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Caitlynn C. Carr
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“Siguiendo Adelante”/ “Moving Forward:” Gender-based Violence (GBV) Service-seeking and
Survivorship among Indigenous Guatemalan Women

by

Caitlynn C. Carr

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
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global health, Indigenous women, population-based resiliency

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the women in my life, in Guatemala, the United States (U.S.), and elsewhere. Women who make the world a better place, oftentimes without realizing it. And to my grandmother, Susan Smith. Your resilience, inner strength, and humor in the face of adversity is unparalleled and I am so grateful to be your granddaughter. Thank you for believing in me, for inspiring me, and for your love. And to the women in Guatemala whom I have met during fieldwork for this project and over the years. Thank you for your companionship, laughter, and memories. I hold them close to heart; they are forever part of me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Abstract	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Background	8
Previous Work in Guatemala	13
Positionality	15
Ethical Considerations	19
Research Objective and Questions	20
Key Arguments and Contributions	20
Chapter Two: Literature Review—Sociohistorical, Anthropological, and Programmatic	
Approaches to GBV in Guatemala and Latin America	26
Introduction	26
Guatemalan Civil War	27
Modern-Day Health Disparities, History of Violence, Collective Memory, and Collective Trauma among Latin American Populations	35
Collective, population-based resiliency	37
Modern-day social inequalities resulting from the civil war	38
The Postwar Period and Modern-Day Neoliberalization	39
Beyond Transitional and Toward Transformative Justice	40
Legal Anthropological Perspectives of Women’s Rights and Gender-based Violence	43
Community-based Resiliency	47
Human Rights Laws, Neoliberalism, and the Church	48
Women’s Social Status and Violence Against Women	52
Women’s Empowerment and Indigenous Rights Initiatives in Guatemala Since The 1990s	53
Definitions of GBV	53
Guatemalan Social Programs	58
Women and Development Efforts	60
Women’s Rights Movements and Religious Influence	62
Femicide	65
Guatemalan Social Movements Resulting from the Civil War	66
Anthropology of Violence	67
Political Determinants of Health	68

Chapter Three: Methodology	71
Key Methods and Approaches to Studying Causes, Consequences, and Solutions to GBV	71
Transnational feminism	72
Feminist ethnography as a theory and method	74
Transnational ethnography and positionality	77
Research as a therapeutic tool.....	78
Empathy	80
Ethical Considerations Working with Trauma Survivors.....	81
Community-based and Participatory Research with Marginalized Populations and Communities	82
Future Directions: Implications of Feminist Ethnography for Applied Anthropology and Public Health	83
Study Methods	83
Field Sites.....	84
Municipio altiplano.....	86
Aldea bocacosta	87
Organizational settings near two main field site areas.....	89
Confidentiality of Organizations and Participants.....	89
Sampling and Recruitment.....	89
Participant Observation.....	96
Organizational level.....	96
Local level.....	96
Focus Groups	97
Semi-structured Interviews	98
Local community members (men and women)	99
Interview themes.....	99
Agency staff members	100
Interview themes.....	100
Agency service-seekers.....	100
Interview themes.....	100
Safety	100
Additional Methodologies	101
Participant observation.....	101
Primary Field Site Descriptions	102
“Municipio altiplano” guatemala (the community at large)	102
“Community-based organization for women municipio altiplano” (municipio altiplano, guatemala)	102
“Aldea bocacosta” guatemala (the community at large).....	103
“National organization for women mazatenango” (mazatenango, guatemala)	103
“National organization for women chimaltenango” (chimaltenango, guatemala).....	103
“Hope for women” (guatemala city, guatemala)	103
“Economic organization for women” (guatemala city, guatemala)	103

“Small governmental women’s office municipio altiplano” (municipio altiplano)	103
“Small governmental women’s office san pablo jocopilas” (san pablo jocopilas-municipio governing aldea bocacosta)	103
Field Site Justification	104
Participant Incentivization	104
Research Assistant Selection and Compensation	105
Data Analysis	105
Chapter Four: A State of Corruption and Contradiction	108
Introduction.....	108
A State of Contradiction: Simultaneous Presence and Absence of the Guatemalan State	108
“La pandemia:” the pandemic’s effects on local economies and gbv services	113
Corruption.....	116
Economic Realities	125
Economic empowerment workshops and group therapy sessions.....	130
“Hay Muchas Leyes Bonitas, Pero Faltan La Aplicación”/ “There Are Many Beautiful Laws, but They Lack Application”	134
Racism and Discrimination in Institutions.....	140
“El Estado es Machista”/ “The State is Sexist”	145
Institutional Disenfranchisement	148
Conversations with the Police: An Extension of the State	151
Frontline Workers’ Experiences	153
“Pero Está Cambiando. No Somos Tan Ignorantes Como Antes”/ “But It’s Changing: We’re Not as Ignorant as Before:” Signs of Change?.....	156
Conclusion	163
Chapter Five: Indigenous Women’s Lives in Guatemala: Economic Independence and Moving on from Violence in Local Contexts	164
Resiliency, Economic Sustainability After Violence, and Survivors Supporting Other Women.....	165
“Luchando”/“Fighting” to Support Children.....	177
Abandonos: Abandonment from Partners.....	180
“Jesús Es Mi Novio. No Necesito Otro”/ “Jesus is my Boyfriend. I Don’t Need Another One:” Religion, Decision-making and “Moving On”.....	183
Religion and GBV survivorship.....	183
“A veces, ya está”/ “he is still around sometimes:” gbv survivorship and daily negotiations	188
“La gente habla”/ “people talk:” gossip in rural guatemalan communities	191
Machismo and gender norms in local communities	192
Alcohol.....	196
Conclusion	201

Chapter Six: Indigenous Women’s Experiences Seeking and Receiving GBV Services in Guatemala	203
Introduction.....	202
General Overview of GBV System.....	203
Service Types and Where They Fall Short	205
Denuncias/formal, legal complaints.....	207
Alimony payments	214
Protection orders	216
“Aguantar o Pedir Ayuda:” “To Endure or Ask for Help:” Decision-making among GBV Survivors.....	220
Fear and Service-seeking	225
“Más confianza”/ “more trust:” opinions regarding governmental and non-governmental organizations	232
Transportation	240
“Traer mis hijos no es fácil” “bringing my children isn’t easy:” children and service-seeking	245
“Cuesta No Leer” “Not Reading is Difficult:” Service Access and Literacy	247
Fear of dying as an impetus for service-seeking: “no quería ser como las víctimas de femicidio en las noticias/ “I didn’t want to be like the femicide victims on the news”	247
“Al principio, me sentía poco tímida pero después me sentía bien” “at first, I felt timid, but then I felt OK:” fear entering organizations due to ethnicity and social status	253
“Me Siento Feliz”/ “I Feel Happy): Happy to Have Received Services.....	255
“Siguiendo Adelante”/ “Moving Forward:” Healing after Violence	255
“El Problema Es Que Hay Muchos Servicios Pero No Hay Justicia”The Problem Is That There are Many Services but There is No Justice): Seeking Justice for GBV	262
Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion	269
Introduction.....	269
Comparison between Two Primary Field Sites	288r
Limitations	290
Public Health Implications.....	294
Opportunities for Future Research	295
Applying the Results.....	295
Recommendations.....	296
References.....	300
Appendix A: USF IRB Letter of Approval.....	326
Appendix B: Summary of Findings Handout (English)	328
Appendix C: Summary of Findings Handout (Spanish).....	329

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Semi-structured Interviews91

Table 2: Focus Groups97

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Guatemala.....104

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Indigenous women's access to and beliefs regarding gender-based violence (GBV) services and the Guatemalan legal system. It illuminates the legal, structural, and institutional challenges and power dynamics associated with seeking support and justice for women in Guatemala, as well as why and how women decide to seek formal assistance. This research also investigates changes in attitudes and beliefs regarding women's rights, gender roles, and formal and informal forms of support for GBV survivors. Utilizing a mixed-methods, engaged anthropological approach during 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork in two primary locations in Guatemala, this dissertation explicates qualitative data collected from a total of 94 semi-structured interviews seven focus groups, and participant observation conducted in both organizational and local, community-based settings. Indigenous women's lived experiences with GBV, and the challenges associated with seeking "formal" types of organizational support suggest that, while formal governmental and non-governmental services exist, the infrastructure in which they are offered, paired with lack of funding. I draw from a combination of theoretical frameworks, including transnational feminism, vernacularization of human rights (Merry & Levitt 2017: 213), law in action, transformative justice to holistically situate women's rights discourse in organizational and localized settings. Further, this project utilizes a feminist ethnographic methodological approach by putting historically silenced and disenfranchised women's voices at the center of this project. This dissertation contributes to scholarship on GBV survivorship, community and population-based resiliency, political

determinants of health, transnational feminism, legal pluralism, transformative justice, and work with GBV-frontline workers and helps fill the research gap concerning women's experiences seeking governmental and non-governmental services after surviving GBV. In the concluding chapter, the study offers a series of recommendations for researchers and GBV program funders, policy workers, practitioners and legal representatives based on key findings.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Guatemala is commonly referred to by scholars and visitors as “The Land of Contradictions.” For example, I once purchased a nice lamp at a meat shop. Mayonnaise and ketchup go on pizza. Payless is quite an expensive store, even considered a status symbol. Daily life generally involves a laissez-faire attitude, accompanied by strict rules and rigid bureaucratic processes. Within the breathtakingly beautiful landscape of volcanoes, *milpa* (cornfields), many families are struggling to survive. Laughter, celebration, and jokes are omnipresent, but so is the pain, suffering, and civic insecurity experienced by many members of its population. While the past few decades have resulted in numerous legislative, organizational, and philanthropic efforts to reduce violence among women in Guatemala, the systems put in place by the Guatemalan state are still deeply flawed, incongruent, and oftentimes inaccessible to women, especially in rural areas.

One particularly rainy September night, I was working on my laptop while most of the family members we were living with at the time rushed into my upstairs bedroom, asking me what the local police phone number is. They stated that, minutes ago, they witnessed a female neighbor getting punched in the face by her male partner, while holding her six-month-old baby. Fortunately, I had a pamphlet that I acquired while conducting fieldwork at a non-profit organization in Guatemala City sitting right next to me, with the National Police (*Policía*

Nacional)’s phone number on it. I told the family to call “110,” the national emergency number. After calling the number, we were on the line for approximately five minutes while the automated system stated, “Your call is important to us. A dispatcher will be with you shortly.” The family hung up twice and, on the third try, they finally got through to the dispatcher, stating the details of the incident that they recently witnessed.

Two middle-aged, male police officers arrived 29 minutes after the initial call, pulling up to the front of the house in a black pick-up truck, sirens and lights blaring. I went outside with our “house mom,” Rita, as well as her youngest daughter. Rita described the details of what she witnessed, stating that she, along with several other neighbors, witnessed a young man (*joven*) punch his female partner in the face while she was holding her baby. She went on to explain how the male “suspect” fled the scene, sprinting down the dark alleyway. The woman remained at home because she stated that her mother lived far away, not in the town.

To my disbelief, the police stated, “This is a private matter between the woman and the man. We cannot do anything unless she files a formal complaint herself.” When the officer asked, “What’s up, Blondie?” (*¿Qué pasa canche?*) I intervened and expressed my concern regarding the situation. I asked if they could take down the information of our family members as a witness report. Again, they responded by stating that the woman herself has to file the *denuncia*, and that no one else can on her behalf because it is “*privado*” (private). I stated that I have experience working in the domestic violence field and want to make sure that the woman is OK. I also said that many times, women are afraid to make a *denuncia* right away, and that it may be good to at least check on her to make sure that she’s OK.

Rita then asked the police if they could at least go to her door to see if she wants to talk to them or file a “*denuncia*.” At that point, I went back into the house for safety reasons, watching

from the house's side door as Rita disappeared into the night, using the police officer's jacket to shelter herself from the rain. During this time, I could see neighbors in their doorways, chatting, as she continued to talk to the police. Approximately 10 minutes later, the policeman walked by. Shortly afterward, Rita came back into the house, a solemn look on her face. I then asked, "What happened? Did they do anything?"

"They did not do anything," she lamented. They told her that no one lives in that part of the neighborhood with a baby. They also asked her, "Do you know them?" To which she responded, "I don't know them personally, but I have seen them around." Then, the police looked her in the eye, pointing a finger, and responded by stating, "Then don't call us. When you know that people or if they are family, call us. If not, then don't call us."

After listening to Rita's experience talking to the police, her husband, Chepe, expressed his frustrations with the police. "They are supposed to serve the community. They are supposed to help us. Neighbors do more than the police do. This is Guatemala," he lamented. He then went on to say how police respond at different times for different reasons/incidents, explaining that if there is a car accident, they come quickly. Later, as I continued forward with more data collection, I would hear iterations of this statement time and time again. Chepe continued, by stating that the police come quickly because they know that they can get money (as a form of bribery---the person who hit the other can pay them off to not do anything about it). If there is a thief, they are usually afraid, so they do not always respond.

He went on to state that the police questioned why he was recording the interaction and the officer asked him not to record them. "It is a right that we have." This serves as an example of how rights (*derechos*) rhetorically exist yet fail to materialize into action. We then went on to

discuss the subjectivity of what it means to truly “know” someone. Does this mean that you know their name? That you grew up together? That you said, “hi” once?

Coincidentally, I planned on interviewing the police the next day. I stated that I was angry and didn’t really feel up to the interview, and Chepe stated that I should still interview them to see if there is a difference between what they say they do and what they actually do with regard to responding to GBV-related incidents. The next day, without mentioning the incident that occurred the day prior, I asked the police officer whom I was interviewing if a witness could file a formal, legalized complaint (*denuncia*) if they witness a violent event in the community. The Chief urged, “Yes, of course.” -Chimaltenango Department, September 2022.

The breathtakingly beautiful yet internally conflicted country of Guatemala has been a significant part of my life for over thirteen years now. Like many people who travel to Guatemala, the country has pulled me back numerous times after initially traveling there as an undergraduate student and volunteer in 2011 and has thus become a second home. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to build meaningful friendships, social networks, and to have refined my Spanish skills to the point where I now speak with a Guatemalan accent (“*acento Chapín*”). In 2011, I first traveled to “Guate” as a somewhat naïve, albeit enthusiastic undergraduate for a spring break service-learning project contributing to my Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish. While engaging in our volunteer work, I recall the woman whose house we were helping to construct confide in my professor and I and reveal that she was experiencing physical abuse by her domestic partner. This event served as a turning point for my academic interests, as I later went on to complete my undergraduate capstone project on lived domestic violence-related experiences among Latina/Hispanic immigrant women in Cincinnati.

Directly after completing all requirements for my undergraduate degree from the University of Cincinnati in 2012, I moved to Antigua, Guatemala, where I worked as an English instructor for children at a Montessori elementary school. While this position did not directly pertain to my academic interests, the seven months that I spent in Guatemala at this time nonetheless allowed me to further familiarize myself with the country, immerse myself in the culture and begin to understand the country's deeply rooted social complexities and historical background, and meet some key stakeholders to whom I am still in close contact with today.

In 2015, after consulting with the Executive Director of a large non-profit offering physical medical care to Indigenous Maya people in Indigenous languages regarding a location in which I could feasibly conduct research with Indigenous women while speaking Spanish, I began fieldwork for my MA degree in anthropology in rural "Aldea Bocacosta" focusing specifically on gender inequality women's empowerment in agriculture. However, during the preliminary stages of the project, I found that, upon openly asking women about their roles in agricultural decision-making, the conversation would turn towards topics of gender inequality, household decision-making, and GBV. I then decided to pursue that topic specifically, focusing instead on women's lived experiences with GBV and their perspectives of the machismo ideology, as well as the psychosomatization of distress symptoms resulting from GBV (an understudied topic in rural Guatemala).

Findings from my MA field research suggest that, while intimate partner violence was a prominent concern among women in the rural field site location, only one of the 30 participants interviewed for the project had sought "formal" support by a local organization, and then went on to serve as a local leader for women in her community. This example inspired me to take an ethnographic turn to examining the types of services available to rural Indigenous women, how

women navigate decision-making processes after or while experiencing GBV, what the process is like for those working on the frontlines, and what life looks like for women after the violent incidents occur, and after separating from their former partners. I also became increasingly interested in the power dynamics influencing women's access to formalized forms of services, and to what extent such access is politically determined (Velásquez, Figueroa, and Dawes 2022).

After graduating with a Master of Arts degree in Cultural Anthropology from Washington State University in 2016, and before starting the Ph.D. program at the University of South Florida in Fall of 2017, I returned to my home state of Ohio for over one year and drew from the experiences and Spanish skills gained during my MA fieldwork to work directly with Latinx GBV survivors in an advocacy organization serving the Hispanic/Latinx community of Columbus, OH, and where I conducted a year of AmeriCorps VISTA service from 2013-2014. In my position as a Domestic Violence Legal Advocate for Spanish-speaking clients, I learned firsthand about the injustices experienced by Latinx women in the U.S. legal system, as well as how the language barrier, lack of transportation, fear, immigration concerns, economic factors, literacy, and coercive control exerted by ex-partners as a form of manipulation, and other factors serve as additional burdens for Latinx survivors of domestic violence in the U.S.

During my second year as an Applied Anthropology Ph.D. student in 2018, I returned to Guatemala to conduct preliminary research for the project discussed in this dissertation, primarily focusing on preliminarily examining the formalized forms of support that exist for women, particularly Indigenous women, in Guatemala, and on building relationships with the organizational staff working on-the-ground with GBV survivors. These cumulative experiences, extensively reviewing the existing literature, some deep reflection and collaborative conversations, have led to the production of this dissertation.

In 2022, after waiting 1.5 years to enter the country due to COVID-19 restrictions, I returned, along with my now-fiancé, to Guatemala for a 10-month period under a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) Fellowship funded by the U.S. Department of Education. While waiting to enter the country, I returned to my hometown of Cleveland, OH for eleven months and worked full-time as a practitioner in an urban domestic violence advocacy center. In this role, I refined my understanding of trauma-informed care, advocacy, U.S.-based programs and services, and experience working with GBV survivors and members of historically marginalized and disenfranchised communities and low-income backgrounds. This experience also opened my eyes to the injustices that exist for GBV survivors in the United States, as well as the circuitous relationship between GBV, economic insecurity, and motherhood.

The research project that I discuss in this dissertation is the product of many years of visiting and conducting research in Guatemala, working directly with GBV survivors both as an applied anthropologist, public health professional, and professional advocate. While a considerable body of research has focused on Indigenous women's experiences in Guatemala pertaining to structural violence and everyday violence (Menjívar 2008; 2011; war widows (Green 1999; Normann 2014), and more recent work on the barriers and limitations of justice systems for GBV in Latin America and, more specifically Guatemala (Menjívar and Walsh 2016; Menjívar and Diossa-Jiménez 2022; Ruiz 2018; Stephen 2024), no other study has been conducted that specifically examines and pays adequate attention to Indigenous women's personal and lived experiences seeking services and justice for GBV in Guatemala. By centering the lived experiences of GBV survivors (those who have sought formalized services and those who have not), frontline workers, and legal system workers in this dissertation, I strive to illuminate the complexities of the governmental and legal systems in Guatemala, the efforts of

those who show up every day to provide legal and programmatic assistance, and the resilience, strength, and tremendous ability of survivors to “*seguir adelante*” (move forward) despite adversity, precarity and other life challenges.

Background

Guatemala, the most populated country in Central America, holds one of the highest femicide rates in the world. The national femicide rate increased from 2020 (1.3 per 100,000 women; 527 femicides) to 1.6 per 100,000 women (534 femicides) in 2021. There were 534 femicides in 2022, and 69 femicides reported by March 2023, while the research discussed in this dissertation was taking place (World Bank 2023). Guatemala also ranks third in the world in violent crimes against women (UN Women 2023). According to the CDC, gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual violence rates have increased in recent years, with femicide rates nearly five times those of European nations (CDC: Refugee Health Profiles 2017).

Guatemala’s Indigenous Maya women face a disproportionate risk to GBV due to increased poverty rates, systematic racism, and living in rural areas. Previous ethnographic research suggests that high GBV rates in Guatemala result from a variety of factors (Carr, 2016). These factors include but are not limited to economic dependence on male partners, limited educational opportunities, and women’s inferior position in the social hierarchy. Machismo ideology (Gibbons, Frieburger, and Poelkner 2020) also prevails in Guatemalan society, fostering gender norms such as women’s dependence on men for income and limited decision-making power (Carr 2016).

The term, “machismo” is colloquially utilized by men and women in Guatemala to refer to a plethora of negative behaviors associated with patriarchal gender norms, such as dominance and a strong sense of power imbalance and control in interpersonal relationships, alcohol

consumption, and control over household income (*gastos*) (Carr 2016). This term has also been used to describe qualities such as protectiveness, courage, and a strong sense of personal independence (Cuellar 1995). However, male and female participants in this dissertation specifically referred to machismo, and its associated adjective, “*machista*” in a negative context, referring to patriarchal gender norms and treating women as unequal to men. In rural Ecuador, Friederic (2023) also found that masculinity is often spoken of by local people as a caricature of the machete-wielding “*macho man*,” with “little room for exploring real or potential alternative masculinities that could replace the ubiquitous *machista* male” (138). I echo Friederic’s (2023)’s call for the imagining of alternative masculinities beyond purely stereotypical depictions of toxic masculinity. Because violence against women is normalized in Guatemalan society, only until rather recently has it been recognized as a public health issue. Fatalism has only recently been studied in reference to collective trauma (Maercker et al. 2019).

Only since the 1996 Peace Accords have GBV been regarded as public health issues in Guatemalan society. Prior research (Carr 2016) suggests that while both men and women regard GBV more generally as “*problemas*” (problems), or *sufrimiento* (suffering) a multitude of synergistic factors, including the lack of legal enforcement, the relationship between violence against women and the omnipresent machismo ideology, and the belief that such violence is simply “part of life” and should be regarded as a private matter. Indigenous women are apprehensive about seeking GBV-related services at governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) due to lack of trust in governmental entities, limited transportation, and fear. The efficacy of non-profit organizations’ delivery of GBV-related resources to Guatemalan women is also limited due to contrasting frameworks pertaining to violence, trauma, and healing between organizational entities and Indigenous populations.

Overall, high rates of GBV in Guatemala are due to a variety of synergistic factors, including a war-ridden history, poverty, and ideology. Several social determinants are responsible for high rates of GBV in Guatemala. These social determinants exist at various levels, spanning from political, economic, social, community, and familial levels. Poverty plays a considerable role in women's empowerment, leading to early, unplanned pregnancies and women's dependence on her partner at a young age. According to the World Bank (2015), approximately 75 percent of the population live below the poverty line and 58 percent live in extreme poverty. It is also estimated that approximately 90 percent of Guatemala's Indigenous population live on an income that below the poverty line (World Bank 2015). It is estimated that one in five Guatemalan mothers give birth between the age of 15 and 19 years, leading to increased vulnerability (Lemon, Hennink, & Saquic 2016). A lack of family planning corresponds with poverty levels (Levy et al., 2018). Guatemalan women who marry at a young age are less likely to have decision-making power in their relationship, thus making them more susceptible to abuse (Gibbons et al. 2015).

While there are some signs of change regarding gender norms in Guatemala due to transnational migration (Taylor, Moran-Taylor, and Ruiz 2006) and gender labor laws in the formal sector (Almeida and Viollaz 2022), in many areas, especially in rural areas, "traditional" gender norms entail women staying at home and conducting the majority of unpaid care work (Espino, Hermeto and Luz 2022). In Guatemala, only 32 percent of "active age" women work in the labor market, making it have one of the lowest rates of female work force participation in the Latin American and Caribbean region, as well as the world, despite being a middle-income country (Almeida and Viollaz 2022). Indigenous women in particular face even fewer opportunities to obtain more formalized forms of income due to extremely limited economic

opportunities in rural areas, significant disparities in educational attainment (Hallman et al. 2007), and enduring racism against Indigenous populations (Hale 2009; Brett 2011).

These norms involve women fulfilling “traditional” care work roles (Dominguez Cisneros 2019; Hallman et al. 2002; Coffey et al. 2020), including child rearing, meal preparation, household cleaning, and additional domestic duties. In some cases, women fulfill these traditional household roles while simultaneously operating household stores and other small businesses or working part-time away from the home. For others, this is not a possibility due to coercive control (Stark 2009; Stark and Hester 2018) from partners (Carr 2016) and intense feelings of jealousy from male partners (Ajcalon Choy 2014). My previous research (Carr 2016) also suggests that because many women are financially dependent on their male counterpart, they are more likely to remain in violent (GBV-related) situations out of fear of not being able to provide for their children. It is also likely that women lack legal resources because many are financially dependent on their significant others, and because alimony laws are rarely enforced (Menjívar and Walsh 2016) take a long time to process, and oftentimes fall short in offering sufficient and sustainable financial assistance to survivors.

Limited studies have examined how Indigenous people understand, appropriate, and engage with the “nonlocal” discourse of human rights (Pitarch & Solano 2008). In addition to machismo ideology affecting behavior at the “local” and domestic levels, the Guatemalan state also serves as an extension of this ideology. As Torres (2008) observes, high rates of violence against women serve as an extension of the Guatemalan state’s misogynistic characteristics. For example, during preliminary (“pilot”) research conducted at an organization serving GBV survivors in Guatemala City, an organization leader stated that the 2008 Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women was controversial, and that some legislators

(including men and women) did not agree with this law's specific emphasis on combatting violence against women.

Because GBV is a social issue with roots in political violence, treatment is not as concrete as other public health issues, such as infectious disease. Gibbons et al. (2015) found that in one Guatemalan community, horse-handling has been an effective means of reducing aggressive behavior and violent attitudes among Guatemalan men. Efforts aimed to address GBV have resulted in partnerships being formed between NGOs, transnational agencies, as well as the United Nations Millennium Goals (Cosgrove 2015). Overall, GBV is a difficult public health issue to "treat" because this issue is deeply rooted in ideology and policy-level and societal issues. More research is needed pertaining to direct treatment-related procedures.

Preventative efforts for GBV in Guatemala mainly focus on women's empowerment, juvenile intervention programs, and microfinance (Cepeda, Lacalle-Calderon & Torralba 2017). Gender equality is a salient theme in preventative efforts (Mercy et al. 2017). Increased women's leadership is another possible avenue for prevention (Poelkner & Gibbons 2017). For GBV to be eliminated in Guatemalan society, preventative efforts must be made at the policy-level and intervention must exist at all levels of government (Cosgrove 2015). Primordial prevention¹ in the form of legal procedures is critical because, over time, it would lead to the denormalization of this issue. In addition to community-based programs aimed towards reducing violence against women, primordial and primary² prevention efforts must focus on the sociocultural, policy-related, and legal factors contributing to the normalization of such violence (Cosgrove 2015).

¹ Primordial prevention refers to prevention at the policy level. It is also rooted in the political economy and closely tied to environmental, economic, and social factors.

² Primary prevention includes preventative measures that can occur before a health-related issue occurs.

As noted by Menjívar and Walsh (2016), it is uncommon for women to utilize GBV-related services. Prior field research conducted in 2016 and 2018 suggests that due to inherent racism against Indigenous populations (Hale 2006), it is possible that Indigenous women do not trust social services provided by the state due to the history of state violence perpetuated against Indigenous populations during the Civil War (Sanford 2003). There is limited representation of Indigenous women working in social service agencies due to lower rates of “formal” education compared to their Mestiza counterparts. With this dissertation project, I further examined the relationship between racial constructs, state violence, beliefs pertaining to social service access and utilization, and Indigenous representation in state agencies and NGOs.

Previous Work in Guatemala

I have conducted research in Guatemala since 2011, and my M.A. thesis drew from three months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the rural *aldea* (village) of Aldea Bocacosta (Carr 2016). During my fieldwork, I lived with a host family and maintain regular communication with this family and other community members to this day. This ethnographic study examined the relationship between Maya women’s well-being, “mental health,” and experiences of GBV. I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with Indigenous women, numerous informal interviews, conducted participant observation in the *puesto de salud* (health post), markets, and households, and distributed 80 surveys assessing women’s well-being, mental health, and mental health experiences.

My findings suggest that Aldea Bocacosta women attributed the following male behaviors as machismo-based: physical, economic, and emotional abuse (in this case, abuse is defined as causing harm to another), control of household income (*gasto*), control of household and health-related decision-making processes, and alcohol consumption. Out of the 30 women

with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews, only one sought formal, legal assistance at the governmental National Organization for Women Mazatenango office, located one hour from the Aldea Bocacosta field site. This finding fostered interest in the proposed project included in this proposal; examining the legal, “formal” resources that do exist for Indigenous women, the accessibility of these resources for Indigenous women, and how these services (or lack thereof) serve as a reflection of state violence and structural instability.

In August 2018, I conducted preliminary research for this dissertation project. I met with directors and staff members of the organizations listed in this proposal and discussed my research plan with them. I have also maintained regular communication with these stakeholders over the past year via e-mail correspondence. Interviews conducted during my pilot research suggest that frameworks and language utilized by NGOs and governmental organizations (abuse, domestic violence cycle, perpetrator, victim) differ from prominent Indigenous terms such as “*sufrimiento*,” “*problemas*,” and “*trauma*.” Semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted at the Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano suggested that while women may know their legal rights when they are in the office seeking services, their family members and partners may be unaware of the laws due to lack of enforcement. Local community members in both Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano alluded to the notion of the “nonexistent state” by stating that “the government does not exist here in Guatemala.”

Prior informal and formal interviews and participant observation at the National Organization for Women Mazatenango office and the Human Rights Office of the Ombudsman revealed infrastructural instability and limited funding. In addition to forms of political and statewide violence, this governmental negligence could serve as an additional form of violence

inflicted on Indigenous Guatemalan populations. Prior pilot fieldwork also illuminated a distinction between Indigenous lived experiences (regarding the normalization of violence, absence of “mental health” as a category, and the concept of suffering (*sufrimiento*) used to describe GBV). Collectively, these findings suggest that there is a disconnect between governmental agencies and NGOs offering services to GBV survivors.

