suggesting that Amber was viewed by law enforcement as indistinguishable from other indigenous women (Savarese, 2017, p. 167). She was even removed from the missing person's list. As such, it is a short step away from concluding that her disappearance could have only been due to her choice (to hitchhike) rather than anything else.

Hitchhiking, however, is merely one kernel of a broader and more complicated picture. For example, cash (or trading) systems tend to dominate the local economies of tribal communities, as banks seldom exist on reservations (see Wagner and Hertel, 2010; Cover et al., 2011; Guedel and Colbert, 2016). In fact, it is thirty miles to the nearest bank from the town of Wellpinit, WA on the Spokane Reservation, where the majority of inhabitants do not have bank accounts. As such, many Native Americans do not have credit cards. And further, Native Americans do not always carry the state identification that many

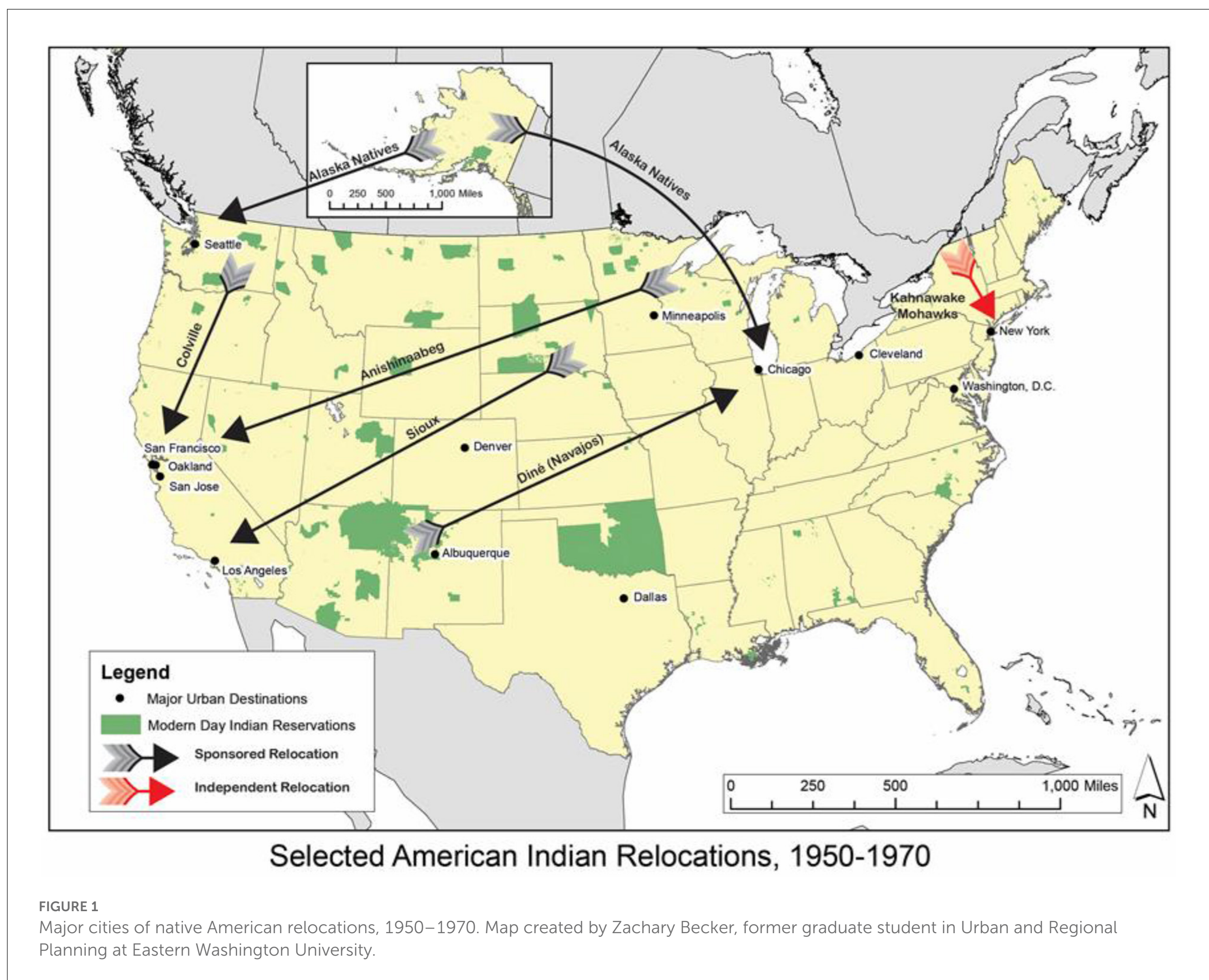

FIGURE 1
Major cities of native American relocations, 1950–1970. Map created by Zachary Becker, former graduate student in Urban and Regional Planning at Eastern Washington University.

transportation services require (e.g., greyhound bus, Amtrak); they tend to carry tribal identification. This means that Native Americans are generally at higher risk for getting stranded enroute to their destinations, e.g., if their car breaks down, their phone dies, or they don't have enough cash for a bus ticket. At the mercy of others in such instances, indigenous women become particularly vulnerable and often in the very kinds of spaces known to be frequented by traffickers (Mletsko et al., 2018), who may initially pose as friendly Samaritans.

In short, these conditions of (im)mobility converge to generate a "perfect storm" scenario of risk that indigenous women and girls increasingly face while moving along the urban-reservation continuum (virtually or physically). Indeed, abduction can happen at any point along this continuum. Access to adequate health care is also problematic as Native Americans are only eligible for contract health care on the reservation, which is often non-existent, thereby necessitating long-distance travel due to the remoteness of many reservations. Lucchesi (2019) presents a case study of two Inuit women, Sharon Baron and Siasi Tullaugak, who were murdered (although officially declared suicides) in Montreal, Canada in 2016–2017. Both women, who were sisters, had moved to Montreal to live with boyfriends. In the 1980s, Montreal's Cabot Square became a home base for many Inuit speakers looking to network with one another. Shortly after, Cabot Square became a site routinely frequented by non-Inuit pimps and drug dealers. Sharon came to Cabot Square to visit her mother at a nearby health care facility. While waiting for the bus she was approached by a drug dealer, and ultimately ended up in the sex trade before being murdered.

Siasi, who traveled to Montreal in search of her sister who had gone missing, encountered the same pimp and suffered the same fate. As Lucchesi (2019, p. 11) reports, this man was widely known "for getting Inuit women addicted to drugs, and then pimping them out … He has never been arrested for human trafficking, rape, or any related charges, despite being reported by victims, business owners, and social workers." At the other end of the continuum, surges in hydraulic fracturing in many remote, rural regions across North America (Montana,

Wyoming, etc.) have been associated with increased rates of violence, sexual assault, prostitution, illicit drugs, and sex trafficking (Gilbertz et al., 2021; Joseph, 2021). As Joseph (2021, p. 4) notes, the "exoticization and sexualization of indigenous women in these areas and in general, make them bigger targets for violence," especially when fracking zones appear in close proximity to reservations, a reality depicted in the recent and chilling motion picture *Wind River* (2021).

Along the continuum, the cohesive urban fabric that stitches these otherwise disparate landscapes together, the International Human Rights Clinic (2014) report on human trafficking involving Native Americans in Oregon reveals that commercial sex establishments are littered along the I-5 corridor, most notably at truck stops which are known to facilitate transfers of sex trafficking victims. Federal prosecutors have reported a surge in sex trafficking along this interstate corridor, as well as increased frequency of adults traveling to Southern Oregon to have sex with children they met online. The report also discusses that interviewees working on or in close proximity to reservations repeatedly reported instances of prostitution and human trafficking as occurring at locations near (but not on) the reservation, such as highway truck stops or neighboring towns. There is also reportedly a significant amount of trafficking and prostitution of Native, Hispanic, and White women in Madras (just outside of Warm Springs, OR), where pimps pick up young women to take back to Portland. One interviewee reported knowledge of a young woman who had been recruited into trafficking through her attendance at a community college in Baker City, Oregon. Finally, the report found that state officials are not meeting their legal obligations to the Native American community with regard to the prevention of trafficking, prosecution of offenders, and protection of victims.