This dissertation is organized in the following manner. In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of the existing literature used to inform this study. In Chapter Three, I review the methodology and methods that guided the data collection process. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I present the data collected as part of this study, including the sociopolitical and macro-level factors influencing Indigenous women’s experiences with GBV. In Chapter Four, I describe women’s local experiences fostering economic independence and motivations to move on from violence in Chapter Five, and review women’s experiences with GBV-related service-seeking and recipience in Chapter Six. In Chapters Seven and Eight, I more thoroughly apply the theoretical frameworks utilized in this study and conclude this dissertation with informed recommendations for policy makers, program funders, and organizational staff that were directly informed by this research.

Positionality

As an ethnographer conducting qualitative research, I recognize that I am the primary instrument of data collection while in the field and understand that the participants involved in this project may respond based on their perception of me as an “outsider.” While conducting research in Guatemala, I am aware of my positionality as a White, blonde woman from the United States conducting research in predominantly Indigenous Guatemalan communities. In the field, I am commonly referred to, most of the time in an endearing manner, as “blondie,” (*canche*

or *canchita*), American (*gringita*, or, less commonly, *La Americana* or *La Norteamericana*). Because of the Peace Corps' (*Cuerpo de Paz*)'s strong presence in Municipio Altiplano, I was also commonly asked if I was a Peace Corps volunteer. People in Aldea Bocacosta also commonly asked if I came as part of a group, due to the prominence of medical and religious mission trips to the area.

Because my physical appearance automatically labels me as an outsider, I make a conscious effort to truly connect and build rapport with participants and others with whom I interact by speaking Spanish, dressing in a manner that is deemed tactful and “appropriate” for a woman in [rural] Guatemala, and local events and family festivities with my fiancé, talking about my family and asking about others' families, sharing food, and participating in family and community events to further build rapport with participants. While conducting participant observation and data collection in organizational settings, my experience having worked as a domestic violence victim advocate at agencies in the United States helped legitimize my expertise and professional identity.

While one of the main goals of conducting ethnographic research is to strive to see the world “through the eyes” of those you conduct research with, I admit that this is an impossible feat. Rather, I draw from my past experiences working closely with Hispanic/Latinx populations as an undergraduate student, as well as my experience working professionally as a Health Coordinator and, later, as a domestic violence advocate at a Latinx advocacy organization to maintain a sense of “cultural competency,” but to also maintain a sense of connection and empathy with those who participate in my research. Additionally, my ability to fluently Spanish while using Guatemalan colloquialisms such as “who knows” (*saber*), cash (*pisto*), and Guatemalan (“*Chapín*”), among others, my previous experience having visited and lived in

Guatemala on several occasions and having since maintained connections with many people there, connections with cultural brokers and “gatekeepers,” and my use of Guatemalan colloquialisms and humor have had a tremendous influence on my ability to build rapport and closely connect with those whom I interview.

While maintaining professionalism and adhering to ethical guidelines, I also make a conscious effort to recognize and treat the participants with whom I work like friends and family. The individuals who have graciously agreed to participate in my research study(ies) are than mere “participants” to me, many of them are close friends. While back in the United States, I do my best to keep in touch via social media and other electronic applications to maintain relationships with participants, update each other about our lives, and to downplay the transactional nature of research. I stay particularly connected to close friends, former research assistants, host families, and their extended families.

As an anthropologist, I strive to be as empathetic as possible with research participants, especially those who have faced or are in vulnerable situations during the time of research. I also draw from my training as a Domestic Violence Victim Advocate at an advocacy agency in Central Ohio where I worked full-time assisting women directly with their GBV-related experiences, as well as helping them navigate the U.S. legal system. I spoke Spanish most of the time that I was communicating with clients in this position. I also draw from additional experience having worked full-time as a Community Advocate at a domestic violence victim advocacy center in Northeast Ohio while waiting to gain permission to enter Guatemala during the COVID-19 pandemic. The professional training and skills derived from working as a practitioner in the domestic violence field equipped me with empathetically appropriate language

and supportive statements to offer survivors during the ethnographic interviewing process. It also equipped me with safety training skills.

Furthermore, I am largely open about my personal life experiences with participants. Sometimes verbally stated, sometimes not, I draw from traumatic and abusive experiences that I have personally survived to connect with participants at a human level. Therefore, while I am cognizant of my position as a White, blonde woman conducting research in Guatemala, I strive to eliminate boundaries by being as empathetic as possible in my body language, facial expressions, words, and other actions. In the end, while interviews (and other methods) are conducted primarily for the purpose of research, I hold the human connection that is made through this process at utmost importance. Because of the friendships and connections developed throughout the fieldwork process, I also return to Guatemala whenever possible to visit those with whom I have fostered relationships (with research assistants, host families, etc.) and maintain communication via WhatsApp and social media whenever possible. I am grateful for the human connection and conversations that have ensued because of my research activities in Guatemala and hold these collective experiences close to my heart.

Lastly, I found during both my MA fieldwork and dissertation fieldwork that my presence as an “outsider” helped women feel comfortable sharing their experiences, knowing that I had to follow confidentiality rules, and not living in the community long-term, which is prone to gossip. Because psychologists and domestic violence advocates are limited and sometimes inaccessible to women, many women do not have access to an objective listener who can listen without judgment, without questioning.

Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical considerations that I have internalized and taken to heart throughout the course of this dissertation research. In addition to adhering to ethical guidelines established by the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (USF IRB), I also closely followed the guidelines established by the American Anthropological Association (AAA). During the data collection process, I ensured that there is no coercion to participate and will make it clear to participants that they may choose to end their participation in the study at any time. I provided all research participants with informed consent documents, which I thoroughly reviewed out loud prior to data collection. Verbal consent was obtained in lieu of written consent due to Indigenous population's general distrust in the Guatemalan government because of the Guatemalan Civil War (Sanford 2003) and low literacy levels.

Because this research involved collecting sensitive data from a particularly vulnerable population, I also provided the contact information from GBV organizational leaders (when provided) and verbal instructions about how to get to local organizations via public transportation. When necessary, I connected participants to governmental and non-governmental organizations that offer legal and psychological services, and other forms of assistance. While interviewing participants in organizational settings (and elsewhere), I paid their local transportation fare, as well as the fare for children or other relatives or friends accompanying them to the interview location. If the interview took place during lunch time or other mealtime, I also provided a meal to the participant and those accompanying them (e.g., children, friends, family members) in exchange for their time and efforts.

Research Objective and Questions

The overarching objective of this dissertation project is to examine how Indigenous Guatemalan Maya perspectives of healing and trauma compare with GBV-related programs and associated materials designed by governmental organizations and NGOs.

To achieve this research objective, I utilized the three following research questions:

Q1: What are Indigenous Maya perspectives on gender equality, trauma, and healing regarding GBV? Q2: What are the narratives, goals, and practices employed by governmental agencies and NGOs dedicated to preventing and reducing GBV in Guatemala and how do these narratives compare with Indigenous perspectives of GBV, trauma and healing? What do NGOs/governmental organizations claim to do through their programs/services designed to prevent and reduce GBV? What are Indigenous Maya women's perceptions of the effectiveness of these services in meeting their needs and how can they be improved? Q3: What are Indigenous Maya service seekers' experiences with seeking assistance for GBV through NGO programs or governmental organizations? Cumulatively, through these research questions, I aim to investigate the tensions and power dynamics related to neoliberal frameworks for GBV and Indigenous perspectives, as well as Indigenous realities and lived experiences utilizing these services.

Key Arguments and Contributions

This study is specifically concerned with Indigenous women's experiences seeking services for GBV due to existing forms of entrenched racism against Indigenous women, especially those who wear *traje* (traditional dress) in "formal" institutions³. While it is

³ In these "formal" institutions, organizational leaders and staff members are college-educated and generally part of "higher" social classes, thus leading many Indigenous women to feel as though these environments are not "for them," or may not fully understand their lived experiences and specific needs.

understood that women from all social classes and ethnic backgrounds experience GBV, this study is specifically concerned with Indigenous experiences seeking services and notions of community resiliency by Indigenous populations for a variety of reasons. First, this dissertation pays close attention to the history of abuse and discrimination towards Indigenous people in public care facilities (Cerón et al. 2016).

Entrenched social disparities and a strong ethnic divide between rural, Indigenous populations in Guatemala and other groups prevail (Cabrera, Lustig, and Morán 2015; Gibbons and Ashdown 2010). These social disparities include malnutrition (Mazariegos, Kroker-Lobos, and Ramírez) and limited formal economic opportunities for rural Indigenous women in particular (Martínez Rodas, del Valle, and Zamora 2022), enduring forms of racism against Indigenous populations (Villarreal Sosa and Lesniewski 2020), lower formal education levels (Orozco and Valdivia 2017) and a 79 percent poverty rate among Indigenous populations nationwide (United Nations 2023). Cumulatively, these social determinants (Venkatapuram 2011; Braveman and Gottlieb 2014) exacerbate GBV and, due to low-income levels, can leave Indigenous women particularly dependent on their male partner's income, thus making it more difficult to leave violent domestic situations (Carr 2016). Therefore, in this dissertation, I am primarily concerned with specifically explicating Indigenous women's experiences because, by doing so, I pay proper attention to the intricacies of how various social determinants (e.g., racism, tense ethnic relations, and limited formal employment opportunities) affect Indigenous women's service-seeking experiences and lived realities while or after seeking services.

This dissertation centers Indigenous women's lived experiences with GBV and power dynamics associated with service-seeking and survivorship in its analysis. I examine how GBV laws manifest "in action" (Nelken 2018; Stilt 2011) for Indigenous women in Guatemala,

illuminating the distinction between the illusion of legality and justice, and the realities of how laws interact with the lives and needs of Indigenous Guatemalan women and forms of structural violence affecting their livelihoods, well-being, and futures. Broadly, I argue that, although Indigenous women are engaging with GBV laws and services, the availability and accessibility of these are largely symbolic, with significant discrepancies in what they intend to accomplish, and how they play out in daily life. Despite limited follow-through on behalf of legal structures and governmental systems, these laws are still very much present in the lives of disenfranchised women, who are encouraged by the state and public health messaging to seek legalized forms of support, and who travel (sometimes long distances) to agencies with hope for assistance.

First, this study thus illustrates how striving to obtain purely legalized forms of justice does not sufficiently accommodate for Indigenous women's material economic needs. I argue that legalized forms of justice place an additional burden on women to respond to and engage with women's rights efforts and to file formalized, legal complaints (*denuncias*). This study's findings reveal that Indigenous women take actions, such as filing *denuncias* and receiving programmatic assistance, with hope for life-changing results, yet they learn that, in many ways, these services are incongruent with their lived realities and material needs. Further, the Guatemalan state's response efforts to GBV create the illusion that consistent, accountable legal support and fulfillment is fully available and accessible to all women. However, as explicated in this dissertation, women's lived experiences interacting with these laws in a multitude of settings reveal the constraints that limit how they play out in action. In fact, only three percent of all crimes in Guatemala are legally penalized (Smith 2020). In 2018, it was estimated that 97 percent GBV crimes resulted in impunity (Smith 2020). This discrepancy is a stark contrast with

the promises offered by the 2008 Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women.

Second, I argue that collective, population-based resiliency serves as a mechanism through which women “*seguir adelante*,” or move forward, to devise and create economic solutions despite severely limited economic opportunities, and when the state-sanctioned legal system and associated services fail to appropriately address the intersections between GBV and poverty. While I am not arguing that poverty explicitly causes violence, I recognize that economic precarity across groups and contexts often leads to gender power differentials, increased vulnerability (Oliver-Smith 2016; Kottow 2005), and a higher likelihood of experiences of violence in a multitude of forms including visible and less visible, symbolic forms of violence (Bourdieu 2004; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004). This study advances how we think about Indigenous women moving forward (*siguiendo adelante*) from GBV through a lens of population-based resiliency, thus highlighting women’s strengths and creativity in moving forward economically, spiritually, and emotionally, despite justice system and legal shortcomings and failures.

When governmental and non-governmental programmatic efforts largely employ a “top-down” approach to responding to GBV through state-level, legal initiatives, they fail to pay proper attention to the localized means in which legal efforts interact with daily lives, livelihoods, and existing collective forms of resiliency. Paying proper attention to these collectively resilient efforts has utility in the decolonization of development and other community-based programmatic efforts.

Third, through this project, I respond to Coker (2002)’s call for transformative justice efforts to “shift in focus from the legal to the social and political, and from the state and

institutions to communities and everyday concerns,” therefore utilizing a “bottom-up understanding and analysis of the lives and needs of a population” (411). By clearly demonstrating the shortcomings of purely legal solutions to GBV in Indigenous rural communities, I put historically silenced and marginalized Indigenous women’s engagement with human rights efforts at the center of this dissertation. I argue that in addition to encouraging Indigenous GBV survivors to navigate a challenging and precarious legal system and to take legal action against violent injustices, achieving justice also entails appropriately and sustainably addressing women’s concerns regarding sufficient and sustainable employment, safe housing, keeping their children in school, and having access to quality nutrition, clothing, and other factors vital to survival.

Fourth, this dissertation also situates the political determinants GBV within a health equity lens, illuminating how political phenomena such as corruption, governmental organizational infrastructure, and inequitable distribution of resources affect the underlying, structural conditions affecting Indigenous women’s access to GBV services, transportation access, and access to educational and employment opportunities that foster economic independence and enable women to break GBV cycles.

Fifth, this dissertation’s findings illuminate how human rights and particularly women’s rights are “vernacularized”, understood, and implemented (Merry & Levitt 2017: 213) in the context of Guatemala. This process demonstrates that while international human rights discourse is largely accepted and internalized by Indigenous women in its emphasis on women’s rights, empowerment, and urges to take legal action against GBV, the dominant rhetoric is simultaneously neglectful of women’s economic futures and lived daily realities that complicate this process.

Further, this study illuminates the transnational feminist elements that play out in everyday life. Through community-based resiliency, these transnational forms of feminism and resiliency allow for feminisms in Guatemala to be reimagined and reframed beyond human rights-oriented definitions and approaches. These decolonialized forms of feminism exist in a variety of forms, including mutual support and assistance among GBV survivors, entrepreneurship, community and population-based resiliency, and independence.

Finally, this dissertation utilizes a methodology rooted in feminist anthropology by emphasizing the words, voices, and lived experiences of Indigenous women who have been historically and routinely silenced through a multi-sited, feminist ethnographic approach.

CHAPTER TWO:

**LITERATURE REVIEW—SOCIOHISTORICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL, AND
PROGRAMMATIC APPROACHES TO GBV IN GUATEMALA AND LATIN
AMERICA**

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the sociohistorical, anthropological, and programmatic approaches to GBV in Guatemala and, more broadly, in Latin America. First, I introduce the relevant history provide a review of the Guatemalan Civil War, paying particular attention to the genocide and human rights violations committed against Indigenous populations, modern-day health disparities, collective memory, and collective trauma resulting from the Civil War. Next, I provide an overview of the postwar period and modern-day neoliberalism, review transitional versus transformative justice-oriented approaches to GBV, legal anthropological perspectives of women’s rights and GBV.

I then review resiliency literatures, both from an individual and population-based perspective, human rights neoliberalism, and the church, women’s social status and violence against women, women’s empowerment, Indigenous rights initiatives, social programs, and development efforts in Guatemala, femicide, and anthropology of violence. Lastly, I discuss political determinants of health literature. Cumulatively, in this section, I provide a holistic portrait of how the modern-day public health issue of GBV among Indigenous women in

Guatemala is sociohistorically situated. In this section, I also introduce the key theoretical trajectories and literature that were utilized to inform and advance this dissertation project.

Guatemalan Civil War

Guatemala, despite being one of the wealthiest countries in Central America, continues to suffer from tremendous social disparities rooted in its tumultuous political history (Rohloff 2011: 428). The Guatemalan Civil War, colloquially referred to as The Violence, (*La Violencia*), The Guatemalan Genocide, or simply, The Situation (*La Situación*), has led to modern-day inequality, structural violence, and poverty faced by its Indigenous population. The Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996) was Latin America's longest armed conflict to-date. The Civil War resulted in 440 massacres in villages burned by the Guatemalan army, the displacement of 1.5 million people, the fleeing of 150,000 people to seek refuge, and the death of approximately 200,000 Guatemalan citizens (Sanford 2003). During the first half of the war, ladinos were primarily targeted, with much of the violence occurring in urban areas. Then, starting in 1981, the Guatemalan army directly targeted Maya populations in directed acts of genocide via scorched earth campaigns (Godoy-Paiz 2008).

According to the 1999 release of the Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, approximately 83 percent of war victims were of Maya descent (Sanford 2003:14). This report also blamed the Guatemalan army for "93 percent of the human rights violations, violations that were so severe and systematically enacted against whole Maya communities that the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) determined that the army had committed acts of genocide against the Maya" (Sanford 2003:14).

Public conversations concerning the Civil War remain sparse among Indigenous Maya survivors, the majority of whom suffer from modern-day structural inequalities, violence, and

racism rooted in the Civil War (Green 1999; Hale 2006). In the years following *La Violencia*, civil society has mobilized to fill structural gaps left by the Guatemalan government. Following the 1996 Peace Accords, Guatemala underwent a period of economic restructuring (Smith 1990), resulting in decreased economic and political autonomy of Indigenous communities, the main source of resistance to the Guatemalan state (Smith 1990: 8). Indigenous Maya populations continue to struggle with land ownership and political representation, exacerbating modern-day inequalities (UN Women 2017). Land control is a major problem among Guatemala's Indigenous population. Maya populations face dispossession because of "extraactivist governmentality," resulting in corporate control of land and natural resources and leading to dispossession of Indigenous populations (Alonso-Fradejas 2012).

Lorena and Lopez (2006) elaborate on the intricacies of land ownership disputes among Guatemala's Indigenous population, stating that, "Until 1998, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INTA) was the instrument used by different governments to destroy the whole system of relation, vision, use and community administration of the land in the country's Indigenous communities. The INTA may have legally recognized community lands; but it also broke them up into small plots and private units. Even worse, widows would lose the right over the land unless they had a son who could take over as head of the family. According to the Human Development Report, Guatemala: Human Development, Women and Health, of the United Nations Development Program, "land concentration in Guatemala remains very high," and its distribution according to ethnic groups and gender has intensified the socio-economic polarization of the Guatemalan society. The report also points out that only 23.6 % of farming lands is in Indigenous hands, and women administer about 6.5 %" (4).

Discussions on the modern-day marginalization and structural inequalities faced by Guatemala's Indigenous population typically begin with the Guatemalan Civil War. However, as Garrard-Burnett (1997) argues, Indigenous resistance has roots decades before the war began. In her article, Garrard-Burnett details the concurrent arrival of Protestant missionaries along with Justo Rufino Barrio's Liberal reform in the 1880s (35). Traditional Maya religion and Christianity coexisted along with Spanish conquest in the 1500s. However, Protestant conversion efforts were largely unsuccessful during this period and local religion remained dominant during this time (49).

While much has been written about the genocide committed against Indigenous populations during the Civil War, tensions between the Guatemalan state and Indigenous populations long precede this time period. In the nineteenth century, the power of the Guatemalan state drastically increased in power, especially over rural property, thus outlawing *ejidos* (communal lands) and turning them into private property (McCreery 1990).

In 1892, José Reyna Barrios, a member of the elite Criollo class⁴, also colloquially referred to as, "El Presidente," began his term as President of Guatemala (Kirkpatrick 2022). During his time in power, the Maya, who predominantly resided in rural areas, increasingly experienced indentured servitude, also known as "debt slavery" (McCreery 1983), laboriously working plots of land in exchange for just enough food to support one's family. Additionally, during his first term in power, the power of landowners over the rural "peasantry" increased (Carey Jr. 2018). This dependence by Indigenous sharecroppers fueled the workforce in

⁴ Refers to direct or close descendants to Spanish conquistadors who conquered Guatemala in the 1500s, as well as leaders of recent European origin.

Guatemala at this time (Davis 2004). By this time, the term “*mozo*,” which directly translates to “servant,” became a colloquial term to use to refer to Indigenous Maya (Lundell 1932).

During this time, Maya *mozos* were essentially enslaved; forced to work for a system where their employers forced them to work yet were simultaneously unable to pay off their debts. Over time, this phenomenon of Indigenous Maya working for little-to-no-income in rural areas became naturalized in society (Schmoltz-Haberlein 1996), while middle-class ladinos largely populated cities (Reeves 2006). While there has been some change in recent years, and, of course, exceptions and variation, this reality of Indigenous populations largely occupying rural areas, with ladino populations occupying more urban areas persists (Parkyn 1989).

Due to deeply entrenched social classes based on skin color phenotypes and family lineage resulting from colonialism (Paredes 2017), one had to be of European origin to occupy an upper-level political role during this time period. Under Barrios’ rule, despite multiculturalism among Indigenous populations, Indigenous Guatemalans were grouped together under a single group colloquially referred to as, “*mozos*,” which directly translates to “servants,” but, over time, was used synonymously to mean “Indigenous” (McCreery 1983). At this time, Indigenous Maya Guatemalans were essentially enslaved or given back their land as sharecroppers (Yashar 1992). This allowed for a “guaranteed” national labor force. Also, in this era, there was national messaging reframing all groups in Guatemalan under a general “Guatemalan” form of identity, advocating for unification of Maya and Criollo groups under the more generalized “Guatemalan” national identity (Smith 1990).

However, in 1898, José Reyna Barrios was assassinated, largely due to the railroad that he was building not being complete, thus resulting in farms not being able to get enough crops to ports for exporting purposes (Kirkpatrick 2022). Then, in 1931, the notorious General Jorge

Ubico took power, notorious for referring to himself as “the Hitler of Guatemala.” Ubico accused all “*mozos*” to be Communist (Munro 2014; Gere and MacNeill 2008). Also at this time, anyone in Guatemala who was “antiimperialist,” (not necessarily Communist), as well as anyone who questioned the Criollo as the leaders of the country, or anyone who questioned United Fruit Company’s right to occupy Guatemala’s land was killed for its actions against the state (Huhn et al. 2017).

In 1944, ladinos demanded a say in the government, thus creating unrest in the government (Arias 2008). At this time, Indigenous, “Criollos” and “ladinos” were united under the general notion of being “Guatemalan,” and essentially decided that they have “had enough,” after seeing what monopolization did to their economy for generations. In 1944, the Guatemalan people cast out a puppet government and demanded free elections (Winslow 1954). While Ubico agreed with this, due to fear of being outnumbered, the United Fruit Company disagreed, and wanted to ensure that the country felt the consequences of their decision to head toward democracy (Bowen 1954).

In 1951, Jacobo Arbenz became President of Guatemala, and decided that, through agrarian reform, he was going to reclaim the land that the United Fruit Company was not using, pay them what the land was worth on tax returns, redistribute it to Guatemalans would benefit from it (Gleijeses 1989; Handy 1988). This decision would ultimately serve a catalyst to the 36-year-long Civil War, spanning from 1960 to 1996. In 1954, Arbenz was overthrown by a coup de’etat led by the U.S. government, sponsored by the United Fruit Company, and executed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), through an operation known as PBSUCCESS (Rabe 2004).

His presidency was succeeded by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. Elected in 1954, Armas was assigned to manage Guatemala's bankruptcy. Guatemala was also facing increased desperation resulting from an increasing economic crisis (Brignolia and Martinez 1983). During this time, Minor Cooper Keith, railroad tycoon the Vice President of the United Fruit Company, was building a banana empire in Caribbean countries with land that governments handed over after defaulting on loans for Minor's railroads (Lorenzana 2008). Due to economic vulnerability and increasing pressures, Castillo Armas gave United Fruit Company the land that they requested (Chapman 2014; Tapia 2011).

Once Armas' role as President of Guatemala ended in 1957, United Fruit Company then stepped in and ultimately gained control of Guatemala's infrastructure, going on to control railways, port and transport, and over half of the country's farmland. At this time, the United Fruit Company owned stores, provided its workers with housing, and even controlled the postal service (Chapman 2014). In 1920, Carlos Herrera came into power and worked to take back the unused land from the United Fruit Company. However, in 1921, he was deemed "mentally unfit to govern," and was overthrown by a coup d'etat led by General José María Orellana, forced to relocate to France (Lehoucq 2023).

At this time, Keith, the Vice President of the United Fruit Company, called Allen Dulles, the head of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), who was also invested heavily in the United Fruit Company (Clarke 2020). Dulles' brother, John Foster Dulles, the U.S. Secretary of State at the time, also operated a law firm, that then went on to represent the United Fruit Company. Additionally, Allen Dulles, spread word to President Eisenhower that Guatemala's President was thinking of stealing the U.S.'s property and redistributing it to the "mozo," also stating that Soviets were involved in this effort, thus spreading McCarthyism.

Therefore, in 1954, with the backing of the U.S. government, Guatemala's democracy essentially came to a somber end (Winslow 1954).

Democracy was thus replaced by absolute terror. While the Guatemalan government at this time was not Communist, word was quickly spreading that this was the case. Therefore, in 1960, guerilla bands started forming in rural areas and worked hard to strike back against the government with violence (Wickham-Crowley 2010). In response to this unprecedented threat to power, the "puppet" government of Guatemala took off, sending right-wing "death squads" (Oettler 2006) as part of "scorched earth campaigns" (Jonas 2012) into Maya highland villages, murdering anyone who they deemed a threat. Innocent Indigenous Maya citizens were labeled by the Guatemalan government as revolutionary sympathizers.

Many Indigenous men in particular were brutally murdered, with others simply disappearing, leaving many women to move forward in life on their own (Green 1999). This was the catalyst of genocide against Indigenous Maya populations, resulting in a total of over 200,000 casualties. Eighty-three percent of the war's casualties were Indigenous Maya (1999 UN-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification Report). Most of the violence against Indigenous Maya people occurred in the regions of Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Ixil, Ixcán, Rabinal, and Baja Verapaz (1999 UN Commission for Historical Clarification Report). In the end, the United Fruit Company's land was never redistributed to the Maya people.

In 1954, the U.S. government initiated a coup in Guatemala. While it remains debatable whether U.S. involvement ensued due to security concerns or due to economic reasons, Taylor-Robinson and Redd (2003) argue that the United Fruit Company was motivated by its own economic concerns. However, this company had to frame U.S. involvement as a Cold War threat to the United States, with assistance by U.S. press and U.S. governmental contacts, including the

CIA, to legitimize their position (78). According to declassified U.S. intelligence documents, the United States committed human rights violations during their involvement in the war from 1954-1996. This involvement also included equipping and training Guatemalan security forces that committed genocide against the Indigenous Maya population (Gibney 1997).

In addition to its contributions to starting the Guatemalan Civil War due to imperial ties with the United Fruit Company (Striffler and Moberg, 2003), the U.S was intimately involved in a series of human rights violations. According to the same declassified U.S. intelligence documents (Tejada 2023), these human rights violations include equipping and training Guatemalan security force, resulting in the murder of over 200,000 people. Additionally, these documents, obtained by the National Security Archive, also reveal that the U.S. CIA maintained close ties to the Guatemalan army up until the 1980s, fully aware of its mass killings of Indigenous Maya villagers (Calandra 2018).

There is a large body of research focused on Maya Guatemalans in the postwar period, focusing on the relationship between history and modern-day cultural identity (Bellino 2017). Prior to Carmack (1988)'s book, *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis*, little had been written about Maya populations' "social reality." In the years following the Peace Accords, increased scholarly attention has been paid to the different forms of violence affecting Guatemala's Indigenous population (Menjívar 2011), as well as how modern-day Maya identity has been shaped by a violent past and the collective memory of trauma associated with it.

Guatemala's long history of state violence has left a significant imprint on postwar youth's identities. Guatemalan youth grapple with life in a society with a flawed democratic system (Bellino 2017). Civil society plays a large role in modern-day development efforts (Smith

1990) educational reform (Cojtí Cuxil 2002). During the Postwar period, Guatemala underwent a period of political and economic restructuring (Smith 1990). As noted by Bellino (2017), “teaching the past in any context is susceptible to politicization and public contest, particularly on subjects of violence and injustice...schools convey postwar citizenship as conditional on particular engagements with historical injustice. But memories circulate in the private sphere, even under conditions of public censure. The construction of the past is therefore not confined to schools or textual resources, suggesting that young learners make meaning through various educational exchanges, some formal and others informal, while embedded in broader sociocultural contexts” (7).

Modern-Day Health Disparities, History of Violence, Collective Memory, and Collective Trauma among Latin American Populations

When considering modern-day sociocultural phenomena affecting Latin American populations, anthropologists and public health scholars alike holistically situate such phenomena within a politico-economic framework (Torres and Schugurensky, 2002). Within the Latin American region, political and state violence have led to entrenched social disparity in (Biehl 2005; Andrade et al., 2015). Indigenous populations disproportionately experience the deleterious effects of colonial efforts (Peña 2005; Hale, 2006). Racism is a major contributory factor to modern-day health disparities among Latin American Indigenous populations (Dulitsky, 2005), especially in Guatemala (Cerón et al. 2016; Brown et al. 2014). Phenotypic characteristics such as skin color and hair texture continue to influence Latin American populations’ access to opportunities and social mobility (Lancaster 1991; Paixao & Rossetto 2020) due to deeply embedded structural racism and caste-like social structures (McCaa et al. 1979).

When considering modern-day racial discrimination and health disparities, it is essential to account for the structural and sociohistorical factors that have led to such inequalities.

Collective memory, defined by Shuman & Scott (1989) as, “widely shared knowledge of past social events that may not have been personally experienced but are constructively constructed through communicative social functions” (105). Collective memory has been utilized by scholars to examine how memory relates to cultural identity (Assmann & Czaplicka 1995).

In the context of Latin America, political events have greatly influenced collective memory studies (Pennebaker, Paez, and Rime, Ed. 2007). Villalón (2015) references Latin America’s authoritarian regimes and civil wars as key drivers influencing collective experience in this region. In her words, “truth, reconciliation, and justice efforts have been revisited, trials of people involved with violence, torture, abductions, murders, and disappearances have been (re)opened and new interpretations and questions about what happened have been raised” (3). Literature on collective memory within Latin America has largely focused on political movements, particularly those seeking justice and “truth” for war-induced atrocities (Villalón 2015; Sanford 2003).