Additional stories are reported in the United States Attorney's Bulletin (2017), about indigenous women being taken, held, and sexually abused in the cargo storage compartments of international ships visiting the Duluth port in Minnesota. Since September 11, 2001, the Duluth port has increased security because of its designation as an international point of entry. Credentials and identifications are required to get on the docks and boats, and civilians are not permitted to access the dock or boats. Although these security measures have significantly reduced the amount of trafficking in recent years, and are to be applauded for sure, much work still needs to be done, and it continues to be an uphill battle.

The case of Josephine Rattler

Lastly, we shine a spotlight on the case of Josephine Rattler, the sister of one the authors of this paper, Idella King. Josephine and Idella were born as members of the Northern Arapaho Tribe of the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. Their biological father, a highly decorated Vietnam Veteran, went to prison for alleged sexual crimes against females in their family as well as in tribal communities in Montana, Wyoming, and Washington. Josephine and Idella were then adopted by their stepparents and raised in the Blackfeet cosmology and way of life, as this was their stepfather's tribal nation. Moreover, Josephine and Idella's grandparents came from multiple tribal communities across the American northwest. Consequently, their extended family (biological and adopted) was and continues to be spread out over a notably wide geographic area, with ancestors living (and buried) in Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and California. Their grandparents also moved to Los Angeles, CA in the relocation era. They then moved to Oakland, CA, and settled in Seattle, WA. As Idella noted to us, "whenever you relocate, you then have family and friends who want to visit; we had lots of nieces and nephews come live with them in Seattle, some now live in Port Angeles, WA. Some of our [Great] Plains people ended up living in the Seattle area too."

Both sisters experienced long-distance travel as a regular occurrence (for them and their relatives) as they grew up. Idella speaks of how their grandfather took the family on many trips back to Montana for summer vacations and ceremonies, and they often traveled in large groups when both sisters were young. Long mobility hauls were normal. Complicating matters, sundown laws which were standard at the time often meant that they could not buy food along the highways. The consequence was that basic acts of mobility were made much more difficult. Long-distance travel was also made more necessary by the fact that reservation life was (and remains) starved of the most basic services and resources. Idella speaks of how long-distance travel off the reservation was necessary just to get glasses.

Yet, both sisters came from a relatively unique background insofar as their grandfather served in the United States military, and then worked for the Washington State Governor's Office. Because of this, their grandfather was respected, which helped him buy a house in Seattle. This was not normal for other Native Americans, where discriminatory practices (i.e., redlining) kept homeownership outside their reach for many decades. Their grandfather's house became a safe space for Native Americans in Seattle.

However, this did not help save their numerous family members from being killed, including Josephine herself who was murdered in 2004 at the age of 27. What happened to Josephine, unfortunately, is not unique. Idella describes how on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming "people went missing all the time," seemingly a normal part of life. It is also worth noting that Idella's aunt was also killed under mysterious circumstances in Seattle. Their grandmother's sister was killed in Northern California. Her body was discovered on the side of the road, and the police were never able to tell family members at the time what had happened to her, and nobody was ever charged with a crime. Idella's brother was also killed in a hit-n-run accident in Okanogan County, WA by a Caucasian woman who never went to jail. Idella noted to us that because her brother was drinking and walking on the side of the road when he was struck, "law enforcement acted almost as if it was his fault." In short, Idella's

story is worth being documented in a monograph, and as such, is beyond what we can do justice to in the space of this article.

Idella's sister, Josephine, had been a cook who traveled extensively to ceremonies until she married Will, a Blackfeet man. Evidently, Josephine had been "living in an abusive relationship that she did not disclose with her family." Previously, Josephine traveled as a single woman from pow-wow to pow-wow, but this aspect of her life ended when she married Will. In short, "Will was not a pow-wow guy," and was "always present when Josephine visited family functions." Will kept a watchful eye and closely supervised Josephine's engagements. As Idella noted, it was rare to see Josephine without Will being right there, "he was always there ... and very controlling."

Josephine and Will had three children together, but the (physical and verbal) abuse continued to the point where Josephine decided to leave the relationship. Josephine had evidently tried to leave many times but always returned for the sake of the children of whom she was devoted. However, things were different this time. Idella was living in Missoula at the time while studying at the University of Montana. Josephine told Idella of her plan while visiting two weeks before her death. Josephine had planned to leave Browning, MT, where she had been living with Will, and get to Riverton, WY on the Wind River Reservation, with stops in Great Falls, MT and Billings, MT. Josephine's destination was the home of her biological father. This is a telling detail as Josephine felt greater safety with her biological father, a convicted sex offender, than staying in her marriage. She had been working as a cook at a Taco John's fast-food outlet in Browning, and she had planned to escape the day she got paid. The plan fell apart when she discovered that Will had already picked up her paycheck. Later that night, Josephine's body was left at a Hospital door in Browning, where she was pronounced dead on Father's Day.

Nothing is known (or has been disclosed) about what happened to Josephine after leaving Taco John's and ending up at the Hospital that night. It is suspected, according to Idella, that she never made it out of Browning, and that "someone had found her and brought her to the hospital, which turned out to be her husband." Will admitted to finding her and leaving her at the front door of the hospital, before returning with his family a few hours later. Idella's family, however, was not called when this happened, and when they arrived in Browning, 'there were no cops, and no investigation. ... [and] the autopsy was inconclusive."

It is still unclear how exactly Josephine died. According to Will, he found Josephine hanging by suicide in their home, although he never called 911. Given Will's criminal background, Idella and her family have long suspected that Will was trafficking their children and likely Josephine (Josephine's children may have witnessed their mother's death) to his friends and contacts in the military. The children are now adults and are institutionalized with chronic mental health issues. Following Idella, Will was from a different kind of family, which meant that Josephine and Idella were always considered outsiders. As such, it is possible that things might have gone differently had they been considered "from the community," reflecting class-based and tribal-identity distinctions within the Native American community. Idella still does not know exactly what happened to Josephine or who is responsible, as no investigation ever took place as her death was presumed a suicide. However, what we can conclude is that Josephine's significant geographic removal and isolation from the rest of her immediate and close extended family members meant that she had nobody to advocate for her, even in her own home.

As horrible as this story is, the fact that it is not abnormal makes it worse. Both the Blackfeet and Wind River Reservations are among the most remote in North America. Yet, the oil and gas industry has had a presence in these two states for years, as noted in the documentary *Gasland*. While otherwise a rural landscape in appearance, it is nonetheless plugged into a broader, planetary (and racialized) urban fabric by way of a globally expansive energy industry that links the urbanization process in general to far-flung industrial hinterlands like, for example, the Wind River Reservation (see Gilbertz et al., 2021).

Coda: Racial economy, scale, and mitigating (im)mobility-related risk to MMIW

This study deepens our understanding of the ways in which indigenous (in)mobility exacerbates the risk that indigenous women face to being victimized by the global and racialized economy of human trafficking. In the process, it extends the racial economy perspective toward a different and comparatively underexamined empirical context: the disproportionate role of indigenous women and girls abducted by human traffickers within a global industry that stitches remote tribal lands into a broader and hyper-differentiated process of extended urbanization. In particular, the formation of this racial economy (*via* extended urbanization) is revealed to extend considerably beyond the scale in which the racial economy perspective is typically examined, i.e., the local-urban scale, and onto a trans-local and multi-scalar landscape of operation. Further research, following Bonds (2013), might interrogate the dynamics of such scale-transcending manifestations of racial economy formations within a more relational (or planetary) conception of uneven urbanization processes.

Embedded within the hyper-polarized (and planetary) urban fabric is the loss of land, culture, language, and identity combined with limited opportunities for education, jobs, and housing which forms a searing state of vulnerability afflicting tribal communities today. As we have shown, indigenous women are more likely to struggle with poverty, violence and addiction, while structural discrimination pervades legal processes, institutional policies, and cultural misrepresentations.