In addition to collective memory, collective trauma (Audergon 2006; Koh 2021) also unifies populations in Guatemala, and Latin America more broadly. Similar to collective memory in the sense of unifying a population based on shared historical experiences, collective trauma further examines the effects of and pays adequate attention to the mental health consequences of surviving political violence. Thus, collective trauma accounts for the psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect a whole society, and thus represented in the group as a whole in the way that it interacts with those who have both directly and peripherally experienced the traumatic event (Hirschberger 2018).

As a result of the Civil War, many Maya communities have experienced deeply rooted trauma as a result of losing loved ones and witnessing horrifically violent events unfold (Dass-Brailsford et al. 202; Green 1999). In many communities in Guatemala, especially rural areas, there is a dearth of psychological services available to women, men, and children, thus making the mitigation of such traumatic thoughts and memories difficult, especially in communities where gossip is common, and it is difficult to share deeply held emotions with friends and, sometimes, with family members.

Collective, population-based resiliency

In well-being literature (Fava and Tomba 2009; Harms et al. 2018), resiliency is often depicted as something obtainable that an individual must *acquire* to cope. This conceptualization places an added burden on individuals already experiencing precarity and is similar to the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” neoliberal mentality, which does not adequately nor wholly account for entrenched, root structural causes of such precarity and related issues.

Population and community-based resiliency, however, offers a lens through which we may examine how entire populations of individuals move forward despite scarce power resources (Hutcheon & Lashewicz 2014). By examining resiliency through a population-based lens in the context of Guatemala, we can pay full attention to how women move forward from GBV when legal services and associated infrastructures fall short.

Through a community-based resiliency-oriented lens, analysis can be turned towards how communities work together to move forward, despite strong tensions and abandonment from the state. In the context of GBV, community and population-based resiliency offers an opportunity to pay attention to the ways in which women survivors and their families move forward with and without the assistance of formalized institutions. By paying attention to how local communities

and populations strive to mitigate problems such as GBV, we can devise more informed solutions to this widespread public health issue.

Modern-Day Social Inequalities Resulting from the Civil War

Although the Guatemalan Civil War formally ended in 1996 with the initiation of the Peace Accords, Guatemalan citizens, most notably the Indigenous population, still face deeply entrenched social inequalities and disparities. Guatemala's Indigenous population comprises 80 percent of the total population, yet 40 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty (CIA.Gov: World Fact Book). As mentioned by Green (1999), "The Peace Accords negotiated a settlement to a stalemated armed conflict. Because they did not address the indissoluble link between structural violence and political violence, they in fact reinforced exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness" (49). She goes on to state that "at the root of the accords are two key contradictions: the fundamental paradox between democracy and capitalism...Secondly, the accords ignore the extent and strength of the military project—reinforced by ongoing impunity" (Green 1999: 50).

These structural inequalities, including gender inequality, have been interpreted by sociologists and anthropologists as forms of violence (Farmer 1998; 2006; Menjívar 2011; Torres 2015; Torres 2008; Carey and Torres 2010). Many of these sociocultural issues cannot be examined in an isolated manner. Guatemalan Indigenous populations face many disparities, including malnutrition (Ramirez-Zea et al. 2014; Mazariegos, Kroker-Lobos, and Ramirez 2019), landownership (Alonso-Fradejas 2012), racism (Hale 2006; Caumartin 2005), and violence against women.

The Postwar Period and Modern-Day Neoliberalization

In the process that many scholars have attributed to globalization (Bahun-Radunovic et al. 2008; Pitarch & Solano 2008) Guatemalan civil society has experienced the transition to neoliberal democracy in the postwar period (O'Neill & Thomas 2011), leading to tension between state-guided efforts and Indigenous populations. While there is limited research on this specific topic, researchers have questioned the relationship between human rights, neoliberalization, and the effects that globalized discourses have on Indigenous populations (Pitarch & Solano 2008: 1). As noted by Torres (2015), despite having a “democratic” system, economic insecurity prevails in Guatemala to the point that in Guatemala City (in addition to other locations), homes are adorned by razor wiring. This wiring symbolizes the inter-ethnic inequality (Hale 2006) and political violence that has led to “civic insecurity” (Menjívar 2011: 2), including “high levels of violence, persistent impunity, and an inability to address the post-conflict instability” (Torres 2008:2). In the postwar period, Guatemala experiences homicide rates four times what the World Health Organization considers epidemic (Bellino 2017), earning it the nickname, “killer’s paradise” (O’Connor & Portenier 2007). During the postwar period, private security forces have outnumbered police officers by four or five to one (Adams 2011).

In addition to limited, “formal” enforcement of crimes, political corruption prevails. As stated by Benson and Fischer (2009:153) and cited by Menjívar (2011), “By implicating neoliberal ideologies and policies in the production of the new violence, we complicate simple assessments of the Peace Accords’ successes and failures and challenge the guiding premise that unfettered market forces are necessary for achieving peace and security” (3).

Beyond Transitional and Toward Transformative Justice

In the years following the Civil War, Guatemala's government underwent a period of transitional justice (Kauffman 2005). Many scholars have written about transitional justice initiatives in Guatemala (Viaene 2010; Crosby & Lykes 2011) and other Latin American countries (Barahona De Brito, Enriquez, and Aguilar 2001) in the 1980s-1990s. Transitional justice refers to judicial and non-judicial measures that have been enacted to address and repair human rights violations. These efforts go together with the democratization process. Sieder (2007) highlights the obstacles faced by Indigenous populations while navigating the legal system. Sieder alludes to regional changes in Latin America in the 1980s-1990s pertaining to Indigenous rights, including increased support for landownership (2007).

An example of transitional justice efforts directed towards the Maya after the Civil War consists of the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This legal agreement was signed by the Guatemalan government and the guerrillas of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) in May 1995. The crux of this agreement was to constitutionally recognize Indigenous people's corrective rights. These rights include: the right to be subject to customary law, the right to bilingual education, and protection for communally held lands. However, this agreement excluded territory-based autonomy arrangements. Additionally, a series of reforms to the 1985 Constitution were approved by Congress in October 1998 (Sieder 2007). These reforms include a full section specifically dedicated to "Indigenous Communities" and include the following articles: Article 66; Protection of Ethnic Groups; Article 67: Protection of the Indigenous Agricultural Lands and Cooperatives; Article 68: Lands for Indigenous Communities; Article 69: Transfer of Workers and their Protection; and Article 70: Specific Law ("Guatemalan Constitution of 1985 with Amendments through 1993"). However, while these

formal amendments have been made to the Constitution, there is still limited enforcement of these laws.

Guatemala's state-endorsed "multiculturalism project" (Sieder 2008 *In* Pitarch et al. 2008) has led to minimal enforcement of the aforementioned cultural rights (Hale 2006). This, Hale (2003) argues, has resulted in a distinct dichotomy between recognized and uncooperative Indigenous populations, and paints a portrait of modern-day Indigenous movements as "menacing" instead of assimilative, which was characteristic of past generations (485). Sieder (2008-*In* Pitarch & Solano 2008) also alludes to the "multiculturalization" of justice in the postwar period. She states that, "a variety of community-based forms of justice were recognized to some degree as part of the wave of multicultural reforms," framing this as a "response to long-standing Indigenous demands for greater autonomy" (76).

There is a considerable body of scholarship on "traditional" or "formal" forms of justice with regard to human rights violations during the Civil War (Pitarch & Solano 2008; Little and Smith 2009), and restorative justice efforts (Stoehr 2020). Vianene (2010) illuminates an interesting and vitally important perspective pertaining to structural and legal reform during this period. Her article, "The Internal Logic of the Cosmos as 'Justice' and 'Reconciliation': Micro-level Perceptions in Post-Conflict Guatemala," fills an important gap in the literature pertaining to how Indigenous communities conceptualize justice and what reconstructive justice actually looks like in such communities. She explores how justice and reconciliation are understood at the local level. One of her key findings is that from the perspective of Q'eqchi' Civil War survivors, the cosmos' logic takes the form of a spiritual force that thus repairs communities both socially and spiritually (2010). Ethnographic information such as this is key to better understanding social movements and social justice in Latin America, including Guatemala.

Like Vianene (2010), Sieder (2011) also critiques “formal,” legal efforts established during the Postwar period to “provide assistance” to Indigenous communities. She states that, “Civil society organizations and local communities differed in their responses to ADR (alternative dispute resolution) initiatives,” stating that, “some welcomed them as a means of extending access to justice, pointing to their accessibilities and low costs. However, many Indigenous rights organizations rejected them as external impositions. They argued that such innovations effectively undermined Indigenous authorities and Indigenous law by imposing external techniques of mediation and training local mediators-instead of recognizing the authority of local Indigenous leaders” (78).

Moving beyond transitional justice, Gready and Robins (2014) call for a new agenda, which they call, “transformative justice.” They state that, “transformative justice has become a globally dominant lens through which to approach states addressing legacies of a violent past, most often implemented as a component of larger efforts of state building” (339). They go on to explain that “an industry of praxis has emerged, supported by dedicated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and large-scale funding from Western donors. Yet, the performance and impact of transitional justice mechanisms have been at best ambiguous and at times disappointing, critiqued, for example for treating the symptoms rather than the causes of the conflict” (340).

According to Coker (2002), “Transformative justice regards transformative change that emphasizes local agency and resources, the prioritization of process rather than preconceived outcomes and the challenging of unequal and intersecting power relationships and structures of exclusion at both the local and the global level... Transformative justice entails a shift in focus from the legal to the social and political, and from the state and institutions to communities and

everyday concerns. Transformative justice is not the result of a top-down imposition of external legal frameworks or institutional templates, but of a more bottom-up understanding and analysis of the lives and needs of populations” (411).

Because transformative justice is aimed towards restructuring legal frameworks and addressing deeply-rooted structural inequalities (e.g., structural violence—Evans 2015) this type of macro-level change certainly takes generations to develop and make a significant difference. This is especially true in the case of Guatemala, where structural inequalities and Indigenous health disparities prevail (Rohloff 2011). Lastly, Coker (2002) discusses implications for a transformative justice framework in the context of feminist theory, interpersonal partner violence, and family violence in the United States and calls for transformative justice in the form of addressing the systems of oppression that enable and perpetuate forms of violence against women.

Legal Anthropological Perspectives of Women’s Rights and Gender-based Violence

In the late 1990s, legal anthropologists began addressing GBV from an anthropological perspective. Sally E. Merry is a key scholar of women’s rights and GBV from a legal anthropological perspective. Her work is particularly critical to examining the complex relationship between global governance and globalization (Merry 2001; Davis, Kingsbury, & Merry 2012) on the intersection of human rights and transnational culture from an anthropological perspective (Merry 2006), and the use of ethnographic methods as a means for studying human rights from a legal perspective (Merry 2017).

Merry (2010) borrows the term ‘legal culture’ from the field of economic development (Cohen 2009) to describe different legal frameworks as cultural entities of their own. For example, she suggests that human rights culture could be considered a “legal culture” due to its

broad set of legal dispositions. Merry's pioneering work is commonly cited by cultural and legal anthropologists focusing on human rights, transnational feminism, and global approaches to GBV. Wies and Haldane (2015) refer to Merry's work (1997; 2006; 2009; 2011) in terms of translating international law into local justice as a principal anthropological concern. They also draw from Merry's term, "vernacularization" (1-2).

Vernacularization refers to "the extraction of ideas and practices from the universal sphere international organizations, and their translation into ideas and practices that resonate with the values and ways of doing things in local contexts" (Merry & Levitt 2017: 213). Merry's work on legal pluralism (Merry 1988; 1997) has also influenced scholars' approaches (Pitarch et & Solano 2008) to the contentious relationship between human rights laws and what she calls the "demonization" of culture (Merry 2003). Overall, Merry's pioneering work has been critical to bridging the research areas of anthropology, legal studies, and human rights and has led a close anthropological examination of the complexities between globalized and national legal structures and "local" communities.

Wies and Haldane (2015) acknowledge that Merry's work was, "critical for demonstrating the production of new regimes of knowledge, and a resulting global biopolitic⁵." Merry's key findings suggest that legal frameworks employed globally shared notable similarities regarding individual human rights, a legal framework and approach, and a criminalization of GBV-related behaviors. However, individualized cultural contexts were diverse regarding marriage, kinship, sexuality, love and companionship, and the way that nation-states defined anti-violence efforts (7). These findings are particularly notable because while

⁵ This term refers to Foucault (1976)'s term, "biopolitics," which refers to how social and political power is exerted on populations, leading to health inequities. Font is different here.

they suggest that a human rights-oriented legal approach is a feasible means to reduce GBV globally, they reveal that there are significant differences in how efforts are manifested in cultures around the world. An all-encompassing, prescriptive solution to GBV does not exist. Rather, it is imperative that critical cultural intricacies and differences are acknowledged and understood for human rights frameworks to be implemented in a sustainable, culturally appropriate manner.

“Law in action,” a theory prevalent in sociolegal studies, refers to the distinction between how laws exist formally and how they materialize in practice in the real world. By examining a “law in action,” we can gain further insight to how written laws play out in action in society, the ramifications of such laws, and how they correspond to the daily realities and needs of populations battling economic precarity. As noted by Abrego and Lakhani (2015), qualitative methods are particularly effective in being able to determine the distinctions between how law exists as a written, formalized document, and how they play out in people’s lives in the real world.

Chevalier (2018) highlights the significance of taking a qualitative approach to examining “storylines of law,” and advocates for the utility of qualitative studies to “offer valuable insights on the facets of law outside the books” (93). And although ethnography is not mentioned, Argyrou (2017) calls for the increased use of the case study qualitative method for use in empirical legal research, specifically to, “further explain the participatory function of governance in social enterprises (1). Furthermore, Dobinson and Johns (2017) reexamine legal research as qualitative research, arguing that qualitative methods very much have a place in empirical legal research.

In the context of GBV-related laws in Guatemala, recent studies suggest that, despite women's rights campaigns and other efforts effectively leading to the passing of laws, such as the Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women, various socio-legal determinants strongly influence whether these laws are actively applied in society. For example, Menjívar and Walsh (2016)'s findings reveal that Guatemalan judges, police, and other legal officials utilize additional laws such as domestic violence laws and property laws to avoid taking responsibility for not enforcing femicide laws.

Their findings also reveal widespread impunity associated with the discriminatory manner in which these laws are enforced, in addition to women being hesitant to go through the legal system because of knowing that alimony payments will not be enforced and being economically dependent on male partners (Menjívar and Walsh 2016). This is just one example of how observing the ways in which laws play out "in action" is essential to devising solutions for women to navigate legal shortcomings. In this dissertation, I investigate the lived ramifications of human rights and women's rights laws when they are very real, yet largely symbolic due to their inability to provide justice and offer other forms of support for women GBV survivors.

While rather closely related to the anthropology of human rights, scholars in the field of legal anthropology have also focused their scholarly attention on GBV. Legal anthropology offers a useful perspective to interpreting the intersection between international policy, the state, and "local" law enforcement/legal procedures (Aoláin 2006). Regarding GBV in Guatemala, Guatemala's legal structure and the way such laws are applied contribute to widespread impunity. Menjívar & Walsh (2016) found that police and judges use laws other than those created to address violence against women to justify the lack of enforcement. For example, when

judges resist issuing restraining orders, the police refuse to apply them because doing so can violate the (male) perpetrators' property rights.

In addition to restraining orders, Menjívar and Walsh (2016) learned that judges also refuse to apply GBV laws because they violate the principle of equality, which is also guaranteed under the law. Because such laws are applied by judges in such a discriminatory fashion, many Guatemalan women refuse to utilize legal services because alimony laws are not enforced, and women are economically dependent on their male partners for survival. This lack of enforcement has led to widespread impunity regarding GBV offenses and the exacerbation of women's fears and disillusionment regarding the legal system.

Community-based Resiliency

Resiliency is a commonly discussed phenomenon in well-being literature both in terms of how well-being impacts resiliency, (Grabbe et al. 2021; Raymond et al. 2018), and how resiliency affects well-being (Souri 2013). In the well-being literature, there is an overarching focus on resiliency as something an individual must obtain to move forward (Mayordomo et al. 2021; Sharma 2012) anthropologists are critical of this perspective because it fails to acknowledge structural realities and barriers that individuals face in their pursuit of well-being.

In anthropology, much has been written on resiliency among natural disaster survivors (Oliver-Smith 1996) and has been examined as limited in contexts of political violence (Hobfoll et al. 2011). In his reflection on resilience in the field of anthropology, Barrios (2016) exerts that anthropology is at a "vantage point" due to ethnographic attention paid to how people work together by mitigating social relationships and social structures to face disastrous situations. Scholars have also examined how collective, or community-based resiliency helps communities

move forward from collective trauma (Saul 2022; Rime 2020) through shared experiences and perspectives and social support systems.

In the context of Guatemala, Weiland (2013) examined the relationship between churches, trauma, and resilience and reconciliation in Guatemala, illuminating how the Church plays a significant role in mitigating collective traumas as communities strive to move forward from violent pasts. Foxen (2010), asserts that, “psychosocial health cannot be separated from the broader political and economic structural weaknesses that follow war, including new forms of social aggression such as widespread corruption, lack of rule of law, and global economic failure” (82), going on to argue that these forms of hardship haunt modern-day people more than the memories of the civil war itself. When examining forms of resilience against modern-day vulnerabilities and trauma among Indigenous communities in Guatemala, Foxen (2010) argues, we must take both residual traumas of the war and the social suffering created by the war’s atrocities into account.

Human Rights Laws, Neoliberalism, and the Church

The strong presence of evangelical churches in Guatemala is closely tied to neoliberal development, namely due to anticommunist efforts (Hoksbergen and Madrid 1997). By “neoliberalism” (Harvey 2007, 2016), I refer to the transition of capitalism into a new phase at the end of the 1970s (Duménil and Lévy 2001, 2004). Further, I borrow Duménil and Lévy (2012)’s definition of neoliberalism as the most recent phase of capitalism, “a class phenomenon whose basic economic and political mechanisms, both nationally and internationally, are tightly intertwined” (240).⁶ Along with the Peace Accords, the Guatemalan government strengthened

⁶ As Robinson 2000 argues, neoliberal policy in Guatemala is closely tied to hegemonic, transnational processes (“the economic and concomitant social, political, and cultural changes associated with incorporation into global economy and society” (89)) and has played out in Guatemala through structural adjustment starting in the 1960s, continuing into the 21st Century. I echo Robinson (2000)’s argument that

the rule of law, which resulted in the establishment of the 1996 Human Rights Law, colloquially referred to as “La Ley de Los Derechos Humanos.”

Additionally, the Guatemalan government also established the Accord on the Establishment of a Commission for Historical Clarification of Human Rights Violations (Green 1999: 50; Sanford 2003). During this time period, more than 200 million USD was given to the justice sector. However, impunity prevailed during this period and the judicial process remained subverted by military and criminal networks (Sieder 2010). This has led to limited enforcement and questions regarding the “inter-subjective nature of legal interactions” to fully understand the dynamics of socio-legal change in the postwar period (Sieder 2010: 62).

Pitarch & Solano (2008) provide a detailed analysis of the relationship between human rights and the neoliberal state in Central America. In their words, “The simultaneous reframing of both state discourse and Indigenous struggle in human rights terms also raises questions within specific processes of power, including neoliberal state power and the more deterritorialized if nonetheless tangibly felt power of capitalism in its neoliberal forms” (13).

Presently, non-profit organizations, colloquially referred to as “NGOs,” fill an infrastructural niche in Guatemalan society. These organizations provide a plethora of services that the Guatemalan government fails to provide for a variety of reasons, including inherent racism against Indigenous populations who suffer from high poverty rates, governmental corruption, and political instability (Sanford 2003; Menjívar 2011). Discrepancies over unequal

modern-day inequities in Guatemala can be traced to the Guatemalan elite’s resistance to reforms such as changes in the tax system, thus creating “the image of a transnational project as progressive, [obscuring] the essential polarizing and pauperizing consequences of neoliberalism” (89) and indicating contradictions internal to global capitalism. This includes the polarization between the rich and the poor, the loss of nation-state autonomy and regulatory power, and the deterioration of the social fabric of civil society, accompanied by crises of authority and state legitimacy” (89).

land distribution, one of the primary catalysts of La Violencia, remains a prevailing issue. In the years following the Civil War, market-assisted land reform, an agrarian strategy designed to rectify the problem of land inequality, has resulted in poor land quality and continued inequality (Guaster & Isakson 2007).

Hale (2006)'s ethnography, *Mas Que Un Indio: Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala*, provides rich, ethnographic detail of the circuitous relationship between neoliberalism, racism, and multicultural identity in Guatemalan society. Hale provides a thorough analysis of neoliberal multiculturalism, suggesting that “this remaking of racial hierarchy in Guatemala forms part of a broader process of political restructuring, which has yielded new forms of governance and contestation” (Hale 2006: 31). Hale also situates this neoliberal transition within the larger phenomenon of Central American revolutions of the 1980s, stating that during this time period, “Central American societies had all of the characteristics—at times exaggerated to the point of crude parody—of corrupt, predatory capitalism, with obscene levels of inequality and social exclusion, held together by brute force (Hale 2006: 31).

In Guatemala, two main events in the 1960s led to the growth of international development, namely the proliferation of non-profit organizations/NGOs. These two events include the Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress, “a major Latin American initiative which targeted aid to support community cooperatives and modernization projects” (Streeter 2006; Rohloff et al. 2011). In addition to this initiative, there was a “widespread growth of community organizing initiatives in rural, Indigenous communities.” Catholic Action, a secularizing movement within the Catholic Church led by foreign-born priests invited into Guatemala by President Castillo Armas following his seizure of power in 1954, was one of the most prominent organizations in Guatemala during this time period (Rohloff 2011; Beck 2017;

Streeter 2006). An influx of monetary support from the United States coincided with the emergence of Catholic Action, thus leading to a superficial commitment to social reform as a means to mitigate the threat of communism during this time period (Rohloff 2011: 427; Fischer 1996).

There is a large body of research concerning the presence of “mega-NGOs” in Guatemala (Brautigam and Segarra 2007). However, there is a lack of ethnographic data concerning the development of smaller NGOs and their effects on rural Guatemalan populations, the majority of whom are of Indigenous descent (Rohloff 2011: 421). While political and structural changes emerged after the Civil War, deeply entrenched structural inequalities nevertheless persist (Sanford 2003). The cessation of the Civil War has led to dramatic growth of small non-profit organizations (NGOs). However, there is a dearth of research that critically examines the impact that such non-profits have on the communities that they serve. Through the utilization of ethnographic case studies from the Guatemalan healthcare sector, Rohloff et al. (2011) argue that serving as “proxy agents” for government have restricted the sector’s flexibility and capacity for local engagement.

In her comparison of two microcredit NGOs, Beck (2014) provides a comprehensive review of Guatemalan NGOs since the 1960s and observes that these institutions respond differently to external pressures. Correspondingly, she illuminates the concern that such NGOs are becoming internally homogeneous. This includes International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOS). However, success of these organizations has been largely dependent on INGO adaptation to the peacetime period, commitment by the Guatemalan government to the Peace Accords, and the willingness of INGO staff to cooperate on large-scale, interdisciplinary projects (Blum 2001: 328).

Women's Social Status and Violence Against Women

In his 1988, article, "Guatemalan Women Reach Consciousness," Rappaport offers a rather antiquated and ethnocentric viewpoint of women's development in Guatemala. In his words, "Since 1955, the Indian women of Guatemala have begun to awaken little by little, and to participate in activities contributing to their development" (1). He goes on to state that women increasingly participated in Catholic Church-related activities during this time and that, "women began to venture outside of their homes, to participate in courses, to get to know men and women from other communities, to travel, to learn to read, and to take on responsibilities. While problematically composed, this article provides an ethnographic glimpse into the lived experiences and emic realities that Guatemalan women experienced regarding empowerment and development during this time period. Although a few decades have passed since Rappaport published this article, women continue to hold a low position on the social ladder (Carr 2016).

During the Guatemalan Civil War, rape and violence against women were used as weapons against women (Menjívar 2011; Carey and Torres 2010). As mentioned by Torres (2015), "Using a framework of femicide, we can begin in the extended necrographies of guerrillas' tortured bodies during La Violencia. Guerrilleras were eminently political, forceful, violent, and decisively social actors" (64). In addition to the physical marks that violence has left on the bodies of women (including scars, dismemberment, nudity, rape, and so on (Torres 2015: 64), there has also been a production of female cadavers "through different forms of gender-based violence and prolific coverage in media stands" (Torres 2015: 66; England 2018).

In addition to physical violence inflicted on the bodies of women, various forms of violence have also impacted women's self-esteem and their conceptions of themselves (Torres 2015: 66). Civil society has played a prominent role in offering a variety of social services.

These programs include (and are not limited to): microfinance programs, women's rights education classes, healthy relationship programs and women's empowerment programs (Atkinson et al. 2013).

Women's Empowerment and Indigenous Rights Initiatives in Guatemala Since the 1990s

Studies that have been done on women's rights in Guatemala have primarily focused on women's roles in development efforts and women's roles in environmental activism.

While there is a considerable body of research concerning NGOs, INGOs, and development efforts in Guatemala, there is limited work concerning NGOs particularly focused on women's rights and women's empowerment (Rohloff et al. 2011). Few studies have examined how development goals of NGOs are determined by local, political, economic, and geographic environment (Blue 2005).

In addition to "general" development efforts. Indigenous Guatemalan women have also been heavily engaged in environmental activism work, including participation in anti-mining activism (Deonandan, Tatham, and Field 2017), and conservation because of the democratization process (Sunberg 2003).

Definitions of GBV

Gender-based violence (against women) is a prevailing challenge to social justice and human rights in the 21st century (Dauer 2014). When considering definitions for gender-based violence and interpersonal partner violence, we may first examine global, macro-level definitions of what is considered violence against women. In 1993, the United Nations (UN) released its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This document is composed of three articles. Article 1 of this document states that the term, "violence against women" refers to "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or

psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in private or public life” (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women 1993).

Article 2 of this document provides more specific details pertaining to the possible circumstances leading to violent acts against women. For example, this article states that violence against women includes (but is not limited to) a) physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family, general community, and that “condoned by the state.” Collectively, these forms of violence include (but are not limited to) human trafficking, rape, economic violence (e.g. dowry-related violence), sexual violence, and psychological violence. Article 3 of the UN’s Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women states that, “Women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. These rights include, inter alia : (a) The right to life; (b) The right to equality; (c) The right to liberty and security of person; (d) The right to equal protection under the law; (e) The right to be free from all forms of discrimination; (f) The right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health; (g) The right to just and favorable conditions of work; (h) The right not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993).

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines gender-based violence against women has been defined as “any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), adult women and teenage girls are at particularly high risk for experiencing gender-based violence (UNPF 2020).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a more commonly utilized term in recent years.

According to ender-based violence against women has been defined as “any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (Felipe Russo & Pirlott, 2006). The United Nations has identified GBV as a global health and development issue. As Russo and Pirlott (2006) observe, the global prioritization of GBV has resulted in the establishment of policies, public education, and action programs in order to “eliminate” this issue globally.

In addition to global, policy-level definitions of GBV, anthropologists have also developed definitions for these forms of violence with an emphasis on a local, cross-cultural context. Wies & Haldane (2015) actively apply anthropology to the study of gender-based violence, acknowledging that “there is a shared recognition that individual experiences are shaped by structures and institutions potentially create and maintain violence” and in their edited volume, they pay “careful attention to the relationships, contestations, and influences between the local and structural levels. However, the case studies repeatedly show these larger structures and their embedded power at possible sites for cultural changes that can contribute to the diminishing and eradication of GBV” (4).

In their discussion of anthropologists’ “return to the local” in their studies of GBV, Wies and Haldane (2015) emphasize Merry (2006)’s notion of the “deterritorialized ethnography” as a primary contributing factor to the small community of anthropologists working on forms of violence against women in 2006 (7). “Merry’s work was critical for demonstrating the

production of new regimes of knowledge, and a resulting global biopolitic. What Merry found was that while in individual cultural contexts there were still very diverse understandings of marriage, kinship, sexuality, love and companionship, and the way nation-states were defining anti-violence efforts, shared an emphasis on individual human rights, a legal framework and approach, and a criminalization of the behaviors defined as a formed of gender-based violence. What appeared around the globe were ways of defining and addressing violence that looked strikingly similar” (7).

Wies & Haldane (2015) state that, “Deterritorialized ethnography “focuses on a problem, not a place. This approach has been useful in substantiating research of gender-based violence in-and-of-itself and provides a framework for examining gender-based violence that is not geographically bound. It allows anthropologists to examine information from literature and reports to apply an anthropological lens to consider what has been left out, deemphasized, or possibly misrecognized” (7). Deleuze and Guatarri (1977)’s concept of “deterritorialization,” is referred to by Green (1999) in the context of postwar Guatemala. She goes on to say, “the spatial and symbolic boundaries of home, church, and family that offer some immunity from violence are ruptured through acts of state terror, their meaning resignified insofar as they no longer offer protection from repression” (9).

Like Merry (2006) and Wies and Haldane (2015), Bahun-Radunovic and Rajan (2008) also grapple with the dichotomy between the “intimate” and the extimate” features of gender-based violence in their volume, *Violence and Gender in the Globalized World: The Intimate and the Extimate*. Radunovic and Rajan (2008) illuminate Indigenous women’s critiques of the “mainstream women’s movement’s tendency to stress the universality of women’s oppression at the expense of recognizing differences in the forms of subjective experiences of that oppression”

and recognize the following drawbacks in conceptual approaches to violence and anti-violence strategies that do not effectively account for Indigenous women's perspectives: a) restricted conceptualizations of "domestic violence," b) an uncritical emphasis on separation from abusive partners, c) the privileging of criminalization strategies in anti-violence work, and d) the notion that gender-based violence is rooted in "culture" (14).

Dauer (2014)'s special issue, "Anthropological Approaches to Gender-based Violence," examines how four anthropologists integrate human rights frameworks, human rights approaches, and feminism in their work. In the years following 2006 and 2014 for that matter, anthropological studies on GBV are continuing in the realm of holistically studying these issues in relation to global, national, and local policy.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) falls within the larger category of GBV. This form of violence refers specifically to acts of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse (Ruiz-Perez 2006). Wies and Haldane (2011) refer to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' definition of gender-based violence; "violence occurring in the family or the general community that is perpetrated or condoned by the state" (2). Anthropologists have a history of studying violence and conflict, mainly in the context of warfare, conflicts over material goods, and cultural ethos. It was not until the 1970s that acts of GBV (e.g., rape, domestic violence, and human trafficking) were regarded as cultural phenomena (Wies & Haldane 2011, 4).