Other risk factors that indigenous women face include unstable housing, unreliable transportation, poor education, and exposure to physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

In this context, race and gender are understood as inseparably intersecting forms of inequality: you cannot speak of race without speaking of gender and vice versa. Applying the racial economy perspective to the phenomenon of MMIW foregrounds the gendered (as much as the racial) experience of violence and victimization which has not been extensively discussed in the broader racial economy literature. We argue that while the racial economy perspective rightly shifts the focus within urban political economy to race (and the relationship between race and class) within capitalist societies, a long-neglected topic of inquiry, scholarship in racial economy might further benefit from adopting more intersectional modes of analysis where race is treated in conjunction with other forms of inequality that meaningfully and intersect with race (and class) in particular empirical contexts (thereby bringing racial economy into more substantive interdisciplinary dialogues with feminist perspectives).

Moreover, the contentious forms of mobility that indigenous women are forced to adopt are interpreted by white settler society as dangerous, an interpretation that leads to a tendency among law enforcement, legislators, and government agencies to place the onus on indigenous women to change their behavior as the solution. Indigenous women are told that they should stop putting themselves at-risk to avoid being kidnapped and murdered, which simultaneously normalizes the existence of murderous men constantly on the hunt for "willing victims" who hitchhike (Morton, 2016). As such, the "blame," as Morton (2016, p. 304) asserts, "is implicitly assigned to indigenous women as a result of prejudicial constructions of Indigenous femininity" insofar as "hitchhiking frames Indigenous women as wrong-doers … [conflating] their morality with their mobility."

Silenced in this institutionalized trope is the brutal and ongoing history of colonial oppression that forces indigenous women into sustained conditions of immobility in the first place. More simply, "not having a personal vehicle makes individuals susceptible to disenfranchisement and social exclusion" (Morton, 2016, p. 302) (especially on remote, resource-starved reservation lands), and therefore open to considering hitchhiking as an acceptable mode of transportation (also see Sheller and Urry, 2006). The trope that the solution lies in indigenous women changing their behavior implies an unspoken assumption that hitchhikers (and those who adopt other forms of contentious mobility) have a choice, that staying confined to the home is a reasonable alternative, and that the existing state of inequality is unproblematic and acceptable. The message is clear: stay in your rightful and spatially confined place or risk your life!

In the era of #metoo, tribal communities are standing up and asking what is happening to our mothers, sisters, and daughters, and what can be done? A comprehensive report on existing best practices in the context of mitigating mobility-related risk factors, what progress has already been made, and what still needs to be done, is beyond the scope of this paper. With that said, we offer the following ideas. First, and ultimately, the entrenched disavowal of historical and ongoing colonial and structural oppression will have to end. This will take nothing short of a colossal anti-racism/discrimination educational campaign and myriad training programs at all levels of law enforcement, government, and mainstream media institutions, at the very least. Media outlets need to be more sensitive to the unspoken and prejudicial language often deployed that effectively makes excuses for perpetrators (wittingly or not). While awareness of MMIW is growing and such educational/training programs are emerging (see the Polaris Project: https://polarisproject.org/), there is still much that can be done (International Human Rights Clinic, 2014). To this end, we present as Figure 2 what we call the "wheel of vulnerability," which we envision to be used as a visual aid in such educational campaigns. The diagram visually illustrates the myriad socio-spatial MMIW risk factors that uniquely apply to indigenous women.

It is important to note the ways in which the three areas of risk in the diagram—structural discrimination, tribal community, and individual—intersect in the middle to form a perfect storm of vulnerability.

More specifically, and in addition to better understanding the social and life events that influence indigenous (im)mobility patterns, transportation planners need to consider how policy structures empower traffickers to peddle indigenous women and girls as victims. Transportation planners need to be more aware of these dynamics and better capable of assisting victims being trafficked. This would, hopefully, translate into the application of sufficient pressure to overturn the 1978 Supreme Court decision that effectively invites traffickers onto tribal lands. Progress will only continue to be stunted until such horrific legal precedents are extinguished. This could also lead to much greater prioritization at the federal level of prosecuting traffickers coupled with much more severe consequences (and less focus on prosecuting victims under the false pretense that they had a choice in the matter). In short, traffickers must be sufficiently discouraged (rather than actively encouraged) from indigenous communities.