While much academic work focusing on GBV and IPV had previously originated from the fields of psychology, social work, and social work, Wies and Haldane (2011) offer a novel contribution to this subject area within the field of anthropology. Their 2011 edited volume, *Anthropology at the Front Lines of Gender-based Violence*, presents a series of ethnographically informed case studies of frontline workers (e.g., hotline counselors, psychologists, child

protection workers, police officers, etc.). This contribution is unique in that it is the first, comprehensive volume that utilizes anthropological methods to understand GBV from the perspective of frontline workers. Additionally, this volume situates GBV within macro-level, political-economic structures and processes while utilizing structural violence (Farmer 2005) as a prominent theoretical framework (3).

Correspondingly, Wies and Haldane (2015) offer another significant contribution to the study of gender-based violence within the field of applied anthropology in that it simultaneously situates GBV and GBV within a global framework while providing a rich, ethnographic collection of GBV and GBV case studies within a variety of social and political contexts (e.g. natural disasters, scholar-activists, political violence, violence on university campuses, etc.). In this edited volume, Wies and Haldane (2015) critique anthropology's primary focus on structural causes of GBV and GBV, without paying specific attention to the local variations and manifestations of GBV and GBV in local settings throughout the world.

Guatemalan Social Programs

Social programs in Guatemala exist as international, national, and local entities. Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation in social programs in Guatemala, providing services ranging from assistance with land ownership, legal assistance, and other programs rooted in large-scale human rights efforts. Gender-based violence (GBV) became public health/social issues of international concern in the early 2000s (Wies and Haldane 2015). In 2016, the United Nations named GBV as a global public health issue as evidenced by the role of gender and women's rights in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Cosgrove & Lee 2016).

While these international efforts are certainly a step in a positive direction towards violence prevention, because its main office is in Guatemala City, there is a disconnect between this agency (and others like it) to Indigenous populations living in peripheral, rural areas, or

“*aldeas*.” There is also limited research on the role that the Guatemalan United Nations office (and funded programs) play in reducing GBV and GBV in Guatemala.

At the national level, civil society has played a significant role in reducing GBV and GBV (Cosgrove & Lee 2016), although GBV rates are still at the epidemic level (Carey & Torres 2010). At the national level, the 1996 Human Rights Law resulting from the Peace Accords led to the establishment of the Human Rights Office of the Ombudsman regional offices. However, these offices may fall subject to infrastructural instability and limited funding because of being part of an oppressive state.

One of the most significant national advances regarding addressing GBV in the Guatemalan context is the establishment of specialized femicide courts dedicated to processing judicial violence against women cases. However, despite this effort, the country’s femicide rate has not decreased and remains prevalent (Bay 2021). Additionally, recent research suggests that familism as a prominent ideology in Guatemala has placed an emphasis on familial reunification over women’s individual needs related to rights and justice while overcoming violence (Menjívar and Diossa-Jiménez 2022).

In addition to specialized courts, additional judicial efforts include investigation and criminal prosecution units and specialized victims’ care units (UN Women 2023). Defensoría de Las Mujeres Indígenas (DEMI) offices were also established after the 1996 signing of the Peace Accords. These agencies offer legal assistance to women suffering from GBV and GBV, as well as land dispute issues. While the judicial and programmatic reforms enacted in 2008 initially signified a sense of progress regarding provisioning GBV services to Indigenous populations, existing scholarship notes that these agencies nonetheless fail to meet the needs of “marginalized populations” (Beck 2022). Lastly, women’s empowerment workshops and programs, especially

related to economic empowerment, have been commonplace in the past twenty years (Reade 2005).

Recent scholarship has focused on forced mobility resulting from a lack of economic opportunities for Indigenous women (Fuentes 2020; Martínez Rodas, del Valle, and Zamora 2022), and draws from interviews conducted with organizational staff and service provisioners to examine the underlying factors leading to GBV among Indigenous women (Wands and Mirzoev 2022). Studies have also examined the intersections of mental health, distress, and GBV (Rogg and Pezzia 2023); political economy and GBV among Indigenous women (Hartviksen 2021); and sexual violence among Indigenous women (Andía 2021). No studies, however, have drawn from the voices of Indigenous women service-seekers utilizing governmental (and non-governmental) services. This dissertation helps fill this significant research gap, illuminating the voices of historically silenced and disenfranchised Indigenous women who have sought services themselves, and positions service-seeking within local community contexts.

Women and Development Efforts

In the 1980s and 1990s, various development efforts proliferated in Guatemala because of the Peace Accords. For example, the U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) maintained a strong presence and made efforts to expand and improve primary education for girls (Cortina and Stromquist 2000). Additionally, various microfinance programs proliferated after this period. However, as Beck (2017) warns, these trends connecting women's empowerment and development did not always work in the best interest for women and their families.

Lorena and Lopez (2006) discuss the advancement of Indigenous people's rights at the international level in Guatemala. They state that, "the advancement of Indigenous people's rights

at the international level has paved the way for actions at the national level. Indigenous people's rights include universally recognized human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. This process is the result of the peoples' struggle—of men and women---since the times of the conquest and colonization to the present.” They go on to say that “Even though the principle of complementarity between men and women is an integral part of the Maya worldview, it has not been a cosmogonic element strong enough to articulate respectful and balanced relations between them. The development of a male chauvinist society not only has invisibilized women, especially Indigenous women, but it has fundamentally denied them of the enjoyment of their human rights. Thus, it has created the notion of women as ‘objects instead of subjects, of ‘value as property,’ instead of ‘human beings’ deserving of dignity and rights” (5).

In addition to international and national efforts, local-level non-profit organizations have also worked to address GBV among Guatemalan women. As Vianene (2010) argues, more ethnographic work needs to be done from a decolonized lens that specifically focuses on social justice efforts among Indigenous communities from a decolonized lens. As Cosgrove and Lee (2016) share, civil society is (arguably) making an impact on reducing GBV in Guatemala. However, from an anthropological perspective, it is nonetheless imperative that we reshape how we think of justice from a local and cultural perspective.

In her work in rural Ecuador, Friederic (2023) provides an eloquent and ethnographically rich portrayal of what human rights efforts actually achieve over long periods of time. Her findings reveal that, while human rights-based efforts are well-intentioned and may open doors for women, they also expose women to further forms of structural violence. Additionally, Chan (2019) examined the multi-level influences regarding Indigenous women's decision-making for GBV services in the Rural Peruvian Andes. Her findings suggest that survivors very much

prioritize their children's well-being, as well as how community factors such as gossip, local perceptions of violence, and deeply rooted gender expectations simultaneously work to shape these decision-making processes.

Women's Rights Movements and Religious Influence

Within the past two decades, scholars have increasingly researched collective memory in relation to social movements (Zamponi 2013; Gongaware 2012; Abăseacă 2018). Gongaware (2010) explores the historical relationship between collective identity and social movements, arguing that while researchers have examined this relationship for decades, the "specific interactive processes in which participants actively bring the present forward to the present have been left blurred and undifferentiated" (Gongaware 2010: 214).

Other scholars have critiqued the methods used in studying collective memory. Kansteiner (2002) asserts that while collective memory studies have made significant contributions to preserving cultural history, there have been some critiques of the methods employed in collective memory studies. In Latin America, women's rights movements have a close relationship with forces such as globalization, neoliberalism, and globalization (Pitarch & Solano 2008). On paper, it may appear that for many countries, the transition to a democratic system has led to an increase in women's rights. While this statement is largely true, the relationship between these processes is not always clear-cut. Large-scale women's rights movements can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s. Alvarez (1990) provides a detailed history of such movements, stating that "By the 1920s and 1930s, upper- and middle-class women in countries as diverse as Argentina, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil had organized to exact their demands for civil and political rights from male-dominated political systems" (20).

Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar., Eds. (2018)'s edited book, *Cultures of Politics/politics of Cultures: Revisioning Latin American Social Movements* extends her prior discussion on women's rights movements. Through this volume, Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar (2018) illuminate how social movements operate at the interface of culture and politics. They argue that "by exposing the perhaps less visible, less measurable, yet vital ways in which movements continue to contest culturally specific notions of politics and the political, [they] hope to retheorize the cultural dimensions of politics and thereby contest the often-made claim that the 'political' significance of social movements has receded with the return of formal, electoral democracy to much of Latin America" (xi).

Correspondingly, Torres and O'Connor (2019)'s recent article, "Framing the Final Issue on Women's Movements and the Shape of Feminist Theory and Praxis in Latin America," offer a brief, critical analysis of current feminist movements in Guatemala and the larger Latin American region. According to Torres and O'Connor (2019), "the last five years have seen a flurry of creative and powerful feminist protests in different areas of Latin America which have challenged the region's misogynist cultures and roles that states, and state institutions play in enabling systematic abuse and discrimination" (1).

Torres and O'Connor continue their discussion by referencing the 2016 Argentinian protest against femicide and the use of the hashtag, #NiUnaMenos, to protest violence against women. They also reference the 2018 Chilean protest in which women, "challenged sexism, sexual harassment, and domestic violence in massive carnivalesque protests" and "dressed as corpses, faces covered in white sheets, or donning painted bloody hands on their bare bodies" claiming that "machismo kills" to advocate for cultural and state-level change (1). Lastly, they refer to the overthrowing of the Puerto Rican governor for misogynist and homophobic text

messages (2). Moving forward, it is vital for anthropologists and other scholars to document the proliferation of these movements in Latin America to cohesively analyze social movements in real time.

Religion (namely Christianity) has a strong presence in Latin America. Some studies suggest that Pentecostalism increases participation in women's rights movements in contrast to Catholicism. Hallum (2003) makes the cogent argument that, "the study of cultural shift of large-scale conversion by women in Latin America should not be confined to the subfields of religion and politics but should be included in the reexamination of feminist theory" (184). She analyzes the synergistic relationship between feminist ideology, women's movements, and Pentecostalism in Latin America. She argues that "women's empowerment in Pentecostal churches is significant in comparison to the alternative of traditional Catholicism in which they are excluded altogether; or in contrast to secular society in countries with few voluntary associations to nurture participation" (184).

Regarding the relationship between religion, politics, and patriarchal values, Zur (1998) recognizes that "community religion and secular politics have always been male-dominated, since the Spanish established the civil-religious structure after the Conquest, they have also been inextricably intertwined" (51). Zur also provides a close examination of the relationship between evangelicalism and sexist (*machista*) institutions, stating that "...evangelicals are aligned with the state and the patrol, the most macho and violent institutions in Guatemala. Women's position has deteriorated rapidly since the patrols' usurpation of power, irrespective of their religious, political, or other affiliations: the patrol system is completely a male organization which aims to control every aspect of village life. Women have no voice of their own at all in their villages"

(53). Lastly, Zur refers to ladino Catholicism as a form of male authoritarianism which has “negatively affected the status of all Guatemalan women” (53).

Femicide

When considering Latin American social movements related to women’s rights, GBV, special attention should be paid to femicide (also referred to as feminicide in some contexts). While the term “feminicide” appropriately and fully recognizes both individual and state perpetrators of violence, I choose to use the term “femicide” in this dissertation because it is more commonly used in a colloquial sense in Guatemala, especially when it comes to specific laws against this form of violence, as well as femicide courts. Femicide is a rather novel term that originated in recent years. In 2008, Guatemala enacted the “Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women.” The establishment of this law was (arguably) a form of legal activism in that it specifically acknowledges the systemic murdering of women due to their gender (Musalo and Bookey 2014). Opponents to this law do not agree with the gender-based terminology included in the law.

Combatting femicide is a central feature of women’s rights movements in Guatemala and other Latin American countries. Femicide refers to the murdering of women because of their gender and position on the social hierarchy (Carey and Torres 2010). In their book, *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas*, Fregoso and Bejaramo (2010), provide ethnographic portrayals of femicide within the broader Latin American region. Journalistic, academic, political, and community-based interdisciplinary efforts have been made to combat this gender-based crime (xiii).

In Guatemala, modern-day femicide rates nearly equate to the rates during the Civil War (Torres 2008). Movements and demonstrations against femicide have become increasingly

common in Latin America in recent years, signifying a cultural and legal movement. Prieto-Carron, Thomson, and Macdonald (2007) examine femicide from a gender perspective, perhaps the most extreme form of GBV. These authors argue that it is vitally important for Latin American countries to systematically document femicides, and for citizens to carry out (public) advocacy activities and offer support to survivors and their families. Torres (2010)'s discussion of femicide emphasizes the role of the Guatemalan state in exerting systemic impunity as well as naturalizing and normalizing the She refers to Guatemalan women's experiences with femicides as a "vortex of violence," which is rooted in Guatemala's larger political structure.

Guatemalan Social Movements Resulting from the Civil War

Because Guatemala has such a high homicide rate, participating in public demonstrations Hale (2006) situates modern, Indigenous social movements within the sociopolitical context of the Civil War. In Hale's words, "Beginning in the early 1960s, armed opposition movements fought the Guatemalan state, first as small, isolated guerrilla groups (*focos*), then, in the late 1970s, as part of massive popular mobilizations that engulfed much of the majority Indigenous highlands region. They promised radical social change in language imagery familiar to the Left throughout Latin America: social equality, marital well-being, and political voice for all. The Guatemalan counterinsurgency state rose to the challenge and, with aid from the U.S. and its allies, defeated the guerilla military-by as early as mid-1982-and went on to punish would-be civilian supporter of the guerrilla with unspeakable brutality" (13).

After experiencing such brutality, Indigenous Guatemalans "organized, demanded rights, contested racism, affirmed their culture and identity as Maya, and raised their collective voices in national politics" (14). Hale calls this transformation, "profound and irreversible," and states that, "By the late 1990s, Mayas had established themselves as subjects of collective rights---

however limited and contested—and as political actors that no aspiring politician could afford to ignore. Ladinos encompass a wide range of social positions, far too diverse to engender a single response to these changes” (14). While Hale’s statements pertaining to Maya empowerment and social change are grounded, he does provide a rather idealistic portrait of the power that the Maya have in Guatemalan society.

Anthropology of Violence

The anthropological study of GBV fits into the broader field of the anthropology of violence. Anthropology of violence,” founded in the early 20th century, was traditionally dominated by psychological and functionalist approaches to violence because of social conditions (Schmidt and Schroder, Ed. 2001). During this time and in the years that followed, cultural anthropologists oftentimes dichotomized societies as being either “violent” or “peaceful” (Howell and Willis 1989). Johan Galtung’s (1969) classic work was the first of its kind to differentiate between direct violence and structural violence.

Since then, Farmer (1996) has popularized the term while exposing “structural violence” as the systematic ways that existing social structures harm or disadvantage individuals. Specifically, Farmer (2010) uses the term structural violence in the context of oppression and exploitation, defining it as, “the ways in which epic poverty and inequality, with their deep histories, become embodied and experienced as ‘violence’” (293). Through his rich ethnography, Farmer has showcased how structural violence leads to physical health symptoms and structural inequalities (including marginalization) in a variety of settings. These settings include his work in Haiti (2003; 2006; Farmer et al. 2012), and clinical medicine (Farmer et al. 2006).

Structural violence is closely tied to social suffering and poverty (Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 2016). Social suffering “captures the lived experiences of distress and injustice, while exposing the ‘often close linkage of personal problems with societal problems, thereby

challenging the problematic tendency in the social, health, and policy sciences to focus mainly on the individual and ignore broader determinants” (Brady & Burton, Ed. 2016; Kleinman et al. 1997: ix). Kent (2006) distinguishes structural violence from other forms of violence in that “it is not visible in specific events” (Kent 2006:55).

Menjívar (2008; 2011) devised a useful framework for examining violence affecting the lives of ladina women in Eastern Guatemala. This framework involves multiple forms of violence that simultaneously serve as actors in the lives of women, including symbolic violence, everyday violence, and political violence/state terror. Menjívar uses this framework to expose how violence has become normalized in the lives of women to the point that such violence has been viewed as “natural” (Menjívar 2008). This framework has utility beyond the perspective of ladina women because it accounts for a multitude of (oftentimes invisible) forces that simultaneously work to inflict violence on women’s bodies and self-perception.

In addition to Menjívar, Torres (1999; 2008; 2015; 2018), a Guatemalan-born sociocultural anthropologist, has published heavily on state violence leading to the perpetuation of femicide in this region. Like Torres, England (2014; 2018) has examined how the media in Latin America perpetuates violence that they experience.

Political Determinants of Health

In relation to transformative justice, political determinants of literature has been increasingly utilized by health scholars in recent years to frame health equity and population health problems. As described by Dawes, Amador and Dunlap, like social determinants of health, political determinants of health refer to the structural conditions influencing population health (e.g., transportation, environmental conditions, neighborhoods, housing, and food security), while paying particular attention to the political drivers to those conditions (2022).

This framework aptly situates modern-day health disparities within the country's political structure, demonstrating how health realities and healthcare access are purposefully orchestrated by political actors, policies, and the provisioning of funds. In recent years, health-focused, medical scholars have examined the role between political determinants of health and neoliberalism (Viens 2019), global political determinants of health contributing to health equity (Dee et al. 2023), and political determinants of health and health institutions in the U.S. context (Velasquez, Figueroa, and Dawes 2022). Collectively, this body of literature has mostly focused on health equity, clinical medicine, with some studies focused on global health.

The political determinants of health framework draws from the heavily cited and utilized social determinants of health framework to situate health inequities within a larger social structure, as well as in global context (Donkin et al. 2017; Krumeich and Meershoek 2014; Lena and London 1993). This sub-theory advances how we approach, examine, and define social determinants of health by more wholly examining how strongly held power and political dynamics directly influence populations' health through ideology, policy, resource decision-making, institutional funding, and other factors. Vast scholarly attention has been paid to the relationship between health disparities and social and economic forces, however, there is a need for shift in focus to examining the political actors responsible for such health inequity (Dawes 2020: 1).

As an expansion of the social determinants of health⁷, this theoretical conceptualization by and has been predominantly utilized by scholars in the public health and clinical medical

⁷ Here, I borrow Palmer et al. (2019)'s conceptualization of "social determinants of health" to refer to access to health services, social and physical environments, economic and political structures, as well as new research directions for this theoretical framework, including the following: understanding the contributions of upstream social determinants of health, embodiment, protective factors and resiliency, and place and context.

fields to describe how political actors and political decision-making affects the conditions influencing health equity. Additionally, research employing this perspective has mostly focused on clinical medicine within the United States (Dawes 2018). However, considering vast social disparities and power dynamics influencing social disparities and healthcare access among Indigenous populations in Guatemala, the political determinants of health theoretical framework offers immense potential for explicating how political power purposely held by members of populations has led to significant, modern-day health disparities among members of Guatemala's Indigenous population, especially in rural areas.

No previous research has applied the political determinants of health framework to Guatemala. However, considering Guatemala's tumultuous political history leading to the current condition of the Guatemalan state (Schwartz 2020) and significant health disparities (Cerón 2016), this framework pays adequate attention to the political forces influencing the lived realities of Indigenous populations. In addition to this advancement, this dissertation also advances the use of this theoretical framework to position health disparities related to GBV. Lastly, while medical anthropologists and public health scholars have published extensively on social determinants of health (Yates 2020; Marmot & Wilkinson 2005) and global health (Nguyen 2012; Biehl 2016; Gamlin et al. 2021), no published scholars have utilized the political determinants of health framework to theorize ethnographic nor anthropological research.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

Key Methods and Approaches to Studying Causes, Consequences, and Solutions to GBV

Anthropologists and other scholars have utilized a variety of methods and approaches to studying the causes, consequences, and solutions to GBV. Anthropological studies of GBV have become increasingly applied in recent years (since 2006) (Wies & Haldane 2011; Wies & Haldane 2015; Dauer 2014). When researching sensitive subjects such as GBV, ethnographic research offers researchers the unique opportunity to spend extended periods of time with participants. Such rapport is necessary to establish trust with participants (Menjívar 2011; Wies & Haldane 2011).

Sociocultural anthropologists researching GBV combine applied anthropology, ethnography, and an emphasis on local perspectives in their research. Applied anthropologists working on this topic focus on the “geographic specificity” of women’s GBV-related experiences to shed light on how forms of GBV vary due to differing national histories, structural forces, local mitigation strategies, etc. (Wies & Haldane 2015: 5-6).

Various methodological approaches (including mixed methods approaches, e.g., Beske 2016; Hynes 2012) have been utilized by applied anthropologists and other social scientists interested in this topic. Participant observation, the “hallmark method” of anthropology, continues to prevail regarding international fieldwork.

Future work bridging the cathartic aspects of semi-structured interviews with applied, advocacy-related approaches is necessary to further advance GBV studies within the field of

Applied Anthropology. While it is also a theoretical trajectory, transnational feminism has also been employed as a research method for GBV in other countries, especially “third world” countries (Kaplan et al., Ed. 1999). It is becoming increasingly common for researchers to utilize a scholar-activist research methodology, which draws from both quantitative and qualitative theoretical analyses (Pichon et al. 2020). Applied advocacy has also been commonly utilized by GBV, although there is limited scholarship focused on this topic. In her work on GBV in Western Belize, Beske (2016) utilized a mixed-methods approach, including a widespread GBV-related incidence survey, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and scholar-activism (16).

In addition to ethnographic data collection and participant observation, analysis of legal documents (Carey & Torres 2010) and homicide reports (Sanford 2003) has also provided social scientists with objective data pertaining to the epidemic levels of homicides and femicides (Perez 2003). Additionally, England (2018) has analyzed thousands of media reports covering women’s murders. In her recent ethnography, she provides a useful analysis of how media reports serve as an extension of the patriarchal Guatemalan state⁸ and social structures. When researching GBV, it is important to consider the aforementioned phenomena from multiple perspectives and levels (global, national, state-level, policy-level, local level, etc.).

Transnational feminism

Transnational feminism, the field of thought offering both theoretical and methodological contributions to feminist research refers to both a contemporary feminist paradigm and associated activist movement (Conway 2017). The term, “transnational feminism” originated in the mid-1980s in the context of United Nations (UN)-sponsored women’s conferences and has

since conjured a variety of meanings (Conway 2017: 205). This field of thought examines how macro-level processes such as globalization and capitalism affect people (namely women) across international borders. Transnational feminism has interdisciplinary implications and has been used both as a theory and method by scholars in anthropology, psychology, women's studies, and sociology. Conway (2019) defines transnational as an umbrella concept that refers to “a way to name the dramatically increasing flows of people, things, images, and ideas across the borders of nation-states in an era of ‘globalization’” (43). Zerbe Enns et al. (2020) concisely define transnational feminism's “core themes” as: a) reflexivity and positionality, b) intersectionality in transnational perspective, c) inclusive definitions of global and transnational feminisms, d) transnational border-crossing practices, e) agency and resistance in global perspective, f) decolonization of theory, knowledge, and practice, g) egalitarian collaboration and alliance-building, and h) theories and practices that support critical consciousness and social change.

Transnational feminism refers both to a contemporary feminist paradigm and corresponding activist movement (Falcón 2016). Specifically, transnational feminism examines how women in other countries are affected by macro-level processes such as globalization and capitalism, especially regarding ideology, worldview, and localized forms of knowledge. As Aikau et al. (2015) mention in their article, “Indigenous Feminisms Roundtable,” it is essential to address the absence of Indigenous feminisms, particularly transnational feminist perspectives, in academia. Correspondingly, Good (1994) discusses how biomedical knowledge is often thought to provide a universal, “scientific” account of the human body and illness. Non-Western and ethnomedical systems are oftentimes regarded as “belief” and therefore discounted as truth. In Guatemala, information held by neoliberal agencies providing services to Indigenous women for

GBV takes the form of biomedical knowledge, whereas Indigenous experiences are sometimes considered “backwards.”

As Duarte (2016), argues, “feminist discourse has been monopolized by a White and mestiza urban middle-class elite and has displayed a decidedly heterosexist bias” (153). Aikau et al. (2015) and Duarte (2016)’s critique of academic feminism for serving as a hard-to-reach, niche-like space that is non-inclusive of many ethnic minority groups, especially Indigenous women. Correspondingly, their critiques suggest that because Indigenous women do not commonly occupy this “elitist” space, Indigenous perspectives are thus left out of the knowledge production process, thus leading to further colonization and suppression of Indigenous perspective and voice.

Feminist ethnography as a theory and method

Feminist anthropology originated in the 1970s. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974)’s publication of *Women, Culture, and Society* and Reiter (1975)’s *Toward an Anthropology of Women* are “two volumes that signaled the renewed interest in feminism and women within anthropology” (Lamphere 2006 *In* Geller and Stockett, Ed. 2006) (xi). In the years following these hallmark works, the number of feminist anthropologists has increased and there has been diversification of the conception of positionality in the field of feminist anthropology.

As Lamphere (2006) shares, “At least two new cohorts of feminist scholars have conducted field research (those writing in the 1980s and the early 1990s and those who have just now begun to publish) and both have changed feminist theory. More of these are minority women, men (both minority and white, women raised in non-Western traditions, and self-identified gay and lesbian anthropologists. The emphasis has shifted; gone is the interest in sweeping universals. Writing about gender has replaced writing about women. Within cultural

anthropology more attention has been paid to history, to analysis of single cultures, and to multi-sited ethnography in a globalizing world” (Lamphere 2006: xi).

Feminist ethnography has been considered both a theory and a method. In their ethnography handbook, Altkinson et al., Ed. (2001) refer to the role that theoretical debates play in the way that feminist ethnography is framed. In their words, “Feminist ethnography has two main citational frames: first, it converses with the general debates in feminist theory about politics, methodology, ethics, and epistemology, and secondly, with debates that constitute ethnography outside of feminism” (429). Altkinson et al., Ed. (2001) continue their discussion of the origin of feminist ethnography by stating that “Feminist ethnography provided an excellent methodology for feminists, with an emphasis on experience and the words, voice, and lives of the participants, enabling what bell hooks (1989) describes as a ‘view from below’” (430). However, while there are certainly plenty proponents of feminist ethnography and its practicality for field research, this methodology has also been heavily criticized (Lather 2001; Korth 2005).

Visweswaran (1997)’s annual review of feminist ethnography provides a thorough analysis of how conceptualizations of gender have defined the production of feminist ethnography over the years. Veisweswaran (1997) analyses the production of feminist ethnography during four distinct periods. These four periods include: When biological sex determined gender roles and biological sex and gender roles were considered synonymous (1880-1920), when sex and gender were seen as not representative as gender roles (1920-1960), the distinction between sex and gender in a sex/gender system¹(960-1980), and critiques of “gender essentialism,” which involved the separation between sex and gender because “sex” was considered a misfit category (1980-1996).

Although ethnographic methods are suitable for feminist research due to its contextual, experimental approach, scholars have questioned the efficacy of, and ethics involved in feminist ethnography. Stacey (1988) argues that although feminist ethnographers are privy to using empathy and human concern as focal points for their research, in contrast to positivist research, ethnographic methods utilizing a feminist approach may face detriments such as exploitation, abandonment, and betrayal by the researcher, which could cause further harm to participants. In addition to these potential drawbacks to feminist ethnographic approaches, there has also been contention between feminism and postmodernism in anthropology (Gordon 1993). In her 1990 article, “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography,” Abu-Lughod reviews feminist critiques of the “cult of objectivity,” and raises the question of whether feminist anthropologists should deconstruct objectivity, reclaim subjectivity, or do both (Abu-Lughod 1990).

In this vein, Bell, Caplan, and Karim (2013) argue that it is important for feminist ethnography to “do both” because, “perseverance with the doing and writing of feminist ethnography is central to the articulation of a reflexive tradition” and that, “it encourages ethnographic experimentation that is politically and ethically responsible; it grounds in praxis the deliberations of the so-called ‘awkward relationship’ between anthropology and feminism; and it allows one to assume a pro-active stance and resist reactive engagement with the ‘new ethnography’ on the subject of gender (see Caplan 1988)” (29).

In recent years, praxis continues to be of methodological pertinence to feminist anthropologists and feminist ethnographers (Torres 2019), especially under a critical lens (Lock, Swarr and Nagar 2012). Sociologist Conway (2017) offers a critical examination of what he considers a “conceptual divide” between transnational feminism as a normative discourse. She states that there is a notable divide between normative discourse involving a particular analytic

and methodological approach in feminist knowledge production and international organizations. Further, she calls for a “theoretical reconsideration” of activist practice, namely one that draws from post-structuralism and post-colonialism in the study of transnational feminist activism. Moving forward, more work needs to be done concerning the contemporary relationship between transnational feminism and transnational ethnography’s interdisciplinary implications. In the next section, I discuss the role that positionality plays in making transnational ethnography a reflexive and, at times, phenomenological method (Banerjee 2011).

Transnational ethnography and positionality

Transnational ethnography draws heavily from researchers’ reflexivity and positionality (Al-Ali and Pratt 2016). Transnational feminism originated as a response to “White,” second-wave feminism’s analyses of gender oppression, particularly in Third World contexts (Herr 2014). Some researchers (e.g., geographers) call for advancements beyond positionality and for collaboration to occur across borders (Nagar 2003). However, positionality (e.g., as a woman researcher) remains a critical component for conducting ethnographic research with certain populations, especially women participants experiencing vulnerability and adverse life experiences.

Because feminism has different variations and associated ideologies depending on geographical region and cultural context, (Abu-Lughod 2013), transnational feminist methods offer opportunities for decolonized research methodology and knowledge production. Some scholars argue that transnational feminism is not the “end-all,” and that in recent decades, transnational feminism has overshadowed Third World feminism. Some scholars (see Herr 2014) argue that Third World feminism (also known as postcolonial feminism) is essential this field of thought suggests that feminisms in “Third World” countries are not merely variations or

extensions of Western feminism. Rather, these variations of feminism are based on independent ideologies and contextual, sociocultural factors.

As feminist methods were becoming increasingly common in the fields of anthropology and sociology, Bell, Caplan, and Karim (2013) questioned if women and men field researchers could conduct the “same research,” highlighting the difficulties that feminists experienced during this time in mainstream anthropology. This is an important concept when considering the fields of GBV. We know that globally, gender-based violence and intimate partner violence are public health issues that disproportionately affect women (Heise, Ellsberg, and Gotmoeller 2002; Reed 2008). While conducting ethnographic research on these topics, it is imperative for ethnographers/other researchers/social scientists to relate to participants on a human level (Kwiatkowski 2015).

In addition to empathy (Hollan and Throop 2011), relatability and shared personal experiences with regards to GBV can also help foster a strong connection between researcher and participant. Knowing that the researcher has had similar life experiences may also help participants feel more comfortable participating in the research process. While these are important factors to consider, there is still limited research dedicated to ethnographers drawing from their personal, lived experiences with GBV while in the field.

Research as a therapeutic tool

Empathy and compassion are both principal components of feminist ethnography (Stacey 1988). Conducting ethnographic research with women experiencing or recovering from issues such as GBV has therapeutic qualities, especially if women are in a community that lacks professional mental health counseling. Ethnographers are closely tied to the communities in which they work. When researchers build adequate rapport with research participants, interviews

serve as a means for participants to share their personal experiences with an outsider. This sharing of lived experiences and personal information creates a bond between researchers and participants (Atkinson et al. 2001: 370).

More scholarly research needs to be done concerning the therapeutic effects of the semi-structured interview process, especially regarding the ethnographic fieldwork process. Biddle et al. (2013) illuminate their experiences working with high-risk participants in suicide and self-harm research. Their findings suggest that a small proportion of respondents reported being “upset” or “distressed” because of study participation, especially in studies that specifically focused on traumatic experiences. Despite some participants experiencing negative emotions resulting from the interview process, most participants in their study reported beneficial side effects such as “finding the interview helpful” or “feeling better about themselves” after engaging in the interview process (356).

The therapeutic benefits of the ethnographic interviewing process are largely dependent on the researchers’ positionality, as well as situational factors. Gale (1992) found that sometimes, research interviews are indeed more therapeutic than formal therapy interviews. In the context of couple’s therapy, particular qualities identified as being particularly therapeutic include: the relationship of the couple to the researcher, the contextualization of the research talk, and clarifying procedures used by the researcher (Gale 1992). Interviewing has also exhibited therapeutic properties with other high-risk populations, such as military veterans (Mohr and Weisdorf 2019) and sex workers/drug users (Romero-Daza, Weeks, and Singer 2003). More work needs to be done on the relationship between qualitative interviewing and GBV survivors in the ethnographic context.

Empathy

Empathy in the context of research intersects with both aforementioned emotion-related topics in the ethnographic context and research as a therapeutic tool. Kirmayer (2008) provides a rather unique examination of empathy in the context of “radical otherness” in clinical psychiatry. Kirmayer argues that there are limitations to empathy, and that when such limitations are reached, the “other” may be experienced as alien or “unknown” (2008).

Empathy is an essential component to conducting research with trauma survivors, particularly GBV victims. There is, however, a lack of research specifically devoted to empathy while working with GBV survivors in ethnographic contexts. There is a considerable body of research dedicated to health care workers’ and service providers’ experiences working with GBV survivors (Nicolaidis, Curry and Gerrity 2005).

In addition to empathy, empathic qualities can also affect the research process. Emotional empathic tendency is the ability to respond to emotions that are like those present. Duan (2000) distinguishes between intellectual empathy and empathic emotion. Intellectual empathy is described as the phenomenon in which the observer/researcher empathizes with the participant’s perspective. Empathic emotion, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the observer feels the participants’ emotions. Duan (2000)’s overall findings suggest that pleasant feelings and sadness resulted in the researcher experiencing more empathic emotion than shame and anger.

In their phenomenological study of emergency room nurses caring for GBV survivors, van der Wath, Van Wyk, and Van Rensburg (2013) found that the confrontation of GBV-related trauma can affect emergency room nurses’ ability to deliver quality care. From a phenomenological perspective, possessing empathic qualities can assist in the research process

because the researcher may feel what the participants are feeling as they discuss particular phenomena. It is also important to consider the relationship between empathy, possessing empathic qualities, and positionality as a woman. Scholars have questioned whether women are more likely to possess empathic qualities compared to their male counterparts (Monahan 1989; Escriva et al. 2009). More research needs to be done concerning the relationship between being an empath and working on GBV-related research.

Ethical Considerations Working with Trauma Survivors

Conducting ethnographic research with trauma survivors includes various ethical challenges. There is a plethora of research concerning the process of conducting research with trauma survivors (Newman, Risch, and Kassam-Adams 2006; Munroe 1995; Seedat et al. 2004). Watts (2008) considers the sensitivity involved in (sociological) ethnographic fieldwork, namely with regard to the emotional stress involved in watching people's distress and suffering in the context of conducting research with cancer survivors in a drop-in center.

In a similar realm, Dickson-Swift et al. (2006) discuss the need for boundaries in such research. Rager (2005) voices the problem of "compassion stress," which results from grieving along with participants' families (423). In the context of domestic violence research, domestic violence service providers have experienced a similar phenomenon. In their study utilizing a web-based survey to determine factors influencing burnout among domestic violence service providers, Kulkarni et al. (2013) found that secondary traumatic stress led to staff members feeling as though they had little control over their job and stress levels. In the context of counselors working with trauma survivors, Trippany, Kress, and Wilcoxon (2004) caution against "vicarious," or secondary trauma as a result of working with trauma survivors in professional counseling environments. More work specifically focused on the topic of researcher

burnout, secondary trauma, and self-care strategies from the perspective of anthropologists working with GBV survivors and in the general fields of violence and trauma.

Community-based and Participatory Research with Marginalized Populations and Communities

Community-based and participatory models for research have been increasingly utilized by researchers both applied anthropology and public health in recent years (Abma et al. 2019; Israel et al. 2019; Leavy 2017). Both research models have applied implications for gender-based violence research. Whiteford and Vindrola-Padros (2015) make the clear distinction between community-based participatory involvement (CPI) and other community-based models. CPI is unique in that it synergistically incorporates local, civil, and political authorities. Community-based research, on the other hand, focuses more closely on actors at the local level. Maiter et al. (2008) illuminate the ethical importance of reciprocity in community-based participatory research (CBPR), stating that it is important for researchers to “give back” to communities that they are conducting research with (this is especially true for at-risk populations).

In the context of GBV in Latin America, O’Connor and Torres (2019) observe the role that women’s activism movements play in shaping feminist theory and praxis. In his annual review of social movements within the field of anthropology, Edelman (2001) provides a critical examination of paradigm shifts, including transnational activist networks, claiming that such changes in activist frameworks challenges anthropologists and other social scientists to reconsider how we conceptualize social movements. In addition to trauma and emotion, community-based and participatory research in marginalized communities has also been a topic of feminist anthropological concern. In her chapter entitled, “Feminist Anthropology Engages Social Movements: Theory, Ethnography, and Activism,” pioneering feminist anthropologist

Louise Lamphere (2016) offers her insight to where the future of feminist anthropology is in terms of activism and community-based research. Lastly, while considering how to implement preventative efforts regarding GBV community-based research, Aksel and Gurman (2014) found that a participatory video was effective in discussing gender ideology with community members and educating against different forms of violence.

Future Directions: Implications of Feminist Ethnography for Applied Anthropology and Public Health

Despite having a rather contentious relationship with Anthropology, feminist methodology offers many possible applied solutions for studies of GBV. For example, in terms of praxis (Singer 1994), researchers' participation in social movements (Taylor 1998) and engaging women (and men) at the community-based level (Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006). In addition to applied anthropology, feminist anthropology and feminist ethnographic methods offer both a theoretical and methodological framework that offer significant contributions to the public health field (especially maternal and child health and global health) (Brambila et al. 2007). Like anthropology, the public health discipline also takes a holistic approach to examining health disparities (Rohloff 2011). In the field of public health, more community-based work is necessary to really engage with populations at the local level and better understand the factors contributing to forms of violence at the local level (Menjívar 2011). Feminist ethnographic research can offer a great deal when examining the relationship between GBV and other maternal and child health issues, such as reproductive health, family planning, substance use, and mental health.

Study Methods

Drawing from my previous experience conducting ethnographic research in Guatemala and years working in the domestic violence advocacy field, this dissertation is based on ten

months of mixed-methods data collection conducted in Guatemala from early July 2022 to late April 2023. Preliminary research for this study was conducted over a three-week period in August 2018. During this pilot research visit, I met with organizational staff and secured permission to conduct data collection in their organizations. I also utilized a community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) approach, where I directly met with and asked organization leaders what data would benefit their institution, as well as interview and focus group questions that they recommend that I include as part of this study. I also asked local individuals for suggested questions/topics to add to interview guides.

In the stages leading up to this current project, I maintained regular communication with organizational leaders with whom I had contact via e-mail and Zoom. Overall, these digital communication sessions were vital for maintaining communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and for informing organizational staff and host families of prospective project start dates. During these communications, I gained insight into how the pandemic was affecting organizational structures and daily livelihoods and maintained rapport and familiarity with participants.

The data collection methods that I employed for this study include semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and detailed fieldnotes. This mixed-methods research study also draws from data collected from organizational and “localized” settings. In the following section, I further describe the field site locations and provide rationale for these sites.

Field Sites

This dissertation project draws from a multi-sited, ethnographic methodological approach. Data collection was divided between two primary towns (one *aldea* and one

municipio) and broader geographic areas with a specific focus on Indigenous populations. For reasons related to confidentiality, I will refer to these towns as, “Municipio Altiplano” and “Aldea Bocacosta.” These pseudonyms describe both the physical sizes and geographical characteristics of the two preliminary field sites for this study. In Latin America, the term, “*municipio*” refers to “municipality,” while “Altiplano” in Spanish means “Highlands,” referring to a geographic area characterized by high altitudes, cooler temperatures, and a thriving Indigenous Maya culture. The term, “*aldea*” is used to describe a small, rural area, oftentimes associated with being limited in resources. “*Bocacosta*,” is a geographical term referring to a peripheral coastal area characterized by a hot, tropical climate. In Guatemala, the “*Bocacosta*” is one of the country’s most resource-poor and underserved areas.

Additionally, these pseudonyms describe both the sizes and general geographic portrait of both field sites. I conducted the first six months of fieldwork in Municipio Altiplano. I spent more than half of my total data collection time in this area because this was my first-time conducting data collection at this location. Additionally, having contracted COVID-19 during the third week in Municipio Altiplano, the additional month of fieldwork conducted there also helped me make up for the few weeks where I could not conduct data collection due to quarantining and weakness associated with COVID contraction. In the following sections, I provide a brief description of the two primary regions where I conducted fieldwork in organizational settings as well as in local women’s homes and other community settings.

Municipio Altiplano

“Municipio Altiplano” is a pseudonym used to describe the municipality where I lived and conducted the first half of fieldwork for this dissertation. Nestled in the Highlands in the Chimaltenango Department, “Municipio Altiplano” serves as a commercial center for

neighboring *aldeas* and *pueblos*. It is also comparatively resource-rich in governmental and organizational resources, as well as a large supermarket owned by Walmart, numerous banks, private schools, and a large market. Market day serves as a bi-weekly opportunity for local people and those living in neighboring villages to purchase and sell a variety of goods.

This municipio is home to approximately 26,632 people, the vast majority of whom are Kaqchikel Maya. Kaqchikel, one of Guatemala's 26 Maya languages, is an endangered language spoken by 10,000 to 1,000,000 inhabitants⁹ (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/cak>), especially those older than approximately 40 years of age. However, children also continue to learn the language in school, along with English.

Walking down the busy main street lined with two-story housefront stores is overwhelming to the senses. Storefronts displaying colorful and fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh flowers, candles, plastic goods, and *ropa Americana* (American clothes). Towards the center of town Women and girls wear *traje* (traditional dress) adorned in an array of vibrant colors and intricate embroidery. On market days, which occur every Tuesday and Sunday, *vendedores* (street vendors) from neighboring pueblos (towns) and *aldeas* (smaller villages) arrive in town before the sunrise to set up their display of items ranging from dozens of types of fruits and vegetables, kitchen ware, *huipiles*, fresh flowers, and plastic houseware goods. The large, white Catholic church stands tall above the market center, where most people in town attend public church service in addition to more private *cultos* conducted at home with family, in addition to a few Pentecostal and Evangelical churches spread throughout town.

In Municipio Altiplano, people generally have maintained ownership of their land, which is generally passed down in families over generations, thus allowing for more substantial

⁹ Exact number of speakers not identified.

economic practices, such as rather robust storefronts, and multi-leveled homes, to be built in town. The *municipio*, which is about three miles from end to end, not including surrounding villages, is home to most conveniences also present in bigger cities, such as doctor's and dentist offices, several public and private schools, and a large, central market that operates seven days a week, among other conveniences. Because of its prominent size and increased accessibility to goods, resources, and some (although limited) resources compared to neighboring areas, Municipio Altiplano serves as a "hub" for villagers from neighboring communities, some traveling up to an hour or so away.

In 2018, I visited this "Municipio" for one week during a three-week trip to Guatemala to conduct preliminary data collection to help inform this dissertation research study. During this time, I met the host family that would later host my fiancé and I for our first half of time in the Municipio Altiplano, learned more about the Altiplano region of Guatemala, as well as Indigenous customs and traditions. Additionally, I met with the Executive Director and other organization staff (lawyers, psychologists, and other program practitioners) in person at a local community-based, non-profit organization. The findings from this three-week visit helped directly inform the research questions and project design for this current dissertation project.

Aldea Bocacosta

Unlike Municipio Altiplano, which was a new field site for me, returning to Aldea Bocacosta felt like coming home. Aldea Bocacosta, located in the Suchitepequez Department, sits on what used to be a *finca* operated by German coffee growers in the mid-to-late 1800s. The German colonial influence is evidenced by an array of small, wooden houses and other large buildings that were once home to a coffee processing plant. This town, approximately four miles in length, is colorful and tropical, yet simultaneously resource-poor, with few formal

employment opportunities, especially for women. In comparison to the Municipio Altiplano, Aldea Bocacosta, like the Bocacosta region, receives much less traffic from U.S. American visitors, apart from archaeologists in the past and a bi-annual visit from U.S. university medical students. This *aldea* is located approximately 1.5 hours from the Pacific Ocean, depending on road conditions.

In the seven years between conducting my MA fieldwork in 2015 and dissertation fieldwork in 2022, the town had some considerable changes. Colorful, concrete, three-story houses have appeared, many purchased with remittances from the United States. The road that was once dried dirt and gravel has since been paved with shiny black concrete, fostering a much smoother tuk-tuk ride to the neighboring town's market on Sunday mornings. However, despite many of these recent developments, people residing in the *aldea* still experience a strong sense of disenfranchisement and strong discrimination by the government.

The average family in Aldea Bocacosta earns between fifty cents and three US dollars per day. For families with several or more children, living with such low income makes it difficult to make ends meet, especially around schooltime, when additional costs, such as notebooks, shoes, lunches, backpacks, and new clothing, accrue.

In contrast to the Municipio Altiplano, where women are commonly seen vending on the streets and managing their businesses in an entrepreneurial fashion, walking and conducting other activities without the accompaniment of their male partner, in the Aldea Bocacosta, women generally work in the home, where they conduct the vast majority of domestic duties. Because of the stark geographical, cultural, and infrastructural differences between these two field site locations inspired me to select these two field sites for examining differences in societal expectations regarding gender roles, service seeking and acquisition, and women's lived

experiences with GBV. In both settings, it is not uncommon for men and women to leave the town to pursue employment opportunities in Guatemala City, the nation's capital.

Organizational Settings Near Two Main Field Site Areas

Guatemala's "localized" legal system is comprised of multiple entities and offices offering legal services. The Justice of Peace (*Juzgado de Paz*), a small judicial office that houses a local magistrate, is present in all municipalities. However, most legal resources and offices are concentrated in the Departmental centers, which are much larger and more densely populated cities. For this project, I conducted semi-structured interviews with staff members working in organizational settings representative of different levels (municipal, departmental, and NGOs). By interviewing organizational staff members at a variety of levels and organizational types, I strove to capture a holistic portrayal of the set-up of the overall "system" dedicated to administering services to GBV survivors. Additionally, regarding the two primary geographic areas where I conducted fieldwork, whenever possible, I transitioned between the two regions.

Confidentiality of Organizations and Participants

To preserve the confidentiality of the specific organizations, I use pseudonyms to describe all organizations that were a part of this study, the names of the two primary towns where I resided, and for all study participants.

Sampling and Recruitment

Program participants were recruited via the purposive sampling procedure. This sampling method involves a researcher's own judgment when selecting population members to include in the study (see Bernard 2008). Additionally, local participants and service recipients were recruited via target sampling, based on their lived experiences with GBV. Organizational staff

were also recruited via target sampling, due to the formal positions that they hold working on GBV within an institutionalized setting.

Additionally, snowball sampling was conducted in local settings, where participants would refer me to other participants due to their lived experiences and expertise, as well as organizational settings, where staff members would recommend that I ask other staff members to conduct an interview (with their consent).

For this study, I employed a mixed-methods research methodology, including semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, participant observation, and focus groups. Utilizing an applied anthropological approach, a prominent component of this project was also living in the communities that I was researching. In the following section, I discuss sampling procedures, as well as the rationale for strategically conducting interviews with staff members from governmental and non-governmental organizations and legal system staff members. Table 1, included below, includes a breakdown of the number of participants for each location, as well as the method type. Following Table 1 is a brief description of these details.

Table 1: Semi-structured Interviews

Institution Name	Institution Type	Location	Participant Category	n	Sex
“National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango”	Governmental	Chimaltenango	“ <i>Usaria</i> ” (Service Recipient)	7	Female
			Director	1	Female
			Lawyer	1	Female
			Social Worker	1	Female
“National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango”	Governmental	Mazatenango	“ <i>Usaris</i> ” (Service Recipient)	8	Female
			Director	1	Female
			Lawyer	1	Female
			Data Entry Assistant	1	Female

Table 1 Continued

“Small Governmental Women’s Office San Pablo Jocopilas”	Governmental	San Pablo Jocopilas	Social Worker	1	Female
			<i>Usaria</i> (Service Recipient)	1	Female
“Small Governmental Women’s Office Municipio Altiplano”	Governmental	Municipio Altiplano	Social Worker	1	Female
“Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano”	Non-governmental	Municipio Altiplano	Program Fieldworker	2	Female
			Program Director	1	Female
			Lawyer	1	Female
			<i>Usaria</i> (Service Recipient)	2	Female

Table 1 Continued

<p>“International Organization for Women Guatemala City”</p>	<p>International</p>	<p>Guatemala City</p>	<p>Program Specialist</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Male</p>
<p>“Hope for Women Guatemala City”</p>	<p>Non-governmental</p>	<p>Guatemala City</p>	<p>Director of Programs</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Female</p>
			<p>Clinical Psychologist</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Female</p>
			<p>Lawyer</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>Female</p>
			<p>Intake Specialist</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Female</p>
			<p><i>Usaria</i> (Service Recipient)</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>Female</p>
			<p>Communication Specialist</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Male</p>

Table 1 Continued

<i>Juzgado de Paz</i> (Justice of Peace)	Governmental	Municipio Altiplano	Justice of Peace	1	Female
<i>Juzgado de Paz</i> (Justice of Peace)	Governmental	San Pablo Jocopilas	Justice of Peace	1	Male
“Economic Organization for Women Aldea Bocacosta”	Non- governmental	Peripheral area of Aldea Bocacosta	Psychologist	1	Female
			Director	2	Female

Table 1 Continued

Ministerio Público	Governmental	Aldea Bocacosta	Public Investigator	1	Male
			Fiscal Agent	1	Female
National Police	Governmental	Municipio Altiplano	Police Officer	2	Female
National Police	Governmental	Aldea Bocacosta	Police Chief	1	Male
			Police Officer	1	Female
Pastors/ Religious Leaders	Non-governmental	Municipio Altiplano	Evangelical Pastor	1	Male
			Evangelical Pastor	2	Male

Table 1 Continued

Lawyers (private practices)	Non-governmental	Municipio Altiplano	Private Lawyer	1	Female
			Private Lawyer	1	Male
Local individuals who experienced GBV but did not receive formalized support/services	Non-governmental	Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano	Local Service Recipients: Aldea Bocacosta	12	Female
			Local Service Recipients: Municipio Altiplano	9	Female
Additional “local” participants interviewed about GBV service-seeking in a localized setting (not in organization)	Non-governmental	Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano	Aldea Bocacosta and nearby villages	8	Female
	Non-governmental	Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano	Municipio Altiplano and nearby villages	7	Female
TOTAL: 94 participants (semi-structured interviews)					

Participant Observation

Organizational level

I conducted participant observation in governmental agencies and NGOs through informal interviews, observing the organizational structure of these settings, eating lunch with employees, and participating in meetings and other work-related activities. Additionally, I sat in and observed women's economic empowerment sessions, group therapy sessions, conducted field site visits with governmental workers to visit clients in their homes, and occasionally conducted interviews in organizational settings to observe organizational culture, processes, and client experiences more fully. I also took public transportation to-and-from the organizations (up to two hours on bus each way) to better internalize what the commute is like for women living away from the organizations where they were seeking services.

Local level

At the local level, I conducted participant observation, which involved engaging in daily activities with local program participants (e.g., cooking, conducting household chores, walking through the town, going to the market). I employed this method to gain insight into day-to-day life and worldviews concerning gender roles and relations. I also conducted numerous informal, "conversational" interviews with local men and women concerning gender relations, service accessibility, and daily life. Additionally, I took weekly Kaqchikel classes from a respected community leader at a "cultural center" in town. This training helped me learn local terms and colloquialisms and gain further insight into Indigenous and decolonized perspectives in this setting. In addition to Kaqchikel language lessons, I also conducted a series of interviews accompanied by conversations with the Kaqchikel instructor on themes related to the Popol Vuh and the Maya Origin Story, town history, Indigenous cultural lessons, among other themes.

Focus Groups

I conducted a total of six focus groups for this study, including the following groups:

Table 2: Focus Groups

Location	Population	n
Municipio Altiplano	Local male alcoholic support group	11
Municipio Altiplano	Local women	7
Aldea Bocacosta	Local women	10
Aldea Bocacosta	Local women	5
Chimaltenango	Femicide judges	3
Mazatenango	Femicide judges	2
TOTAL number of focus group participants: 38		

Focus group themes included GBV in the community context, women's rights, alcohol and GBV, religion and GBV, power dynamics and change regarding gender norms and human rights frameworks, and (when applicable), their previous experiences seeking services at agencies serving GBV survivors. Additionally, I conducted a focus group with a local men's group in Municipio Altiplano, as well as with two groups of femicide judges in two distinct geographic areas. Like semi-structured interview focus group participants received Additionally, focus groups were audio-recorded.

Semi-structured Interviews

Over the ten-month span of fieldwork for this study, I conducted a total of 94 semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local community members in both Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano (men and women), governmental

and non-governmental organization staff members, and GBV service recipients. Interviews were conducted in a location chosen by the participant. Interviews with “local” men and women almost always in the participant’s home storefront, when confidentiality could be maintained. Interviews with service recipients occurred both in local settings within the Municipio Altiplano and Aldea Bocacosta or in a private room located within organizational settings. A noise cancellation device transmitting “white noise” was utilized to maintain client confidentiality. Additional semi-structured interviews were conducted with religious leaders, judges and lawyers in a private room located within their organizational setting. Further information regarding counts for each participant type is included in Table 1.

Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in length. All participants in this study provided verbal consent for the recording of interviews, per IRB standards and guidelines. Additionally, in Aldea Bocacosta, where I had conducted previous research, I had built relationships over a span of eight years. This existing sense of built rapport over time allowed for greater interview depth and more nuanced conversations. I had also built previous rapport with local Municipio Altiplano participants in 2018 during the pilot study, and with organizational workers to help foster a further sense of comfortability and openness when conducting interviews for this dissertation study.

Local community members (men and women)

Interview themes

Family, children, daily life; personal experiences with GBV; personal experiences seeking governmental/NGO services for GBV; familial decision-making with regard to gender norms/women’s roles; conflict resolution and legal reporting; personal opinions regarding GBV prevention and treatment (specifically in relation to suffering, healing and trauma); emic conceptualizations/notions of trauma, healing, curing; emic notions regarding feminism (e.g.,

what it means to be a “strong” or “empowered” woman; and opinions regarding effectiveness of governmental/NGO services for women experiencing GBV.

Agency Staff Members

Interview themes

Experience working with GBV survivors; program details pertaining to GBV prevention and treatment (specifically in relation to suffering, healing and trauma); organizational efforts for preventing/reducing GBV; perceptions regarding governmental policies; definitions of key terms pertaining to GBV.

Agency Service-Seekers

Interview themes

Overall experience at the agency/organization; types of services received; Guatemala legal framework; effectiveness of services regarding legal and health outcomes and Indigenous, local notions of healing, trauma, and suffering.

Safety

Due to the sensitive nature of my dissertation research topic and the high crime (e.g., homicide and GBV) rates in Guatemala, I always maintained awareness that conducting ethnographic research on this topic posed some safety concerns. I addressed these concerns by taking the following actions: 1) Maintaining a list of resources and key contacts to reach out to in the event that an emergency or safety concern occurs, 2) Not walking alone or at night, 3) Maintaining a close, local network of friends and acquaintances in each field site who are aware of the work that I am doing, 4) Having key stakeholders’ phone numbers on-hand at all times, and 5) Refraining from engaging in public activist demonstrations (e.g., in Guatemala City) if there are potential safety risks involved.

Additional Methodologies

In addition to the more formalized methodological approaches highlighted in the previous section, sometimes the richest information is derived from more informalized means of data collection, such as informal conversations and interviews occurring during *tuk tuk* and taxi rides, unrecorded conversations with friends and acquaintances, and conversations occurring during daily lunch with organizational workers.

Participant observation

Over the 10-month period that I spent in Guatemala, I immersed myself in the two primary field sites where I resided and spent most of my time. I attended family gatherings such as birthday parties, public and private church services, celebrated the births of babies, household chores, market visits, and ran a 15-kilometer race with community members, among other activities to further build a strong sense of rapport within the local community and engage in activities separate from more formalized data collection processes.

Often, my fiancé partook in these daily ongoing alongside me. Folks were ecstatic to learn that we had recently gotten engaged on the summit of Acatenango, and usually immediately asked when we were going to get married. “In October 2024,” we would respond, which typically resulted in confused looks and laughter, and the phrase “Here in Guatemala, we get married within a month-or a day!” Although I had a domestic partner, people still found it somewhat odd that I was 33 years old without children, yet later understood when they learned how long I have been studying. My fiancé’s presence also fostered a natural segue into conversations regarding gender roles and norms (especially regarding societal expectations for men and women), interpersonal relationships, the division of household chores and duties, and marital expectations.

In organizational settings, I also partook in participant observation as much as possible. This involved attending and actively participating in women's economic empowerment workshops led by Indigenous women, group therapy sessions, domestic violence education sessions, prayers, Maya ceremonies, and field site visits with organizational workers. More informal organizational participant observation activities include eating lunch daily with organizational workers, observing in waiting room settings, and informally conversing with organizational leaders and workers.

Primary Field Site Descriptions

This project involves nine primary field site locations. I received verbal consent to conduct fieldwork in each of these locations.

“Municipio Altiplano” Guatemala (the community at large)

“Municipio Altiplano” is a semi-urban community located in the Guatemalan Highlands. The majority of the town's inhabitants are Kaqchikel Maya.

“Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano” (Municipio Altiplano, Guatemala)

What I refer to as the “Community-based Organization for Women,” located in Municipio Altiplano Guatemala, is a community-based organization offering legal and psychological services to women (and some men) affected by GBV. The organization's employees (lawyers, psychologists, program coordinators, field workers, and social workers) are Kaqchikel Maya women. This organization offers services in their main office located in Municipio Altiplano and offers educational programs pertaining to GBV and women's empowerment in off-site locations in rural settings.

“Aldea Bocacosta” Guatemala (the community at large)

Aldea Bocacosta, Guatemala is a rural *aldea* (village) located in the Suchitepequez Department. The vast majority (98%) of inhabitants are K’iche’ Maya. I have previously conducted ethnographic fieldwork in this location for a three-month period in 2015.

“National Organization for Women Mazatenango” (Mazatenango, Guatemala)

“National Organization for Women Mazatenango” is a governmentally operated organization offering legal resources for women experiencing GBV.

“National Organization for Women Chimaltenango” (Chimaltenango, Guatemala)

“National Organization for Women Chimaltenango” is a governmentally operated organization offering legal resources for women experiencing GBV.

“Hope for Women” (Guatemala City, Guatemala)

What I call “Hope for Women” in this dissertation is a large, urban agency serving GBV survivors located in Guatemala City. This organization’s staff is comprised of lawyers, social workers, psychologists, and program directors.

“Economic Organization for Women” (In peripheral area of Aldea Bocacosta, Guatemala)

“Economic Organization for Women” is a small non-profit organization located on the outskirts of *Aldea Bocacosta*. This organization provides women’s groups, psychological services, domestic violence education services, and women’s economic empowerment courses.

“Small Governmental Women’s Office Municipio Altiplano” (Municipio Altiplano)

This office is a small, governmental women’s rights office located in the Municipio building. In these offices, women and men can file *denuncias* for GBV. This office also provides some training and resource assistance to GBV survivors within the municipality.

“Small Governmental Women’s Office San Pablo Jocopilas” (*San Pablo Jocopilas-Municipio governing Aldea Bocacosta*)

This office is a small, governmental women’s rights office located in the Municipio building. In these offices, women and men can file *denuncias* for GBV. This office also provides some training and resource assistance to GBV survivors within the municipality.



Figure 1: Map of Guatemala

<https://geology.com/world/guatemala-satellite-image.shtml>

Field Site Justification

Several organization-based field sites were chosen because the data collected in each of these sites allow for a comparison of local, rural perspectives and urban perspectives regarding GBV services. Additionally, these sites represent governmental and NGO-related perspectives,

which allow for a holistic, comparative analysis of service acquisition. Lastly, data collected in each of these sites allowed for a comparison between Indigenous perspectives and neoliberal narratives of GBV (see Research Question #2). Additionally, interviewing participants with a range of roles and perspectives also helps paint a holistic portrait of the multidimensionality, power relations, and multi-level nature of GBV as a societal challenge and phenomenon.