This paper also stresses that mobility also needs to be taken more seriously in risk mitigation efforts. Tribal communities are especially vulnerable to trafficking, and communities near borders are especially vulnerable to international trafficking, which involves places like seaports, airports, bus and rail terminals, rest stops, truck stops, etc. Trafficking in Indian Country includes each of these kinds of spaces; it also intersects with the diverse economic labor needs from large agricultural, manufacturing, and service industries, and the exploitative relationship between tribal lands and large cities where traffickers seek to peddle victims. Understanding the connection

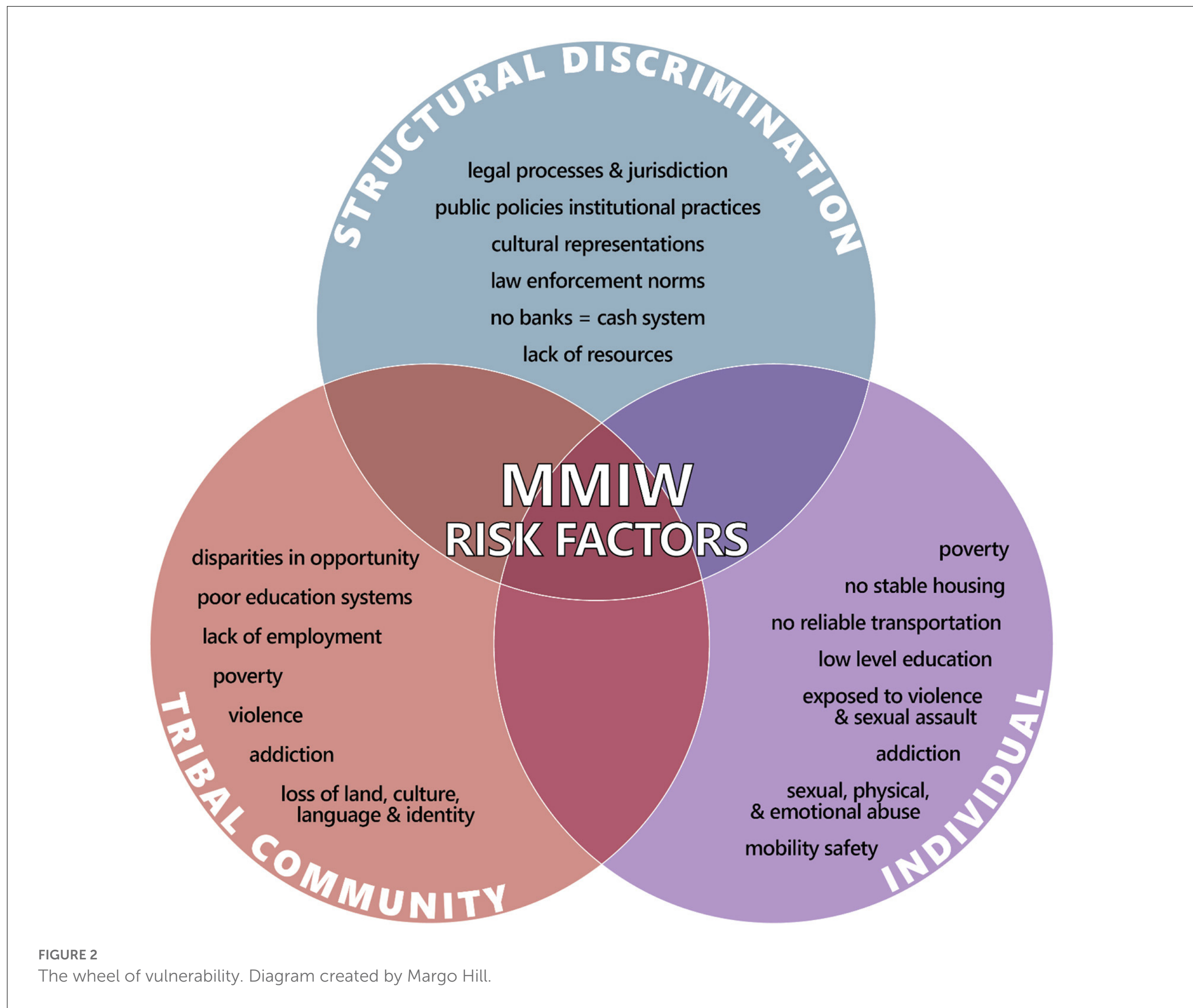

FIGURE 2
The wheel of vulnerability. Diagram created by Margo Hill.

between the reservation and the city is crucial in disrupting this racialized and gendered economy, as well as the interconnected roles of foster care and homelessness (International Human Rights Clinic, 2014). As such, the continued creation of heightened police presence and specialized task forces devoted toward a concerted anti-human trafficking action plan is needed. Such a plan needs to combat MMIW by targeting and intervening in these very kinds of mobility-fluid spaces.

Finding solutions for MMIW is complex and challenging, and while reform is unfolding in the right direction, there are actions that transportation agencies, law enforcement, and tribal leaders can adopt to reduce the occurrences of human trafficking. State transportation agencies can better harness the potential of their employees and technology to fight trafficking, aid victims, and support critical decision making. We also call for more standardized protocols for responding to cases of MMIW, and better collaborative efforts across tribal, state, and county jurisdictions (i.e., cross-deputization agreements). Here, greater resources for law enforcement at all scales (especially on tribal lands) is of paramount importance, including the cultivation of cultural competencies that can work to build trust between indigenous communities, non-tribal law enforcement, and prosecutors. Greater emphasis on tracking this phenomenon with available and accessible data is also needed to better equip policy makers to make informed decisions.

We call for more funding be devoted to social services that are more holistic as well, i.e., that address mental health, including more social workers and support networks that tailor care to the individual. For instance, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act mandates that the United States Department of Human and Health Services (HHS) initiate a pilot program to protect juvenile victims of trafficking. The program would include three residential treatment facilities that provide shelter, psychological counseling, and independent living skills development to victims. Congress authorized $5 million annually from 2008 through 2011 for these facilities, but this funding was never actually made. Special services should also be created and *properly funded* to more adequately serve Native American children living in and aging out of foster

care. More substantive subsidized housing programs need to be developed for indigenous communities as well.

Improving opportunities for indigenous youths is also crucial, through better education systems, employment opportunities, and improved cultural institutions aimed at preserving indigenous identities and languages (Campagna, 2016; Bruce, 2020). Much greater funding for traditional healing methods for victims of generational trauma and crime, including trafficking, also needs to be included, as well as better understanding and appreciation of how social structures and policies have worked to devalue the lives of native women and girls, and how this influences travel behaviors (Mandeville, 2015; Bruce, 2020).

Lastly, awareness of the multifaceted risk factors that indigenous women face need to be better communicated and disseminated in Indian Country, through news media, in educational settings, and risk mitigation training programs for not only indigenous youths but all members in tribal communities, as well as those working in conjunction with health service, non-tribal state transportation, judicial, and law enforcement agencies. In short, better awareness and education can help people on the ground spot signs of trafficking and report potential instances to better equipped authorities (i.e., "Truckers against Trafficking," https://truckersagainsttrafficking.org/). Tribal communities also need to create better policies to address sexual harassment and assault, including improving how tribal law enforcement personnel are trained and handle such cases.

Perhaps most pressingly, greater awareness of the increasing role of social media in the recruitment efforts deployed by traffickers (*via* Snap Chat, video games, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) can hopefully lead to better protecting indigenous youths from abduction. Part of this necessarily entails better training and equipping children to better spot the signs of recruitment. But parents and legal guardians also need to be trained and capable of tracking internet usage. Youths should also not be isolated for long durations of time, and parents, teachers, and guidance counselors can better work together to improve the self-esteem of young people. Stronger and more stable family structures would go a long way to reducing risk. Although we are only scratching the surface in terms of the above list of best practices, we argue that positive movement in each of these areas of policy reform/development could go a long way to, at the very least, minimize this racialized and gendered risk and save lives now.

Author's note

This is a core feature of MH's research and political agenda. The idea for this paper began with her, at which point MA was brought aboard to develop the literature review and compose the manuscript. One of the empirical stories stems from our interview with IK, based on the experience of her and her sister. In the process of doing the research IK was brought on as a co-author as well as an informant such that she could control the telling and writing of her own story which appears in the manuscript. Both MH and IK have personal experience on this topic in different ways, and that experience informed much of the content that drove the writing of the paper.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Institutional Review Board, Eastern Washington University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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