Participant Incentivization

In exchange for their time participating in semi-structured interviews or focus groups, I provided participants with culturally appropriate incentives that did not create inequality in the community. I put together “*viveres*,” consisting of multi-purpose, plastic containers with staple food and household items such as a dried bean, rice, a colorful, woven napkin, cooking oil, fresh vegetables, and fruits. I previously utilized these incentive types during my MA fieldwork, and they once again proved effective for building rapport with community members and demonstrating understanding of the local culture(s). For focus group participants, I also offered a simple small meal/snack (*refracción*), consisting of foods such as sweet bread, (*pan dulce*) *tortas* (a local dish made from a crispy tortilla shell and vegetables such as radishes, avocado, and hard-boiled eggs), and refreshments including *agua de Jamaica* and *atol*. If the snack/small meal (*refracción*) required food preparation, I worked with someone to prepare and paid the person who helped to prepare it. I also covered *tuk tuk* (similar to a motorized rickshaw) and/or bus/additional local transportation fare to-and-from the interview/focus group location for participants, and any family members/friends/children who accompanied them to the interview.

Research Assistant Selection and Compensation

For this dissertation project, I hired two primary research assistants (one in the Municipio Altiplano and one in the Aldea Bocacosta). The research assistants served as gatekeepers for

both primary fieldwork sites and helped further introduce me to the communities, provide essential background information for the study, revise data collection tools, conduct transcriptions as needed, and assist with participant recruitment, interview scheduling, and accompanied me to interviews when necessary to help foster rapport with participants whom I did not know and for safety-related purposes. This amount varied slightly depending on the assistant's professional training and expertise. In each field site, I had one primary research assistant. In the Municipio Altiplano, I met the research assistant through a family friend's recommendation due to shared research and professional experiences.

While I did schedule and conduct approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of interviews independently, research assistants provided supplemental assistance with study recruitment and research-related tasks. For appropriate wage, I consulted with a non-profit director in Guatemala who regularly commissions transcriptions and priced transcriptions based on her professional recommendations.

Data Analysis

During and directly after all data collection activities, I took descriptive notes, capturing the participants' responses to the interview questions, as well as the general setting, participants' body language during the interview, and any conversations that occurred before or after the interview. For all fieldnotes, I included the categories, "date," "location," and "observations," as well as a thorough description of the event.

Thematic analysis served as the primary means of data analysis for this project (Braun & Clark 2012). This consisted of identifying overarching and sub-themes that were salient in interviews, focus groups, and other forms of data collection. I selected the direct quotations included in this dissertation based on their ability to capture the essence of specific themes in this

dissertation, as well as being particularly rich in ethnographic information. I selected quotes based on their relation to women's individual experiences within particular frameworks and ideologies adopted in the study.

During the data analysis process, I also relied heavily on memory and attention to ethnographic detail. Sometimes in the time after having lived in Guatemala, I would close my eyes and relive my daily experiences, remembering the grind of daily life, geographical landscape, and the people I met and places I visited. I also relied heavily on detailed fieldnotes that I took before leaving each field site, capturing the "daily scenes," interactions, sounds, smells, textures, and sights.

CHAPTER FOUR: A STATE OF CORRUPTION AND CONTRADICTION

Introduction

This chapter provides a macro-level overview of salient, modern-day societal factors that situate the intersectionality of GBV survivorship among Indigenous women in Guatemala. To better understand Indigenous women's access to GBV services, it is first necessary to consider the sociocultural and sociopolitical phenomena and power dynamics that serve as underlying forces influencing women's daily livelihoods, well-being, health, and the institutions that they turn to during times of need.

A State of Contradiction: Simultaneous Presence and Absence of the Guatemalan State

The relationship between the Guatemalan state and the people (*la gente*) remains complex, multifaceted, and, at times, tumultuous. Spending prolonged time in the field revealed the multileveled complexities associated with Indigenous communities and state entities. Governmental organization workers and leaders, GBV survivors, and local people alike discussed the state in a sense of simultaneous presence and absence. For example, due to a long history of violence enacted by the state against Indigenous communities and modern-day corruption and social disparity, there is an entrenched sense of distrust regarding governmental entities among Indigenous populations.

People voiced their disappointment in governmental leaders' inability and unwillingness to fund and support initiatives that would improve their livelihoods and quality of life. During times of crisis, GBV survivors are encouraged to have trust (*tener confianza*) in governmental organizations and institutions that are an extension of the very state that falls short in meeting

their basic needs. Additionally, modern-day GBV cannot be separated from the Guatemalan state's violent treatment of women during the Civil War period (Pardilla 2016).

Drawing from my conversations and interactions with frontline workers in governmental and non-governmental agencies, the state's presence was obvious in some ways. For example, in the printed materials given to participants, providing information regarding their rights, phone numbers to call in case of an emergency, and the inundation of information regarding legal rights. Additionally, women are encouraged by public messaging to go to governmentally funded organizations to receive assistance for their GBV cases, yet these same centers severely lack funding and are limited in creating specific programs to meet women's needs due to rigid and political bureaucratic processes.

Another contradiction is the fact that emotional abuse is heavily penalized, yet simultaneously normalized through *machismo* ideology, which continues to prevail, especially in rural areas. *Machismo* ideology remains omnipresent within the system itself, a theme that I return to later in this chapter. Additionally, according to what is colloquially referred to as "the NGO law," as of 2021, the Guatemalan state now maintains the right to withdraw funding from any program with which they disagree. The state can also dissolve NGOs, monitor organizational funding, and fire their directors if their mission and related activities "alter the public order," thus compromising the country's human rights (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2021).

This demonstrates the power that the state continues to have over women's well-being, and continuing threats to civic security. Additionally, this exemplifies how laws can be utilized to create a national landscape for organizations decided to violence against women, while simultaneously capable of depriving women of such resources at the flip of a switch.

After having visited the femicide court on two previous occasions for data collection activities, I had the opportunity to conduct participant observation during a femicide court hearing. By observing this court hearing, I hoped to gain further insight to what the legal process for a violent crime against a woman in Guatemala in a courtroom setting was like.

Upon pulling up to the small, white concrete building adorned with barbed wire in a *tuk tuk*, I promptly showed my university consent form and passport copy. Once the guard gave me permission to enter, I greeted the receptionist with whom I spoke during my previous visit and made my way to the courtroom. To my surprise, the courtroom was very small, the size of a standard hotel room. The judge's "bench" was located at the very back of the room, with a clear, plastic shield protecting the small area, likely placed there during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I sat down against the wall in a standard white plastic chair. Inside the room, two middle-aged, male attorneys were chatting while waiting for the trial to begin. "She is good-looking," one of the lawyers stated. "Yes, very," the second lawyer agreed, unaware that I understood Spanish and Guatemalan slang. I waited a somewhat uncomfortable 15 minutes for the trial to begin, averting my attention to copious notetaking. The survivor, approximately 30 years of age walked in, with a large divider on wheels shielding her from the defendant, a medium-build Indigenous man wearing casual clothing and plastic sandals.

When the male judge, approximately 60 years of age entered, everyone in the room stood up. I followed suit. The trial began with a prayer, as most events, formal and nonformal, do in Guatemala. After the prayer, the trial began. The first stage consisted of a prolonged back-and-forth between the plaintiff and defendant's small legal team regarding the legal process, both parties' rights, and the role of the femicide court.

The judge then recounted the specific details of the incident that led to today's court hearing. Eight years prior, the plaintiff had awakened at 4 AM for work, as his wife remained sleeping. She woke up about thirty minutes later, as he was about to leave, only to be startled by him holding a *machete* to her neck because she did not make him breakfast, as she typically did.

At the end of the trial, the judge gave a formal, poignant written statement regarding the state of gender-based violence in Guatemala, articulating the social effects of the dominant *machismo* ideology in Guatemala how this ideology affects women and their livelihoods, how women have legal rights protecting them from these forms of violence, and how violent acts such as these will not be tolerated. During the statement, the judge made eye contact with me, to suggest that he was proud of the statement that he was passionately making.

Once the trial ended, the plaintiff triumphantly walked out of the courtroom, accompanied by the psychologist (*psicóloga*), with her shoulders back, a large grin and tears of happiness running down her face. This trial served as a very public congregation for coercive sense of *machismo* and that many women experience in Guatemala, yet so often stay hidden and concealed. This incident is almost hyperbolic; it is the epitome of "*macho*" behavior, and thus reinforces the distinct gender roles that prevail, even in highly urbanized areas. This vignette also highlights a few important points regarding Guatemala's legal system. First, the judge was very empathetic to the survivor's situation, the survivor was prevented from physically seeing her ex-husband, and was also accompanied by a psychologist in whom she had confided in the past.

However, even though justice was arguably served on this day, the plaintiff nonetheless had to wait nine years to have her day in court. Additionally, despite the judge's statement regarding social justice and misogyny, this reality still falls short of permeating the lives and lived realities of women in Guatemala. The judge also failed to provide a plan of action

regarding when the defendant is released from prison. For many women in rural areas, their partner's release can also serve as particularly threatening, as land rights often prevent women from being able to secure housing elsewhere. All in all, despite the triumphs of the morning's events, many questions are nonetheless left unanswered. Will the defendant take his aggression out on the plaintiff once he is released from prison? Will he return to the same, close-knit community where she resides with her children? Will the plaintiff receive notification of her ex-husband's release so that she can take proper precautions? Will she receive assistance in crafting a safety plan? These remaining questions reflect the shortcomings associated with the penal legal system.

About two weeks later, I conducted a small focus group with both judges who hear femicide cases. As I had with other participants, I brought a small gift of various assortments of sweet bread (*pan dulce*) and other desserts (*postres*) with me to thank them for their time, a gesture that is appropriate in Guatemala as a form of exchange. "Thank you, but we can't accept gifts," the judge stated. "We are trying to make that change. Sometimes, when we visit very poor areas, people give us food that they need to eat themselves."

This further highlights the complex, contradictory relationship that Guatemala's Indigenous people have with the state and state-level authorities. Additionally, this anecdote demonstrates how, despite following through with the entire legal process, many questions remain regarding the plan moving forward, especially if the survivor is from the same town as the perpetrator. As the judge mentioned, people living in poverty often give them food when they can't afford to do so, hoping to receive some form of assistance or relief in exchange for their efforts. In the following section, I discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic led to further economic hardships and infrastructural instability.

“La pandemia:” the pandemic’s effects on local economies and GBV services

When speaking with GBV survivors about what life was like during the COVID-19 pandemic, only two years prior to the data collection for this project, their lived experiences also contained this over-arching theme of simultaneous coercion and absence. Participants described not being able to leave their homes after 4 PM and how, if they did, they would be confronted by a police officer. However, despite these rigorous rules and standards, the state did not offer much in terms of financial assistance.

Fieldwork for this project was delayed for 1.5 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While waiting to begin this research, I conducted preliminary interviews with Kristina, the Executive Director and Founder of the Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano for a newsletter that I was writing. These interviews helped keep me up to date to how the pandemic was manifesting in Guatemala, including the challenges associated with GBV service provision and known challenges experienced with GBV survivors amid national restrictions. Like the Civil War (*La Violencia*), I noticed that not many people openly talked about the pandemic compared to people in the U.S. As I had gathered throughout my years visiting and residing in Guatemala, many people did not like to openly discuss traumatic events of the past.

Elvi, who lives in Aldea Bocacosta and has three young children, expressed how difficult it was for her to keep the children entertained.

No nos permitían trabajar después de las cuatro de la tarde. Tuvimos que quedarnos adentro, o la policía nos multaría con una gran multa. Vimos la televisión, los niños tienen sus juguetes, pero no fue fácil. Se aburrieron, querían salir. Acabamos de ver mucha televisión. No había nada más que hacer. Fue difícil no poder ver a la familia. Aquí en Guatemala la familia es muy importante. Fue triste no poder ver a mi familia. Además, hacía mucho calor. Normalmente nos sentamos afuera en el porche cuando hace calor, pero teníamos que estar encerrados en la casa.

We were not allowed to work after 4 PM. We had to stay inside, or the police would fine us a large fine. We watched TV, the kids, they had their toys, but it wasn't easy. They got bored, they wanted to go outside. We just watched a lot of TV. There was nothing else to do. It was hard not being able to see family. Here in Guatemala, family is very important. It was sad not being able to see my family. Also, it was very hot. We usually sit outside on the porch when it's hot, but we had to be closed in the house.

In addition to families having to occupy small spaces without being allowed to physically leave in the afternoon, having to be at home and inside by 4 PM caused many people to lose vital economic opportunities. To mitigate these significant economic losses, neighbors bartered what they could with one another, trading goods and food when markets were closed, and economic resources were tight. There was also a significant difference in vaccination and virus-related beliefs in the two field sites. In Municipio Altiplano, it was still customary to wear masks, even outdoors, in 2022. Nearly everyone I encountered had received at least two COVID vaccines, as well as a booster. In Aldea Bocacosta, however, there was strong distrust in vaccines and many people did not believe the COVID-19 pandemic to be real.

Some families made it out of the pandemic without any major consequences. Jaki, (my former host sister from my MA fieldwork), however, lamented how her 71-year-old mother passed away during this time. She had fallen ill while *bañando* (bathing), and her specific illness remains unknown because they were unable to make it to the doctor's office on time.

Teníamos miedo de salir porque sabíamos que la policía nos pararía y nos preguntaría a dónde íbamos. Dudamos porque pensamos que tendríamos problemas por salir de casa después de las 4 de la tarde. Decidimos conducir hasta el hospital más cercano, a unos 40 minutos de distancia porque la clínica estaba cerrada. Lamentablemente, murió en el carro en camino al hospital.

We were afraid to travel outside because we knew that the police would stop us and ask us where we were going. We hesitated because we thought we would be in trouble for leaving the house after 4 PM. We decided to drive to the nearest hospital, about 40 minutes away because the clinic was closed. Unfortunately, she died in the car on the way to the hospital.

Having to stay inside after 4 PM also put a heavy strain on personal relationships, exacerbating GBV in a multitude of ways. Survivors already in abusive relationships were isolated from family, members, friends, and social networks, and perpetrators of violence also used the pandemic to justify further isolation and control.

Through speaking with NGO and governmental organization frontline workers, it was evident that the pandemic significantly exacerbated various forms of GBV throughout the country. Organizations adapted to the pandemic by offering virtual hotlines. But for women who could not afford regular Internet, virtual appointments were not possible. Additionally, hotline use was difficult for women residing with their partners and could have made their situation even more dangerous. Buses and other forms of transportation were shut down, making it even more difficult for women to leave their abusive partners. Some women also resided with their in-laws, who would sometimes blame women for their behavior and defend their sons, thus compounding their experiences even more. Additionally, survivors could not file formal, legalized complaints (*denuncias*), making GBV data for 2020 to 2021 limited and inaccurate to account for all the cases.

Many women faced the additional challenge of having to homeschool their children while simultaneously experiencing the psychological and emotional effects of GBV. Guatemala was not aptly prepared for virtual education. Many families could not afford the added cost of the Internet, and did not have a computer of any type, a smart phone at most. Thus, this led to many children losing more than two years' worth of school time. Additionally, women without high levels of literacy felt helpless because they could not assist their children with their homework assignments. Local markets, a staple for securing nutritious and affordable food, were closed

down. There were also drastic economic effects to those selling crops and other goods in these markets.

Through speaking with Yessica, a paralegal at an NGO located in Municipio Altiplano, I learned that national corruption also prevented designated governmental funds from being used in the manners for intended, including the creation of field hospitals to reach rural communities in hard-to-reach areas. Collectively, as in other countries throughout the world, the pandemic has had a significant impact on GBV survivors' lives, as well as on local and national economies. And for those living with very few economic resources, the pandemic's effects are long-lasting.

Corruption

On October 9, 2023, approximately five- and one-half months after I left Guatemala for the U.S. to begin writing this dissertation, I sleepily and haphazardly opened my social media account to see my “newsfeed” absolutely flooded with posts from my Guatemalan friends and acquaintances documenting public protests (*manifestaciones*) throughout the country. These posts captured Indigenous people of all ages holding signs with various messages describing an overarching theme: corruption. “Leave, Corrupt Ones” (*Fuera corruptos*), “Corrupt Ones, resign,” (*Corruptos renuncien*), “To jail, Thieves,” (*A la cárcel los ladrones*), The people voted Arévalo President (*El pueblo votó Arévalo presidente*), “My country is not a business” (*Mi país no es un negocio*), “We are defending democracy. Leave, coup-plotters” (*Defendamos la democracia no la corrupción. Fuera golpistas*),” were among the hand-written messages colorfully displayed on posters held by citizens forming masses on the road. Other displays were taken by drones above, featuring similar phrases physically spelled out by bodies of men and women wearing both Indigenous dress (*traje*) and “American clothing” (*ropa Americana*).

After seeing approximately 20 posts appear, I realized that something serious was occurring. I immediately contacted a close friend who lives in Guatemala and operates a large non-profit organization to ask about what was going on. “The Attorney General and other political leaders are trying to say that Arévalo did not really win the election, even though he did. They are afraid of him winning because he was the ‘anticorruption’ candidate, and his chances of winning seemed slim. But now, those in positions of authority are afraid of what he will do if he becomes President.” she stated.

News articles succinctly summarizing “the political situation” echoed the summary that my friend provided. The Guatemalan Attorney General ordered authorities to raid electoral facilities and open boxes votes, photographing their contents. The fact that the government is taking such strong measures to prevent an “anti-corruption” candidate from taking office demonstrates how political power is carefully orchestrated and tightly held, regardless of what the people (*la gente*) desire, or in this example, elect.

After having countless conversations regarding the concept of “corruption” during the data collection process for this dissertation, it was startling to see such an obvious form of corruption making it to the news. These public protests (*manifestaciones*) are not an isolated incident by any means. Rather, these *manifestaciones* signify a cry for help, an attempt to publicly “call out” the modern-day forms of violence and injustices faced by citizens in both rural and urban areas. They serve as a means of saying, “We have had enough—we will no longer live this way. Something needs to change.”

During fieldwork (before this specific political event occurred), we were commonly notified of *manifestaciones* occurring in various corners of the country, signifying an increasingly heightened sense of discontent from mostly Indigenous citizens. Guatemalan

citizens experience the deeply rooted effects of corruption in every moment of every day in the forms of what scholars refer to as “everyday violence” (Kleinman 2000; Nielson 2014). These forms of “everyday violence” manifest in a multitude of ways, including but not limited to the lack of consistently running water, economic instability contributing to malnutrition, the lack of health specialists available to those in rural areas with few economic resources, lack of regular police patrol, the lack of educational access beyond the sixth grade and high illiteracy levels, and the lack of stable, consistent employment opportunities, and the lack of reliable and safe transportation. Today, the prevalence and accessibility of social media has led many Guatemalan citizens, especially those in “younger” generations, to compare their quality of life to their family members who are now living in the U.S. Sometimes, this comparison compels them to leave their families and traditions behind and migrate to the U.S. with hope for a better life.

The omnipresence of corruption is evident in the entrenched social disparities throughout the country. According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, Guatemala’s score in 2023 was 23/100, with a score of zero signifying “Highly Corrupt” and a score of 100 meaning “Clean” (Transparency International 2023: Guatemala, Online: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>). As one participant put it, “It’s in the air” (*Está en el aire*). During a conversation with Ana, a 30-year-old social worker at National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango, the topic of corruption tied to land ownership emerged as we discussed the town where she was born and raised, and her upbringing. Ana is from a neighboring town to the Municipio Altiplano, about equal in size. When I asked Ana about economic opportunities for Indigenous people, particularly women, she passionately responded,

Nosotros como Indígenas no tenemos las mismas oportunidades. Los dueños de la mayoría de la tierra son ladinos, y eso es el problema. Por ejemplo, los dueños de la tierra y fincas de mi pueblito son de la Ciudad. Y por eso, la gente de mi pueblo no se puede trabajar por ellos porque ellos no están. No es justo, no es igual. Y eso pasa en muchos partes de Guatemala.

We as Indigenous people do not have the same opportunities. The owners of the majority of the land are ladinos, and that is the problem. For example, the owners of the land and farms in my little town are from the City. And for that reason, the people of my town cannot work for them because they are not there. It's not fair, it's not equal. And that happens in many parts of Guatemala.

As this anecdote highlights, the topic of land ownership remains incredibly contentious to this day. There is a distinct difference in historical land ownership between Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano. The Aldea Bocacosta historically operated as a coffee plantation owned by the Germans, which resulted in a population with The Municipio Altiplano, on the other hand, has a distinct and unified sense of generationality about language, *costumbres* (customs) and land ownership.

Like violence, the concept of “corruption” frequently emerged regarding the government during interviews, focus groups, and daily conversations. Participants discussed corruption on behalf of governmental officials ranging from local to national levels. Participants also commonly alluded to governmental corruption inhibiting equal access to economic resources and opportunities. When explaining why they believed basic physical needs such as running water, affordable and nutritious food, and employment opportunities are not met (forms of structural violence (Galtung 1969; Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 2016)).

The concept of “money not going where it's supposed to go” was brought up frequently regarding corruption, as well as the lack of transparency and clarity regarding upper-level decision-making. When speaking with Ofilia, a social worker in the Small Governmental Women's Office Municipio Altiplano, I asked her why the agency does not have additional

employees to assist her, considering that she is so busy processing local *denuncias* and assisting both men and women who come into her office for social services.

Es porque lo líderes son todos hombres. No quieren utilizar el dinero que reciben a mejorar a los servicios. Nunca me escuchan cuando pido cosas y les dicen que necesito que alguien me ayude. Trabajo todo el día solita. A veces no puedo almorzar. Y estoy embarazada. Cuesta.

It's because the leaders are all men. They don't want to use the money that they receive to improve the services. They never listen to me when I ask for things and tell them that I need someone to help me. I work all day by myself. Sometimes, I don't get to eat lunch. And I'm pregnant. It's difficult.

Ofilia's experience brings the relationship between an institutionalized form of *machismo* and monetary corruption to the fore. The theme of corruption also emerged when discussing local governmental officials offering free goods in the months and weeks preceding elections.

While speaking with Carlos, a forty-year-old father of six children living in the Municipio Altiplano about governmental officials, he stated, "They are all corrupt," (*todos son corruptos*), angrily shaking his balding head. I asked him what he meant by this, and he stated,

No hacen nada. Hay mucha necesidad en nuestras comunidades. Necesitamos líderes en quienes podamos confiar, quienes se preocupen por nuestras necesidades. Nos dejan tener líderes indígenas locales, y hay unas indígenas en posiciones inferiores de poder, pero no hay indígenas en posiciones más altas, donde se toman decisiones nacionales, porque no quieren que nosotros tomemos esas decisiones. No quieren que tengamos educación más alta. Creen que somos estúpidos. No lo permitirán porque tienen miedo de que, si tenemos el poder, las costas cambiarán. Ese es el problema. Quieren quedarse con el dinero y el poder. La gente de su país viene aquí y nos ayuda. Como los del Cuerpo de Paz y los voluntarios que ayudan con la atención médica. Pero nuestra propia gente, la gente que vive en el mismo país, no nos ayudará. No quieren hacerlo. Es por eso que muchos de nosotros vamos a los Estados Unidos, para poder trabajar y ganar dinero por nuestras familias.

They don't do anything. There is a lot of need in our communities. We need leaders who we can confide in, who care about our needs. They let us have local Indigenous leaders, and there are some Indigenous people in lower positions of power, but there are not Indigenous people in higher positions, where national decisions are made, because they don't want us to make those decisions. They don't want us to have higher education. They think we are dumb. They won't allow it because they are afraid that if we have the power, things will change. And they don't want things to change. That's the problem. They want to keep the money and power. People from your country come here and help us. Like with the Peace Corps, and volunteers helping with medical care. But our own people, people living in the same country, won't help us. They don't want to. That's why so many of us are going to the United States, so we can work and make money for our families.

As this quote highlights, there is a strong sense of distrust in governmental leadership for any substantial change to occur regarding meeting people's basic needs. And, as Carlos mentioned, even though there are local Indigenous leaders in communities that uphold Indigenous values and decision-making power, these individuals do not make it to higher positions of power, where larger-scale decision-making occurs.

In Aldea Bocacosta, people shared similar sentiments regarding corruption.

The leaders are corrupt. They only give us things before the elections. But on a normal day, nothing.

Los líderes son corruptos. Ellos solo nos ayudan con cosas materiales antes de sus elecciones. Pero en un día normal, nada.

One day, while walking down the main road (*calle principal*) in the municipalidad governing the Aldea Bocacosta, I ran into Doña Frida, a participant, local rights promoter (*promotora de derechos*) and friend whom I had known since 2015. She asked what I was up to and I stated that I just got done doing some observations for my fieldwork. "The mayor---he's giving us all *lámina!*" (metal sheets used for construction), she exclaimed. Her friends nodded their heads in agreement, eager to receive their free *lámina*. "You should stay and see," she stated. I agreed.

As I entered the large, hot auditorium with high ceilings constructed from *lámina* identical to the stacks lining the white linoleum floor, I remembered locals' remarks pertaining to how city officials would give material goods to people before elections. I entered the auditorium and was immediately overwhelmed by the sounds and magnitude of people inside. The scene was not quite chaotic, but it was very busy. In the back of the auditorium stood the mayor, dressed in a black, long-sleeved suit, despite the scorching temperatures. He was accompanied by other officials, all middle-aged men, their specific identities unknown.

Residents of the municipality were called by first and last name, promptly showed their identification cards and thumbprint, and collected their free piece of *lámina*. Because they do not have vehicles of their own, many recipients had to pre-arrange a ride to come and pick up their *lámina*, much too big to carry home. While people collected their free *lámina*, the mayor stood at the front of the room, smiling at several video cameras, some from the departmental TV station, as well as people live-streaming the event on social media via smartphones.

This publicity stunt exemplifies what many elected officials in Guatemala do in the months before election time. While people were happy to receive the free construction materials, it was still obvious that this event was orchestrated to “look good” to the people, and thus win votes. Later, upon returning to the Aldea Bocacosta, I stopped by Jaki, my former “host sister’s” house.

Mira, le lo dije. Te dije que eso es lo que hacen antes de las elecciones. Siempre fingen que nos van a ayudar. Pero lo sabemos mejor. Sabemos que están mintiendo. Es todo mentira.

See, I told you. I told you that is what they do before the elections. They always pretend that they are going to help us. But we know better. We know that they are lying. It's all a lie.

Jaki's sentiments regarding corruption related to the upcoming election further demonstrate how people, especially in Indigenous communities, have little faith in the

government, even when the official himself/herself is Indigenous. In the Municipio Altiplano, Jesse shared a similar sentiment about having little trust in elected officials. When I asked what he thought about the local mayor, he was quick to respond, “He is Indigenous, with ladino mentality.” When I asked him to explain what he meant by that, he went on to explain:

Él pretende ser uno de nosotros, preocuparse por nosotros. Pero el simplemente acuta de esa manera para conseguir votos. Al final, a él solo le importa el dinero y el poder. A él no le importamos ni lo que necesitamos.

He pretends to be one of us, to care about us. But he just acts that way to get votes. In the end, he just cares about money and power. He doesn't care about us or what we need.

As these examples suggest, locals in both field sites spoke of corruption as a means of separation between themselves and the state, as a form of distrust and disenfranchisement, of the state not having their best interests in mind. On a crisp April morning, I accompanied my friend Sonja to the market, where she operates the successful and respected clothing business passed down to her from her late mother selling beautifully embroidered traditional dress (*traje*), as well as the colorful thread used to embroider (*tejer*). As it was a Sunday, the market was overwhelming to the senses, filled with people of all ages selling goods ranging from fresh meat, locally grown and imported fruits and vegetables, and commercial products such as a plethora of plastic goods, knock-off brand name sweatpants, and homewares.

During our conversation, she asked, me, “Cati, do you know anything about International Organization for Women Guatemala City?” (a large, multinational organization focused on global women's rights). When I told her that I was familiar with them and had visited their office in the past, but that they had not responded to my recent e-mail inquiry for an interview, she stated,

Aquí no hacen nada. No entiendo por qué no. Creo que son corruptos. No entiendo cómo hay organizaciones así, pero no ayudan a comunidades como la nuestra que necesitan ayuda. Y aquí en [la Municipio Altiplano], ni siquiera estamos tan lejos del Capitolio. Tampoco los veo haciendo nada en otras comunidades. Es otro ejemplo de corrupción. Al igual que muchas organizaciones en la ciudad, reciben mucho dinero de otros países, como su país, para ayudar a la gente aquí, pero no usan el dinero para ayudar a la gente. Dios sabe lo que pasa con el dinero.

They don't do anything here. I don't understand why not. I think that they are corrupt. I don't understand how there are organizations like that, but they don't help communities like ours that need help. And here in [Municipio Altiplano], we aren't even that far from the Capital. I never see them doing anything in other communities, either. It's another example of corruption. Like a lot of organizations in the city, they receive a lot of money from other countries, like your country, to help people here, but they don't use the money to help the people. God knows what happens to the money.

Sintia's remarks regarding this organization are reminiscent of others' words used to

describe upper-level governmental officials and governmental organizations alike. Even though the organization which we were discussing defies national boundaries, it nonetheless is negatively characterized, due to its diplomatic connections to Guatemalan governmental officials. This sense of disconnect between rural and urban areas is indicative of the social disparities that characterize the country.

In 2011, development for the immaculate, "master-planned" community of Cayalá began in Zone Sixteen of Guatemala City. In what is considered by some as the "Beverly Hills of Guatemala," this all-white European "city" is home to fancy restaurants, high-end retail stores with prices even higher than stores of the same brands in the U.S., salons, a Starbucks, and more.

My fiancé and I visited Ciudad Cayalá while passing time in Guatemala City, partially out of curiosity, and partially because it is one of the few areas within Guatemala City limits where it is reasonably safe to walk around at night. This community symbolizes several things, including strong class disparities, the attempt to mask conditions in other parts of the City, such as precarity and crime. Despite Cayalá's developers' claim that the "City" is for "all Guatemalans," the cheapest homes in this development are priced at 70 times the average yearly

income. Most of all, the fact that a considerable amount of money and resources was put into building a separate “City” instead of funding infrastructure and programming to strive for equity and development in surrounding areas, serves as a metaphorical and sociopolitical slap in the face to those who are struggling to survive and make ends meet.

I could not help but draw a connection between this master-planned community and the illusion of governmental support and programming for GBV survivors. In both “situations,” there is a masking, a pretending of sorts, that things are not as they really are. Corruption and social disparities are, in many ways, intertwined.

As I further highlight in this chapter, corruption is surreptitiously tied to Indigenous women GBV survivors’ experiences in a multitude of forms, ranging from GBV service funding, law enforcement responses to GBV, and, perhaps most prominently, in the unequal distribution of wealth in the country and limited opportunities for women to earn a stable and steady income to support their children, both before and after experiencing GBV.

This chapter provides a comprehensive, “macro-level” overview of the current political climate in Guatemala regarding gender-based violence and GBV, power differentials, factors pertaining to ethnicity and class, and differences between rural and urban settings. In this section, I provide ethnographic portrayals of people’s opinions and personal interpretations of the underlying, structural factors associated with service provision in Guatemala and societal factors influencing Indigenous women’s economic security.

Economic Realities

As this dissertation explicates, even though Guatemala has numerous formalized efforts in place to serve GBV survivors, these efforts fail to accommodate the immense need for stable

and sufficient income. In the following chapter, I illuminate GBV survivors' experiences devising economic strategies to "get back on their feet" after separating from their partners.

In this section, I provide a more general description of the economic realities in both field site locations. Because of the lack of formalized employment opportunities, in both field site locations, many families rely on multiple streams of income, including income in the form of remittances from the U.S., as well as income earned by children in their families, to make ends meet.

Everyone I met during my fieldwork had some form of entrepreneurial endeavor. The family with whom we stayed for the first half of our time in the Municipio Altiplano, for example, rented out several storefronts, where they sold gifts and partyware, and sold plants from their nursery. Additionally, the first floor of their home operated as a hotel, they occasionally rented out rooms to U.S. volunteers as a homestay, they owned and operated a nursery next to their home and charged people to park in their lot. The family also operated a household store, sold portions of food from their home, and sold *granizadas* (like snow cones) from their home every Sunday. During breakfast one day, Rita described how she and her husband saved up for their house, upon first getting married.

Sabíamos que queríamos tener nuestra propia casa después de casarnos. Todos los días, iba a la escuela de mis hijos antes de que salieran de clase y vendía sándwiches afuera de su escuela. Vendíamos cientos de sándwiches cada día, porque los niños llegaron a depender de nosotros para su merienda después de clase. Hicimos esto todos los días de escuela durante tres años y ahorramos todo lo que pudimos mientras vivíamos con mis padres.

We knew that we wanted to have our own house after getting married. Every day, I went to my children's school before they got out of class and sold sandwiches outside of their school. We would sell hundreds of sandwiches each day, because the kids grew to depend on us for their snack after class. We did this every school day for three years, and saved everything that we could while living with my parents.

The sense of “working independently” for survival and not being able to rely on formal forms of employment was common among participants living in both field site locations. One day, I spoke with Enrique, a member of our host family in Aldea Bocacosta about how Guatemalans are generally independently driven, very entrepreneurial, and sell whatever they can (often from their homes in the form of small, household stores, and from street stands) to make money.

He went on to explain,

Somos muy independientes. Tenemos que serlo. Así es como nos surgimos. Contamos con nuestros propios sistemas de transporte. Tenemos que ganar dinero por nuestra cuenta porque no hay trabajo. No confiamos en nadie.

We are very independent. We have to be. It’s how we survive. We have our own transportation systems. We have to make money on our own because there are no jobs. We don’t trust anyone.

This strong sense of “independence” about making money on one’s own without formal employment opportunities was shared by many people in both the Municipio Altiplano and the Aldea Bocacosta. Because educational opportunities are limited, especially in Aldea Bocacosta, where few people study past sixth grade, independent business ownership is a means of survival. Unlike more formal forms of employment, these “penny capitalistic” practices do not provide guaranteed income, making it difficult to plan for the future and budget for household needs.

As I continued my conversation with Enrique, he was quick to state that this sense of having to work independently also serves as a deterrent for men in town who “don’t want to work.”

Hay personas que no quieren trabajar. Es el problema aquí. No quieren trabajar. Son perezosos.

There are people that don’t want to work. That is the problem here. They don’t want to work. They’re lazy.

I knew that the situation is more intricate and complex than pure laziness, of course, but it was interesting to hear Enrique describe people in his hometown this way. The concept of personal agency, a central theoretical concern in anthropology, often emerged in conversations regarding work. I noticed this concept emerge more regarding rural and resource-poor communities such as Aldea Bocacosta.

One day, while speaking with Doña Francesca, an Indigenous woman in her early 70s my fiancé and I befriended and got to know very well during our time in Municipio Altiplano, we talked about some of the differences between the Bocacosta region and the Altiplano, just after we I returned from an extended visit to the Bocacosta.

Cati, es porque la gente de allí no valora el trabajo. No valoran las cosas económicas. Aquí, nos encanta trabajar. Valoramos el dinero, las cosas económicas. Tengo setenta y dos años y trabajo todos los días. Mi tienda es mi vida. Lo cierro por la iglesia, eso es todo. O si voy a visitar a mi familia. Aquí todo el mundo valora el dinero, incluidas nosotras las mujeres. Gracias a Dios, tenemos la oportunidad de trabajar. Doy gracias a Dios por mi capacidad de ganar dinero. Pero trabajo muy duro.

Cati, it's because the people there don't value work. They don't value economic things. Here, we love to work. We value money, economic things. I am seventy-two-years-old and I work every day. My store is my life. I close it for church, that is it. Or if I go visit with my family. Everyone here values money, including us women. Thank God, we have the opportunities to work. I thank God for my ability to earn money. But I work very hard.

Of course, it is evident that the reasoning behind the differences in formal and informal forms of employment and economic opportunities is more complicated and multifaceted than simply not wanting to work, but it is nonetheless worth discussing how local people conceptualized the differences in economic opportunities between different regions. In addition to agency being closely tied to earning an income and providing for oneself and one's family, agency is also closely connected to the "choices" women stated that they made regarding eduring

(*aguantar*) versus seeking help/support (*pedir ayuda*), a phenomenon I discuss more fully in Chapter Six.

Conversations with local men and women regarding economic opportunities and earning income in the Bocacosta typically revolved around there being a distinct lack of options to earn income. In this small *aldea*, men typically work in the peripheral coffee fields, in mechanic shops, barber shops, metalworking, and in other physically laborious jobs for little pay. The average daily income for people in this region is approximately \$3/day, depending on employment type. As further discussed in Chapter Five, women in the Bocacosta region experienced great difficulty in securing guaranteed and sustainable economic opportunities, relying on “penny capitalistic” endeavors to earn some money, though far from enough.

“There is no work. One must start their own business. But the money isn’t guaranteed. It’s hard. And when people don’t have money, they can’t spend it at others’ stores.” stated Jaki. As I further discuss in the following chapter, personal businesses sell a plethora of goods, ranging from U.S. American shoes and clothing (*ropa Americana*) from small storefronts in the front of homes, as well as fruit, household decorations (*adornos*), and prepared portions of food such as fresh fruit, corn on the cob (*elote*), portions of French fries (*porciones de papas fritas*), soups and stews (*caldos*), *tortas*, and many other types of local cuisine sold from small household stores and street stands. In larger, more municipal and departmental centers, it is more common for folks to rent a “*locale*,” or privatized store front near the town’s center, to sell a variety of goods and specialty items such as flower arrangements, hats, homewares, and other items.

“There isn’t work” (*No hay trabajo*) is an expression that I heard daily during formal and informal conversations. This expression is particularly prevalent in the *Bocacosta* region and

other areas where there is a distinct lack of jobs providing stable and continuous income, especially for women. Owners and operators of small stores (*negocios*) are not required to have a permit to sell their goods, but these “penny capitalistic” endeavors offer limited, sustainable income. Additionally, for store owners who make little income in their sales, purchasing new products to sell can be challenging. Since 2015, I have seen a shift in shop holders and food preparers selling their products via Facebook live and Facebook stories. These virtual means of communication and product promotion help to raise awareness of the goods being sold, but are still insufficient in ensuring stable, hourly income, especially for women who run the most of these entrepreneurial endeavors.

The lack of employment (*falta de trabajo*) and is the primary reason for migration and forced mobilization (Martínez Rodas, del Valle, and Zamora 2022) to the U.S., where workers can count on having a choice of work opportunities and are guaranteed shifts and hours with an hourly rate. Almost all the *tuk tuk* or taxi drivers who transported us during our ten months in Guatemala had worked all over the U.S. in farm work, manufacturing, construction, and other physically grueling positions. Because of the distinct lack of economic opportunity, combined with the societal expectation that women are to remain at home and take care of the children, it is difficult for women to quickly find work after terminating relationships with their partners due to GBV.

Economic empowerment workshops and group therapy sessions

Economic empowerment workshops are among the most current initiatives facilitated by governmental organizations and NGOs to attempt to foster skills to increase economic opportunities for GBV survivors. However, while well-intentioned, these initiatives fall short in providing sustainable, infrastructural solutions to gendered income inequality. Over the ten-

month span that I lived and conducted fieldwork in Guatemala, I attended several women's workshops hosted by governmental and non-governmental organizations.

These workshops emphasize the cultivation of skills and development of products that women can draw from to earn an independent income. Among the types of skill/product types at workshops that I attended included balloon displays, nail art, and embroidering cloth napkins to sell. Even though these workshops are well-intentioned and conducted within the means of the organizations' budgets, they are insufficient in providing comprehensive, sustainable training for survivors to earn a dependable income moving forward. Another major setback of these workshops is the lack of follow-up or program evaluation to determine if the program participants were able to earn an income using the skills that they acquired from attending the workshop. There is also a significant lack of technical training programs for women to learn skills that are associated with higher incomes, such as nursing, teaching, etc.

In addition to economic empowerment workshops, group therapy sessions are also a common group activity in GBV agencies. While conducting fieldwork with "National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango," I helped organize and co-facilitate a group therapy workshop (*terapia del grupo*) dedicated to helping women spiritually and psychologically heal and "move forward" after experiencing GBV. This workshop exemplifies how "National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango" incorporates a combination of clinical and neoliberal practices, such as clinical psychology and community programming, along with "traditional" Indigenous *costumbres* and ceremonial practices.

Just before the session began, I was promptly asked by Mari, an Indigenous social worker, to run to the market to fetch "*petalas*" and candles. After calling a *tuk tuk* and hastily making my way through the market to find fresh flowers to convert to a handful of petals, I

returned to the meeting about 30 minutes later. “There aren’t enough, but it’s OK,” Mari stated. She then bent down to her knees and proceeded to carefully position the petals into a circular shape on top of pine needles which she had already arranged with care, promptly placing the *vela* (candle) in the center of the petals and lighting it with *fósforo* (matches). Mari then proceeded to say a prayer, thanking God for the opportunity to meet on that day, to help guide the day’s workshop, and to provide comfort to those who are experiencing life difficulties; to be their strength.

After the prayer, Belinda, the director of “National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango” stood up and instructed the women to go around in a circle and share what was on their minds and what some of their most recent struggles entailed. During the session, women took turns sharing what was weighing heavy on their minds with the group, including what they hoped to heal from during the therapy session. “I can’t afford to pay for my children’s school supplies,” one woman stated. Another woman added, “I want to start my own business selling fruit, but I don’t have enough money to start it.”

Belinda then stood up and passionately explained how she herself is Indigenous and how she was able to go work her way up to being a director of the organization, even after separating from her ex-husband and single-handedly raising her now-10-year-old son. She told the women that if she could do it, they could do it, too. But to succeed, they have to start from somewhere small; start by selling one item, *poco a poco* (little by little). As Belinda gave her speech, the meeting attendees looked at each other apprehensively, appearing unsure that this is an immediate possibility for them.

After the session, Belinda and I engaged in conversation regarding how the event went. Because economic sustainability emerged as a considerable area of concern for program

participants, I asked Belinda if their organization receives designated governmental funds for economic development programs. She was quick to state that, apart from the organization's economic development cohort, which her organization engages in once per year, resources are profoundly limited, thus making it difficult to create a large, sustainable program as part of their organization.

Los líderes son los que toman las decisiones sobre los fondos. Solo se preocupan por nosotras en el Día de la Madre y el Día Internacional de la Mujer. En esos días, todo enfoca en las mujeres. Pero cualquier otro día, se olvidan de nosotras.

The leaders are the ones who make decisions about the funds. They only care about us on Mother's Day and International Women's Day. On those days, everything is about women. But any other day, they forget about us.

After the workshop, I spoke with one of the meeting attendees as we walked out of the park to the gate. I asked her what she thought of the workshop, and how she felt after attending it.

Me siento poco mejor, pero me da avergüenza hablar sobre mis preocupaciones con el grupo. Hablo más con Dios sobre mis problemas. Pero, a la misma vez, me gusta venir a platicar, a saber, que no soy solita con mis problemas

I feel a little bit better, but I am embarrassed to speak about my problems with the group. I speak more to God about my problems. But, at the same time, I like to hang out, to know that I am not alone with my problems.

Although this group therapy session provided a space for women to focus on their inner selves and the problems that they were facing in their daily lives, there are several shortcomings associated with the session. First, one of the primary reasons why women felt down or depressed was due to economic factors. Even though the therapy session was well-intentioned, it does not get to the root of most of the attendees' problems: having trouble financially providing for their children after experiencing GBV.

Additionally, it was clear that some of the women felt apprehensive about speaking up in front of other group members, perhaps due to fear of gossip and feeling uncomfortable expressing these feelings in front of others. Lastly, while Belinda's testimonial regarding how she was personally able to successfully rise to a governmental leadership role despite facing adversity as an Indigenous woman herself may have been inspiring to some group members, it could also be interpreted as insensitive to the experiences and circumstances of women in attendance.

“Hay Muchas Leyes Muy Bonitas, Pero Faltan La Aplicación”/ “There are Many Beautiful Laws, but They Lack Application”

One morning, after a particularly sleepless night, I asked Estrella, our host mother for the in La Municipio Altiplano, about some strange sounds that I heard in the neighborhood the previous night. “*Es la gata,*” (it's the [female] cat), she stated, laughing “*ella camina en el techo, en la lámina*” (“she walks on the roof, on the metal”). When I stated that I was a little bit scared of the sounds and thought that it might be a person, she laughed again, reached into the kitchen drawer, and pulled out a slingshot, made of wood and a thick rubber band.

Tengo esto. Si alguien venga por aquí, le golpearé con esto. Además, tengo los números de teléfono de todos los vecinos. Nos juntamos si pasa algo. Pero aquí estamos seguros. No pasa nada. Hace muchos años, había un hombre extraño sentado en su automóvil en las afueras de la ciudad. Todos nos acercamos a él y le dijimos que, si volvía por aquí, lo mataríamos. Nunca regresó. No lo hacemos mucho, pero a veces tenemos que hacerlo.

I have this. If anyone comes around here, I will hit them with this. Also, I have all of the neighbors' phone numbers. We join together if anything happens. But we are safe here. Nothing happens. Many years ago, there was a strange man sitting in his car on the outside of town. We all went up to him and told him that if he came around here again, we would kill him. He never came back. We don't do that a lot, but sometimes we have to.

When it comes to community violence in the Municipio Altiplano, neighbors typically *se juntan* (join together) and take matters into their own hands in the event of a communal threat or

violent incident. Even though local authorities exist, depending on the event at-hand, it is not uncommon for Indigenous communities to handle matters themselves as opposed to calling the authorities.

“There are a lot of laws, but they lack application” (*Hay muchas leyes, pero faltan la aplicación*) is a common expression in Guatemala today when it comes to the distinction between laws in action and lived realities. This sentiment refers to a disconnect between written law and what manifests in communities. After living in “Municipio Altiplano” for approximately one month, I had been told several times by locals and participants alike that I should visit the “Small Governmental Women’s Office” in the Municipio and talk to the social worker (*licenciada*) there. While stepping into the small, one-room office decorated with promotional posters advertising women’s rights, what to do in the case of extortion, how to file a *denuncia*, and what phone number to call in the event of an emergency. I could tell that the social worker, Odilia, was tired, stressed, and overworked.

I’m the only one here. It’s a lot of responsibility. I try to help everyone as much as I can, but sometimes it is difficult.

Hay muchas leyes muy bonitas, hay libros, hay programas y charlas, pero lo que falta es la aplicación.

Having a surplus of educational resources and activities for women from faraway governmental agencies to “educate” and “inform” them about their rights without accounting for the underlying conditions depriving women of justice intensifies deeply entrenched forms of structural violence. Additionally, being inundated with such human rights messaging can exacerbate existing feelings of hopelessness, uncertainty, and confusion for women who are not in an economic position fit to separate from their partners and can even increase their risks for being in an abusive relationship.

In many ways, the state sends mixed messages that are reminiscent of the gaslighting process that many GBV survivors experience, where actions and promises for the future are incongruent. It could be argued that the Guatemalan state inundates citizens with public messaging of their legal rights, while simultaneously depriving them of organizational infrastructure, legislation that benefits women, and stable and sustainable economic and educational opportunities. The country has implemented progressive laws regarding women's rights. However, the underlying foundation of these problems is not being accounted for, thus leading to limited change and justice.

In addition to stating that the laws are not achieved (*no cumplen*), the phrase, "they are not applied" (*no aplican*) was also collectively utilized by organizational practitioners, GBV survivors, and locals alike to refer to how laws are not always enforced/effectively enforced to regulate illegal activity. One day, I interviewed Lucy, a 40-something-year-old Kaqchikel woman who operated her own, independent legal office on the main street of the Municipio Altiplano. Lucy had worked as a lawyer for nine years. As our conversation began, Lucy stated that, nowadays, both men and women have many rights (*muchos derechos*) because they can file *denuncias* (formal, legal complaints), which is the reason that these laws exist. When I asked Lucy what she thought about the country's Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women, she first acknowledged that these laws were enacted "to improve women's lives," but went on to say, "they aren't applied, exactly."

Lucy stated that there are many barriers in place, including the slow process (it can take five-to-eight years for a femicide (*femicidio*) case to arrive at court. Lucy's statements echoed the opinions of many other participants in this study: The laws are a sign of "progress" compared to the past, but still pose various setbacks and challenges when it comes to achieving justice.

Upon entering the large, iron doors of National Women's Organization Chimaltenango, it is nearly impossible to miss a beautiful, colorfully painted mural on the wall to the left, just above the white plastic waiting room chairs. In the background of this mural, there is a large volcano, a lake, and a faceless Indigenous woman dressed in *traje* with her arm over the shoulder of a smaller, younger Indigenous girl. Several *derechos* (rights) were written on the mural in cursive, numbered one through ten. They include:

Specific rights: 1) To respect cultural identity, 2) To identify as an Indigenous woman, 3) To not be assimilated by a foreign culture, 4) To participate in management and decision-making positions at all levels, 5) To the modification of customs and traditions that affect your dignity, 6) To the recovery of customs and traditions that strengthen your identity, 7) To the non-imposition of a husband, 8) To dignified, humane, and respectful treatment, 9) To equality, and 10) To bilingual education.

Derechos Específicos: 1) Al respeto de la identidad cultural, 2) A identificarse como mujer indígena, 3) A no ser asimilada por una cultura ajena, 4) A la participación en cargos de dirección y de toma de decisiones a todo nivel, 5) A la modificación de costumbres y tradiciones que afectan a su dignidad, 6) A la recuperación de costumbres y tradiciones que fortalezcan su identidad, 7) A la no imposición de esposo, 8) A un trato digno, humano, y respetuoso, 9) A la igualdad, y 10) A la educación bilingüe.

The organization's "*visión*" (vision) is located adjacent to the mural, stating,

To be a consolidated public institution that promotes the full exercise of the rights of Indigenous women based on the principles and values of Indigenous peoples.

Ser una institución pública consolidada que promueve el pleno ejercicio de los derechos de las mujeres indígenas en base a los principios y valores de los pueblos indígenas.

Despite having had a preexisting awareness of these legal rights as part of my preparation for this study, it was startling to juxtapose the laws with the interview data that I had collected thus far. I began thinking about how, while things are far from perfect, there has nevertheless been some change in recent years.

After encountering many negative opinions regarding the shortcomings in effectively enforcing GPV-related laws, some participants also spoke about the laws in a positive light, despite their shortcomings. Sonia, an Indigenous Maya K'iche' woman lawyer in her mid-thirties who has worked as a lawyer for 10 years, and originally moved to Guatemala City from her *aldea* to study “*derechos*” (rights). She has been at Hope for Women Guatemala City for three years. She stated that the majority of the *casos* (cases) that she has worked with at the agency follow within the sexual violence, femicide, physical and psychological violence categories. She continued,

El proceso penal es muy difícil. A veces el sistema de justicia no tiene empatía de las víctimas. Pero las reformas de las leyes aquí son parte de un movimiento internacional. Creo que las leyes en el nivel internacional, de los derechos humanos, han ayudado bastantes, especialmente a la niñez. Por ejemplo, tenemos una ley de protestas. Todo es una lucha. También, por las leyes internacionales, estamos unidas al tribunal internacional. Eso es muy importante porque hay leyes internacionales que enfoquen en derechos de la mujer y derechos del niño.

The penal process is very difficult. Sometimes the justice system lacks empathy for victims. But the law reforms here are part of an international movement. I think that international human rights laws have helped a lot, especially for children. For example, we have a protest law. Everything is a fight. Also, by international laws, we are linked to the international court. That is very important because there are international laws that focus on women's rights and children's rights.

Sonia also stated that a primary reason women do not go to governmental offices for support is because they do not have trust (*confianza*), which I further describe in Chapter Six. She stated that now, even though services exist, many Indigenous people do not believe in the justice system because “There is a lot of discrimination and racism.” She continued,

El sistema de justicia no es lo que necesitan las mujeres. Las mujeres Indígenas necesitan una alianza aquí en la Ciudad donde puedan llegar con confianza.

The justice system is not what women need. Indigenous women need an alliance here in the City where they can arrive with confidence.

However, despite these challenges, Sonia's overall opinion of the justice system in her ten-year tenure as a lawyer remains optimistic.

He visto cambios positivos. Antes, era muy difícil para los jueces dar sentencias por los delitos. Pero, Gracias a Dios, ha cambiado bastante. Por las leyes de femicidio y los derechos humanos y derechos de las mujeres, he visto la creación de una justicia especializada. Hay poca más protección por las víctimas.

I have seen positive changes. Before, it was very difficult for the judges to give sentences for crimes. But thank God, [this] has changed significantly. With regard to the femicide, human rights, and women's rights laws, I have seen the creation of a specialized justice system. There is a little more protection for victims.

As these statements suggest, the 1996 Peace Accords and the 2008 Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women have resulted in legal penalization of violent crimes against women. However, as I further describe in Chapter Six, Indigenous women specifically still face significant challenges associated with service-seeking. This sense of optimism regarding the efficacy of the modern-day legal system was nonetheless shared by femicide judges in both Mazatenango and Chimaltenango, who articulated their strong feelings regarding there being increased justice for women, with respect to their local *costumbres* (customs), despite the very slow court process, the fact that women sometimes decide not to continue with the court process or do not show up to their court date, and very few cases actually see their day in court. When I brought up the long court process to the two Chimaltenango femicide judges towards the end of our interview, they were quick to state that the process is now "much quicker than before," thus being able to process cases quicker and make more of a societal impact with six months of investigation by the Ministerio Público and eight months of wait time.

However, academic literature pertaining to the femicide court process and interviews with survivors suggest that these specialized courts have done little to stop femicide and other forms of violence against Guatemalan women (Bay 2021). Due to state-imposed constraints, these courts do not effectively provide the full array of justices offered by the 2008 Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women Law, further illuminating how purely legal solutions are ineffective in reducing violence, responding to violence, and providing survivors of violence, and their families, with justice (Beck & Stephen 2021).

Racism and Discrimination in Institutions

As I discuss more fully in Chapter Six, fear of discrimination due to Indigenous dress, identity, and skin color emerged as a prominent reason behind why women felt insecure (*insegura*) or shy (*tímida*) about seeking formalized assistance in urban institutional settings. Racism against Indigenous populations is reflected in both modern-day disparities and daily interactions.

In both the Municipio Altiplano and the Aldea Bocacosta, there is a pronounced sense of social separation when speaking of the ladino population regarding economic security, social class, local customs (*costumbres*), education, trust (*confianza*), and culture. The ladino population in both field sites is generally associated with higher status and being “better off” financially. In close interactions with Indigenous friends and participants, I noticed an increased pressure to appear well-groomed, smell good with the help of perfumes, and bathe daily despite increasingly cold temperatures.

Mi mamá me dijo que me bañara todos los días y que me maquillara, porque si no, la gente hablaría. Es importante lucir limpio y bien vestido porque aquí en Guatemala hay mucha discriminación.

My mom told me to bathe every single day, and to wear makeup, because if not, people will talk. It's important to appear clean and well-dressed because there is a lot of discrimination here in Guatemala.

Traje, traditional clothing associated with Indigenous culture and identity, is worn with a great source of pride in some Indigenous regions. However, when it comes to institutionalized, organizational settings and other formal settings, *traje* serves as a physical marking of Indigenous identity and is heavily discriminated upon. Throughout my fieldwork, I witnessed Indigenous women occasionally reporting a sense of uncertainty or discomfort associated with leaving their towns and heading to unknown areas in *traje*. However, within rural communities with a strong continuation of Indigenous customs and culture, such as Municipio Altiplano, *traje* is viewed with pride, dignity, and more intricate, costly pieces are worn as status symbols.

In Aldea Bocacosta, however, modern-day relationships with *traje* vary considerably. This relationship pertains to a few different factors, including the significant cost of colorful, hand-woven, and hand-dyed tops (*huipiles*) and cloth skirts (*cortes*). Some of these pieces cost approximately \$100-200, depending on the detail involved in the work, and whether it is new, personalized, or secondhand. In Aldea Bocacosta, income levels, the very hot weather and growing disconnect from Indigenous culture and *costumbres* (customs) in pursuit of “modernity,” away from discrimination, have led to younger generations no longer wearing *traje* (full Indigenous dress) or wearing only an Indigenous “skirt” (*corte*). paired with a tank top or T-shirt (*ropa Americana*) on top.

There are also efforts for women to appear less “Indigenous” by wearing jeans, t-shirts, tank tops, and other forms of U.S. American clothing (*ropa Americana*). Some women aim to appear ladina by ensuring that their skin does not get tan, and by wearing “trendy” hair styles and clothing. This phenomenon of erasing Indigenous identity as a result of taking Indigenous Maya

land for state-building and other colonial practices is referred to by scholars as, “ladinoization” (Castro and Picq 2017). This phenomenon persists in Aldea Bocacosta, which historically functioned as a German coffee plantation, what locals refer to as a “*finca*” (farm) or “*comunitaria agrícola*” (agricultural community) “in the early-to-mid 1800s. Although there is a prominence of K’iche’ Maya ancestral heritage and language in this *aldea* and immediate areas, historically, the *aldea* is also comprised of descendants of Indigenous people from more distant regions who were recruited to work on the coffee plantation. During an interview with the town’s historian, I learned that these workers endured slavery-like conditions, making it difficult for the German plantation owners to recruit local individuals, thus leading them to outsource labor from other areas.

As mentioned, the renunciation of Indigenous identity and “traditional” appearance can serve as a point of contention within Indigenous communities. However, I also found that, in other settings, moving between these two styles serves as a form of empowerment. In contrast to Aldea Bocacosta, *traje* is worn with great pride in Municipio Altiplano, where Indigenous traditions, such as speaking Kaqchikel, and preparing *elote* (corn) for special celebrations, remain more pronounced, and are still passed on to younger generations. The production and selling of *traje* also provides economic opportunities to women weavers in Municipio Altiplano. In Aldea Bocacosta, however, these options are extremely limited.

For example, at Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano, the non-profit organization located in Municipio Altiplano, Indigenous women employees alternate between wearing traditional *traje* and jeans. While interviewing Gladis, I noticed that she was wearing jeans and a sweater, although I had grown accustomed to regularly seeing her in *traje*. When I asked her about the dress code at the organization, she went on to state,

Aquí nos sentimos empoderadas como mujeres indígenas. Eso significa que podemos sentirnos cómodas usando pantalones/jeans o corte. Porque sabemos que como nos vestimos no define nuestra identidad. Sabemos que, como mujeres, podemos vestir lo que nos apetezca ese día. Esta bien tener diferentes partes de nuestra identidad.

Here, we feel empowered as Indigenous women. That means that we can feel comfortable wearing either pants/jeans or corte. Because we know that our clothing does not define our identity. We know that, as women, we can wear what we feel like wearing that day. It's OK to have different parts of our identity.

However, in rural communities, this sense of “empowerment” regarding clothing can have consequences on how one and one's family is perceived, how one is treated, and one may face repercussions in the form of gossip because of clothing choices. One day, while walking around a prominent farming community and rural *aldea* located within the broader areas of Municipio Altiplano, in the mountains above the town, I met Delfi through my Kaqchikel instructor in the Municipio Altiplano, after I casually mentioned to him that I was looking for someone to help assist with transcriptions for this project.

About one week later, the instructor introduced me to Delfi, who shared that she would like to show me around her *aldea*, and invited me to lunch with her and her mother in the house that she grew up in. Delfi is from a small, remote Indigenous community “in the clouds” (*en las nubes*) as she put it. Delfi had been taking Kaqchikel classes from Don Rolando and had learned to write fluently in the language, a rare feat. In addition to being passionate about her Indigenous roots and culture, she had also gone to Guatemala City to further her studies. During our walk, Delfi touched on the complexities associated with Indigenous dress and identity.

Desde que me moví a la Ciudad [de Guatemala] para estudiar, ya no uso traje. Pero a las señoras de aquí no les gusta eso. No creo que les guste. Sé que hablan de mí porque me gusta maquillarme mucho y no vestirme como ellas. A veces todavía uso traje, pero descubrí que prefiero usar ropa americana porque me gusta el estilo. Me siento cómoda en ello. Y en la Ciudad, ellos discriminan contra el traje. Pero las mujeres aquí no están de acuerdo. Creen que yo soy mejor que ellas, pero eso no es cierto. A veces es difícil.

Ever since I moved to Guatemala City to study, I don't wear *traje* anymore. But the ladies here don't like that. I don't think they like me. I know that they talk about me because I like to wear a lot of makeup and don't dress like they do. Sometimes I still wear *traje*, but I've found that I prefer to wear *ropa Americana* because I like the style. I feel comfortable in it. And in the City, they discriminate against *traje*. But the women here, they don't agree. They think that I think I am better than they are, but that's not true. It's hard sometimes.

In Indigenous communities such as Delfi's and the entire highland (Altiplano) region, there is a strong sense of Indigenous pride and continuation of Indigenous culture and customs/traditions (*costumbres*). This includes dressing in brightly colored and intricately embroidered Indigenous dress (*traje*) indicative of the region of one's origin.

This is not true for the Bocacosta region, where younger generations (those younger than 45) tend to exclusively wear American clothing (*ropa Americana*) and follow fashion trends similar to those in the U.S., promoted on social media. Upon asking Jaki why she didn't wear Indigenous clothing like her mother did, she stated, "I don't like it. I prefer more modern clothes."

One morning while eating a breakfast consisting of cornflakes, pancakes, and coffee, our "host mother," Rita, in the Municipio Altiplano told me about how she has personally faced discrimination on the public bus (*camioneta*).

Cuando iba en el autobús en mi traje, varias personas no indígenas me miraban con los ojos en blanco. No querían sentarse a mi lado porque soy indígena. Piensan que somos tontos y sucios. Hay mucha discriminación contra los pueblos indígenas aquí en Guatemala. Es algo con lo que vivimos. Aquí, en el pueblo, todo suele estar bien, pero cuando salimos para ir a otras zonas, sobre todo a zonas más desarrolladas, nos discriminan. Espero que algún día esto cambie.

When I would go on the bus in my *traje*, several non-Indigenous people rolled their eyes at me. They didn't want to sit next to me because I am Indigenous. They think we are dumb and dirty. There is a lot of discrimination against Indigenous people here in Guatemala. It's something that we live with. Here, in the village, everything is usually fine, but when we leave to go to other areas, especially more developed areas, we are discriminated upon. I hope one day this will change.

Rita's concerns and lived experiences regarding discrimination for wearing *traje* were echoed by many women in Municipio Altiplano, illuminating the social repercussions associated with "appearing" Indigenous outside of one's hometown.

"El Estado es Machista"/ "The State is Sexist"

In addition to institutional instability and disenfranchisement, another prominent theme that emerged during this research regarding the Guatemalan state is that of the state itself being gendered as sexist (*machista*) and racist (*racista*). In addition to economic forms of corruption, the state also emerged as corrupt in terms of who it favors.

Jessy used the term "sexist" (*machista*) to characterize the patriarchal influence on state decision-making regarding women's health and lives.

El problema es que el estado es machista. Eso es el problema. ¿Cómo vamos a tener justicia por las mujeres cuando los en cargo no quieren el máximo por nosotras? ¿Cuándo no entienden los problemas que vivimos? Y las mujeres quienes están en posiciones de poder son muy conservativas. No tienen una perspectiva feminista. Son mujeres machistas.

The problem is that the state is sexist. That's the problem. How are we going to obtain justice for women when those in charge don't want the best for us? When they don't understand the problems that we live [with]? And the women who are in positions of power are very conservatives. They don't have a feminist perspective. They are sexist women.

"Sexist women" (*Mujeres machistas*) is an expression that I had not previously heard in prior visits to Guatemala. When I asked for clarification, Jessy stated that it refers to women who also have a perspective rooted in *machismo*, who also believe that men are superior to women and that women cannot do the same things as men.

During my interview with Pati, a fieldworker (*trabajadora de campo*) employed full-time at the Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano, she highlighted the distinct, gendered differences between girls and boys, men and women, in Guatemala. She

described how treatment based on gender starts at a very young age, even right when babies are born.

El problema es que, aquí en Guatemala, un hombre tiene más derecho, más terreno. Cuando una mujer se casa, no tiene derecho a la tierra. Cuando se comen, el hombre tiene derecho a más carne que la mujer. Si una mujer resulta embarazada, ella tiene que dejar a trabajar. Si un hombre quiere una cerveza, está bien, pero si una mujer toma una, la gente critica a ella demasiado. Por ejemplo, aquí en esta oficina, no hay mujeres haciendo decisiones. Los hombres manipulan. El machismo es un problema universal. Cuando un varoncito nace, celebran con pastel. Pero no siempre es el caso cuando nacen las nenas. El propio gobierno es machista.

The problem is, here in Guatemala, a man has more rights, more land. When a woman gets married here, she doesn't have rights to the land. When they eat, a man has the right to more meat than a woman. If a woman gets pregnant, she has to stop working. If a man wants a beer, it's OK but if a woman drinks one, the people [in the local community] criticizes her a lot. For example, here in this office, there are no women making decisions. The men manipulate. Machismo is a universal problem here in Guatemala. When a little boy is born, they celebrate with cake. But that's not always the case when girls are born. The government itself is *machista*.

During the interview process, several participants applied the gendered term, “*machista*,” typically used to describe entities that exhibited stereotypical qualities associated with being “*macho*.” While characterizing the Guatemalan state as “*machista*,” participants illuminated how this hegemonic ideology influenced decision-making from the highest governmental levels, all the way to influencing what a man vs. a woman eats at dinner.

During both formal and informal interviews, several participants also described the differences in educational opportunities between boys and girls in Guatemala. As Silvia put it,

Especialmente en las familias muy pobres, se nos dice que se supone que las niñas deben cocinar, limpiar, y cuidar a los niños. Eso es todo para lo que servimos. Si en una familia se puede elegir entre una niña y un niño, el niño puede ir a la escuela.

In very poor families especially, we are told that girls are supposed to cook, clean, and take care of the children. That is all that we serve for. If there is a choice between a girl and a boy in a family, the boy gets to go to school.

While interviewing Patricia, a young, energetic field worker (*técnica del campo*) at a community-based, non-profit organization located in the Municipio Altiplano, she shared her experiences gaining the trust from the (male) community elders/leaders before leading women's empowerment programs in rural villages (*aldeas*).

Algunos son abiertos, pero muchos son machistas y defensivos. Hay muchos desafíos. Normalmente hablo con ellos sobre la importancia de la igualdad. Les digo que, si hay mucha desigualdad de género, toda la comunidad puede sufrir. Luego les doy algo de espacio para reflexionar sobre eso. Intento no tener conflictos con ellos. Con el machismo, ahí es donde tenemos que trabajar. Creo que, si podemos empoderar a las mujeres, podemos cambiar las familias.

Some are open, but a lot of them are sexist and defensive. There are a lot of challenges. Usually, I talk with them about the importance of equality. I tell them that if there is a lot of gender inequality, the whole community can suffer. I then give them some space to reflect on that. I try not to have a conflict with them. With machismo—that's where we need to work. I believe that if we can empower women, we can change families.

Patricia's experience seeking permission from male community leaders to offer domestic violence education and information pertaining to women's legal rights exemplifies the deeply rooted, underlying sense of patriarchy governing communities and service provision. As Patricia mentioned, the "feminist" ideologies in which the women's workshops are based serve as a threat to the patriarchal ideology held tightly by male local leaders.

Like many of the frontline workers whom I met over the course of my research, Patricia's motivations for doing this kind of work are personal. Patricia went on to share her own mother's GPV-related experiences with her father, who was "very sexist" (*muy machista*). She stated that her own parents' experiences are what inspired her to pursue a career helping other GPV survivors in rural Guatemala. As a young girl, Patricia desperately wanted to help her mom, but couldn't. Now, in her current job, she stated that it is a dream-come-true (*sueño cumplido*) to offer information to other women in her community that her mother did not have access to. She went on to say that it is important to bring this assistance forward (*brindar este apoyo*) to all

women. “Many women blame themselves, but all of us women are valuable.” Like Patricia, many of the organizational leaders and frontline workers have personal reasons, related to their families, childhoods, or personal relationships, that have inspired them to work with GBV survivors in the social service field.

Institutional Disenfranchisement

I interviewed Rosa, the director of “Economic Organization for Women,” a small non-governmental organization on the outskirts of Aldea Bocacosta. We talked for about two hours in a small, very hot, one-room bamboo building. Just before we sat down to conduct the interview, she gave me a short tour of the grounds, which they rent from a local couple who own the land, whose house also lies on the property.

In contrast to the other two non-profit organizations where I conducted research, that had spacious offices with ample room for staff and sufficient spaces to maintain client confidentiality, “Economic Organization for Women” consisted of two small buildings and no fans despite the 96-degree Fahrenheit temperatures. “We live pretty simply here” (*Nosotras vivimos bastante simplemente aquí*), she laughed. She then went on to show me the bamboo-framed beds that the staff sleep on, with cardboard in lieu of mattresses. “It’s not very comfortable, but it serves its purpose. We are very passionate about the work that we do” (*No es muy cómoda, pero sirve. Nos apasiona mucho el trabajo que hacemos*). During our interview, Rosa and I discussed their organization’s funding sources.

Most funds are in the City, in the Capital. There, there is more economy, more education, more help. But those who need it most are the women in the more rural areas, the more remote areas. Here in the Bocacosta, there’s nothing. There aren’t any resources. We do what we can, but there isn’t much.

La mayoría de los fondos existen en la Ciudad, en la Capital. Alla, hay más economía, más educación, más ayuda. Pero las que necesitan más ayuda son las mujeres en las áreas más rurales, más retiradas. Aquí en la Bocacosta, no hay nada. No hay recursos. Hacemos lo que podemos, pero no hay mucho.

Rosa shared that the organization receives funding from the Spanish government, but that it is limited. “It’s hard” (*Cuesta*), she stated. When I asked if they ever apply for any other grants to secure funding, she responded by stating that she didn’t know that was possible, and that her staff doesn’t know how to apply for them or where to look.

Like the “Women’s Economic Organization,” the two governmental organizations specifically dedicated to GPV that were part of this project (not located in the capital) also significantly lacked resources such as flushing toilets. The organization also lacked a comprehensive entry system for client data, requiring the workers to store copious amounts of client files in various (unlocked) locations throughout the office building. Financial insecurity of organizations and the inability to hire sufficient staff for their client-staff ratio further demonstrate the pattern of institutional disenfranchisement among GPV organizations in Guatemala.

In contrast to the domestic violence organizations that I had worked at in the U.S., despite hearing that there was a lot of violence (*mucha violencia*) in this city, there was no camera nor security system at the organization, except for the black, iron door. I had previously visited the National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango several times to introduce myself to the staff, to introduce myself and share the Spanish verbal consent form for the research study and to seek permission from Belinda, the director, to complete interviews and participant observation at the organization.

I interviewed Belinda, a pretty, Indigenous woman in her mid-thirties in her office on the second floor. In my time knowing her, she always dressed in great care, in intricate, colorful

traditional dress (*traje*) representing her village, complete with matching jewelry, makeup, and a sleek hair style. At the time of our interview, Belinda had worked as Executive Director for five years, although she had worked for the organization for eight years in total. In my interview with Belinda, she did not hold back and elaborated freely in her responses. I was slightly taken aback by her honesty.

Aquí en nuestra organización, en los últimos diez meses (desde enero), hemos atendido a 840 clientes. Pero sólo tenemos seis empleados. Contamos con un trabajador social, un psicólogo, un director, un abogado, un estadístico y un recepcionista. Necesitamos más empleados, pero los responsables no nos escuchan. Queremos tener más capacidad institucional, pero las del nivel nacional no nos dejan crecer. Es una violencia estructural que nos afecta a todos los niveles y eso depende del gobierno interno. Comienza en el Congreso de la República, pasa al nivel departamental y luego a las instituciones a nivel comunitario. Ahí es donde experimentamos una importante falta de financiación. Tenemos leyes con las que estamos trabajando, leyes nacionales e internacionales. Pero no nos reunimos periódicamente con miembros de otras organizaciones.

Here in our organization, in the past ten months (since January), we have served 840 clients. But we only have six employees. We have one social worker, one psychologist, one director, one lawyer, one stats person, and a front desk person. We need more employees, but those in charge won't listen. We want to have more institutional capacity, but those at the national level won't let us grow. It's structural violence that affects us at all levels, and this depends on the internal government. It starts at the Republic of Congress, goes to the departmental level, and then to the community-level institutions. That is where we experience a significant lack of funding. We have several laws that we are working with, national and international laws. But we don't meet regularly with members of other organizations.

As Belinda articulated, their organization faces several staffing, funding, and collaboration challenges. These challenges are directly related to the institution's bureaucracy and funding sources, limiting decision-making power to effectively and appropriately serve clients and enhance their organization's capacity.

Cari, a social worker (*trabajadora social*) in her mid-thirties born and raised in the Municipio Altiplano, who became a close friend, discussed the difficulties associated with juggling her rigorous work schedule and being there for her daughter and family.

Trabajo seis días a la semana. Es mucho. No tengo mucho tiempo pasar con mi hija ni mi familia.

I work six days a week. It's a lot. I don't have a lot of time to spend with my daughter nor my family.

Cari leaves her home at 6 AM each morning and is on the bus for one-to-three hours before arriving at her destination. Because she is a fieldworker (*trabajadora del campo*), she works in various towns throughout the week, offering domestic violence education to women in rural areas. She does not return home from work until approximately 8:30 or 9 PM every night, making it nearly impossible for her to be there for her daughter, who is fourteen years of age. To cope with the stressors associated with her job, Cari keeps her refrigerator stocked with various types of alcohol, including artisanal wine (*vino artesanal*), beer (*cerveza*), and Quetzalteca, a distilled alcoholic beverage native to Guatemala. "It helps clear the mind." She went on to say,

Es difícil porque tengo que trabajar para mantener a mi familia. Pero no los veo mucho porque siempre estoy trabajando. Pero necesito hacerlo para apoyar a mi hija para que pueda tener una educación y para ayudar a mi mamá a pagar las deudas.

It's difficult because I need to work to support my family. But I don't get to see them that much because I am always working. But I need to do it to support my daughter so that she can have an education and to help my mom pay the debts.

The aforementioned experiences demonstrate the complexities associated with working in the social service field in Guatemala. Like GBV frontline workers, the police are also drastically underfunded, further representing the underlying infrastructural challenges associated with service provision and public safety.

Conversations with the Police: An Extension of the State

After hearing mixed, yet negative, opinions regarding the police in both the Municipio Altiplano and the Aldea Bocacosta, I wanted to hear what it is like responding to GBV incidents from their perspective. One day, after conducting fieldwork at the local women's office in the Municipio associated with the Aldea Bocacosta, I headed to the local police office. Upon

entering the open door, I asked if I could speak with the *jefe* (chief). A couple minutes later, a petite, Indigenous man entered, with a stern, yet polite demeanor. I explained why I was there, showed him the study consent form, and asked if I could conduct an interview with him in the future. “No problem,” he stated. “I can do the interview now.” I thanked him and explained that I had been living in Aldea Bocacosta. “I live there, too,” he stated. “I’ve seen you around with your fiancé.” We then went on to talk about the beauty of his town, the weather, and the reason I was there in Guatemala. Once I had felt as though we had built sufficient rapport, I asked Pablo about the police’s response time when people call them. “It takes us a long time to come sometimes because we only have one truck,” he said, motioning to the black pick-up truck with yellow labels located just outside the closet window.

He went on to state,

Solo tenemos un pickup y nuestra oficina cubre ocho aldeas. Por lo tanto, si algo sucede en una aldea, debemos esperar hasta que eso termine para poder conducir hasta el siguiente incidente. Y a veces necesitamos gasolina. A veces no podemos pagar la gasolina y tenemos que pagarla con nuestro propio dinero.

We only have one truck, and our office covers eight aldeas. So, if something happens in one aldea, we must wait until that is over until we can drive to the next incident. And sometimes we need to get gas. Sometimes we can’t afford the gas and have to pay for it with our own money.

When I asked why he thinks that his police station is so underfunded, he responded by stating,

Es un problema de la Policía Nacional en su conjunto. Es por corrupción. Gran parte del dinero que está en la Capital no nos llega aquí en las zonas rurales. Tenemos que pagar muchos de nuestros propios gastos. Pagamos nuestra propia gasolina.

It’s a problem with the National Police force. It’s because of corruption. A lot of the money that is in the Capital doesn’t get to us here in the rural areas. We must pay a lot of our own expenses. We pay for our own gas.

When I asked if he thinks it is common for people to call when there is a violent incident, he stated, “Yes, it’s more common than it was in the past. However, they don’t always believe in us.” Pablo explained the difficulties associated with officers responding to GBV incidents,

stating that sometimes, a woman will call them for help, but upon arrival, they will change their mind and say that they don't need their help after all and don't want to press charges. Situations such as these, he stated, are confusing for him and other police officers. "How do we provide help if people don't want help?" he questioned. I then asked Pablo if he ever thought about the possibility that perhaps the woman might just be saying that she's fine because her male partner was right there, and maybe she was afraid? He responded, "That may be true, but it's very confusing for us because they sometimes say one thing and do another."

It was evident that Pablo was not properly trained in the dynamics related to coercive control in abusive relationships. Pablo also proudly told me about his station's participation in trainings (*capacitaciones*) in collaboration with Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta, and their local police office's efforts to do what they could to effectively respond to GBV cases within their municipality. This police station seemed to do their best to respond to GBV situations in the neighboring *aldeas*, the rural nature of the area combined with a lack of infrastructure and economic resources still prevented timely responses on their part, causing locals to lose even more trust in the police. As I mentioned in the section on corruption, police officers also engage in corruption because they are underfunded and underpaid. Nevertheless, this conversation further confirmed the underlying constraints experienced by the police as an extension of the state.

Frontline Workers' Experiences

While discussing the possibility of conducting a dissertation research project that focuses specifically on the intricacies of governmental and non-governmental organizations offering services to GBV survivors in Guatemala, I heard the following statement time and time again. "Well, the governmental organizations don't do much, they don't help much." However, despite

this common reaction, I remained curious about the lives and spirits of those who work tirelessly to help prevent and reduce gender-based violence in Guatemala. I was particularly interested in what their motivations were for the difficult work that they do, and what their daily lives are like working under-funded agencies with little support.

Frontline workers work long, hard days. In both National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango and National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango, workers stated that on some days they had enough time to eat lunch, while on other days they did not. For workers without vehicles of their own, their daily routine also requires utilizing overcrowded public transportation, making the workday seem even more prolonged. One day, while interviewing Mabi, a lawyer and disability advocate working as a data manager in National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango, we discussed her future working at the organization, where she had worked for the past year. Mabi was somewhat of a celebrity in Chimaltenango, having appeared on several news platforms for her advocacy work with children, speaking passionately about intersectionality and the importance of self-acceptance and strength when faced with adversity. Despite Mabi's passion for her current work at National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango, her time there is soon coming to an end.

Solo estoy aquí con un contrato a corto plazo. Solo estaré aquí hasta enero. No quiero irme, pero así es como es aquí a veces en las organizaciones. Trabajamos con contratos cortos, a veces solo unos meses, y luego tenemos que irnos y buscar otro trabajo. Y a veces, eso lleva mucho tiempo. Es difícil.

I am only here with a short-term contract. I will only be here until January. I don't want to leave, but it's how it is here sometimes in the organizations. We work short contracts, sometimes only a few months, and then we must leave and find another job. And sometimes, that takes a long time. It's hard.

Mabi's frustrations regarding her short-term contract were also shared by several other governmental employees that I spoke with throughout my fieldwork. Interviews revealed the

challenges experienced by both individuals and organizations regarding finding long-term, sustainable employment. When examining the system, this constant change in employees can take its toll on the system, requiring limited resources to be redirected towards training and replacing employees as opposed to program strengthening and expansion. This quick turn-around also affects client relationships and *confianza* in the organization, requiring survivors to re-tell their story (which may be traumatic), and trust someone new with their caseload.

When discussing the funding sources of their organization, Mabi also explained during our unlike non-profit organizations, one of the drawbacks of working at a governmental organization is that their hands are essentially tied from being able to secure additional funding or create new programs to better serve their clients (*usarias*).

Regarding the theme of formal employment for those with specialized degrees, several participants stated that, in Guatemala, such degrees and formal qualifications pale in comparison to personal relationships with someone who works at the hiring organization. Siomara, a 33-year-old woman living in the Municipio Altiplano, has several degrees and previous experience working both as a police officer investigating gang activity and as a social worker in the Municipio Altiplano's municipal governmental office. However, she nonetheless had trouble securing employment. She currently works as a stay-at-home mom while her husband travels over two-and-a-half hours to Guatemala City for his governmental position.

El problema aquí en Guatemala es que una tiene que conocer a alguien para ser seleccionado por el trabajo. Debe tener un amigo quien trabaja en la organización. Hay mucha corrupción en Guatemala. No les importan sus calificaciones. Tiene que conocer a algún directamente para tener el trabajo.

The problem here in Guatemala is that a person needs to know someone in order to be selected for a job. You must have a friend who works at the organization. There is a lot of corruption here in Guatemala. Your qualifications aren't enough. You have to know someone directly to get a job.

This sense of institutional disenfranchisement was not limited to governmental organizations, however. While Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano, a non-profit organization located in Municipio Altiplano, received funding from numerous sources through donations and external grants, Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta, located in a town adjacent to the Aldea Bocacosta, operated on very limited funding.

“Pero Está Cambiando. No Somos Tan Ignorantes Como Antes”/ “But It’s Changing. We’re not as Ignorant as Before:” Signs of Change?”

The notion of change over Guatemala’s social landscape regarding violence against women and women’s rights emerged as a salient conversational topic. Throughout my fieldwork, the dichotomization between “then” and “now” emerged as a central theme. Women and men alike would often speak of the past regarding “*ignorancia*” or ignorance, and then state why things are now different from how they used to be.

I interviewed Francisca in her immaculately clean, beautifully decorated home in the Municipio Altiplano. “I didn’t always live like this,” she stated. “I have suffered a lot with my ex-husband. Teary-eyed throughout the interview, Francisca shared her story with me.

Cuando era más joven, solía trabajar en el campo. Mis padres no tenían dinero, así que tuve que trabajar. Pensé que iba a tener una buena vida con mi exmarido, pero no fue así. Tuvimos cinco hijos, y luego mi esposo murió. Es una lucha. Sigo avanzando. No quería tener más hijos, pero lo hice debido a la violación. En ese entonces, las mujeres no teníamos forma de defendernos. Antes no había nadie que ayudara, nadie hablaba de derechos. No había programas y trataban a niños y niñas de manera muy diferente. No había autoridades. También era policía, así que fue difícil. En la calle era muy amable, pero en casa era muy diferente. Muy agresivo.

When I was younger, I used to work in the fields. My parents had no money, so I had to work. I thought I was going to have a good life with my ex-husband, but I didn’t. We had five children, and then my husband died. It’s a struggle. I keep moving forward. I didn’t want to have more kids, but I did due to the violation. Back then, us women didn’t have a way to defend ourselves. Before, there was no one to help, no one talked about rights. There were no programs and they treated boys and girls very differently. There were no authorities. He also was a police officer, so it was difficult. On the street, he was very friendly but at home, he was very different. Very aggressive.

Francisca went on to explain her opinion regarding separation from an abusive partner,

Es bueno separarse. Y no vivir con la violencia. Antes, no había apoyo. Pero ahora, hay. ¿Por qué aguante?

It's good to separate. And not live with violence. Before, there was no support. But now, there is. So why endure?

Francisca never had access to the formalized services and support (*apoyo*) that resulted from the 1996 Peace Accords and 2008 Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women. Women ages 40 and up oftentimes brought up the fact that, in their day, women had no choice but to endure (*aguantar*). However, my conversation with Lesli, a 36-year-old mother of two young children in the Aldea *Bocacosta*, showed that this strong separation between “then” and “now” is not entirely clear-cut.

A veces, las mujeres no tienen el valor denunciar. No tienen al valor defenderlas contra un hombre. ¿Qué van a hacer sin trabajo? ¿Sin educación? A veces las mujeres no tienen valor también porque tienen miedo de lo que van a hacer a sostener a los hijos.

Sometimes, women don't have the value to file a formal, legal complaint. They don't have the value to defend themselves against a man. What are they going to do without work? Without education? Sometimes women don't have value because they are afraid of how they are going to economically support their children.

The expression, “to have worth; to be worthy” (*tener valor*) was also used to express one's relationship with themselves and is closely tied to the notion empowerment (*empoderamiento*). The theme, “to endure” (*aguantar*) also emerged as a central discussion topic in terms of “how things used to be,” connoting that women did not have a choice except to endure the violence that they faced by their partners.

When discussing the efficacy of Guatemala's laws designed to improve the conditions for women, the Juzgado of the Municipio Altiplano confidently stated, “Now, finally, something has arrived to improve the lives of women. Now, men have more “fear (*temor*) and respect (*respeto*). Here, in my office, women tolerate a lot, but they also look for help. They don't endure

(*aguantar*) as much as in the past. Little by little, it's changing." There are more efforts for women's rights, like in the governmental organizations. Even in the rural areas, women have their rights explained to them. Also, now, the police can know when a violent situation is occurring. Before, there was more "*ignorancia*" (ignorance).

This notion of "*aguantar*" (to endure) versus seeking support represents a dichotomous relationship between enduring and fulfilling societal expectations and norms of utilizing the services that are omnipresent. "*Ignorancia*," (ignorance) was used by several participants as a means to express people's access to and the existence of educational information. In this context, "*ignorancia*" (ignorance) was associated with the past, with the way that things used to be.

Those in the past were also characterized as being *ignorantes* (ignorant) in contrast to women in today's world who know their rights and are therefore informed by neoliberal efforts to educate women on their rights and potential options. As the *juzgada* (judge) stated, nowadays, the majority of people know the laws, especially with *teléfonos inteligentes* (smart phones) and *redes sociales* (social media).

This notion of having access to more information about laws and legal rights was not favored by all participants, however. During my semi-structured interview with Pepe, a male lawyer operating a successful private practice focusing on family law in the Municipio Altiplano, he angrily expressed his opinions regarding how he perceives women's access to increased information regarding women's legal rights.

La ley de femicidio está en el favor de la mujer. Muchas mujeres abusan mucho esta ley. Las mujeres utilizan las leyes como un mecanismo a dominar a los hombres. Ellas También inventen lo que viven y las mujeres creen que es como un juego.

The femicide law is in favor of women. Many women abuse this law a lot. Women use laws as a mechanism to dominate men. They also invent what they live through, and women believe it is like a game.

This was not the only time in my fieldwork where I had heard that women use this law as a means of domination over men. One day, while purchasing office supplies for an activity that I was assisting with for one of the governmental organizations, the owner, also one of our neighbors, asked me what the materials were for, and why I was in the Aldea Bocacosta. “They are for an activity that we are doing,” I stated. I then went on to vaguely describe the type of research that I was conducting, stating something along the lines of me studying women’s rights. “Ah, the rights,” the neighbor stated, his demeanor rapidly changing from calm and collected, to rather intense. “Women use them to dominate men,” he stated. However, not all male participants’ responses were negative. Other men I encountered during informal conversations in both communities stated that the laws offer protection for women, and that it is good that they exist now because they never did before.

While interviewing Rosa, a thirty-three-year-old Indigenous police officer in the municipalidad associated with the Aldea Bocacosta, I asked her what it was like to be a woman police officer in rural Guatemala.

Mis padres no querían que fuera policía. Dijeron que era peligroso trabajar con tantos hombres, realizar este trabajo. Pero disfruto lo que hago porque las mujeres tienen más confianza en mí porque soy mujer. Siento que puedo ofrecer un apoyo que otros no pueden porque soy una mujer en este trabajo.

My parents didn’t want me to become a police officer. They said that it was dangerous to be working with so many men, to be working this job. But I enjoy what I do because women have more *confianza* (trust) in me because I am a woman. I feel like I can offer support that others can’t because I am a woman in this job.

In recent years, there has been a significant shift towards gender equality regarding women working in positions that were historically occupied by men. Driving through both the Municipio Altiplano and the municipality that governs the Aldea Bocacosta, I have spotted several women police officers directing traffic. Dressed in black uniforms identical to their male counterparts, this serves as a very public expression of increasingly changing gender norms in

even the most rural areas of Guatemala. Additionally, in both the National Police stations that I visited in the Municipio Altiplano and the Aldea Bocacosta, there have been at least three women police officers in both stations.

While there may be some changes regarding gender equality and hiring practices in recent years, gendered norms associated with specific occupations still prevail, even in the Municipio Altiplano, where there are less rigid gender norms associated with working outside of the home. One day while eating our 2 PM lunch consisting of *caldo de res* (beef soup) and *papas fritas* (French fries), I noticed a nervous look on Selvi's face, the 16-year-old "host sister" with whom we were staying. I asked her what was wrong. "I am nervous," she stated. She then went on to tell me about how she wants to apply for a mechanical engineering program, but her parents are worried about it because she is a girl.

Yo sé que ella se puede. Ella es muy pilas. Pero estoy preocupada de como los profesores y sus compañeros van a tratarla en el programa si no hay otras mujeres.

I know she can do it. She is very *pilas* (Guatemalan slang for smart/capable.) But I worry about how the professors and her classmates are going to treat her in the program if there are no other women.

This anecdote demonstrates the complexities of a woman working in spaces historically occupied and designated for men. Despite the enactment of laws aimed to prevent gender discrimination, receiving good grades in school, and a genuine passion for mechanical engineering, Selvi and her mother nonetheless felt conflicted in her pursuit of a career where she would be outnumbered by men.

As I also found during my MA thesis research (Carr 2016), for some women in Guatemala, earning a higher income than one's husband or domestic partner can also serve as a risk factor for GBV. Francisca, who worked as an elementary school teacher in her town, openly

shared her experiences with her husband, a day laborer, who was very jealous of her formal employment. She stated,

Él estaba inseguro, muy inseguro de que yo tenía un buen trabajo y él no. Gracias a Dios pude ir a la universidad y convertirme en maestra. Pero él no pudo ir porque su familia era muy pobre. Pero a veces desearía no ser profesor porque él está muy celoso y enojado conmigo por ganar más dinero que él. Tiene avergüenza.

He was insecure, very insecure that I had a good job and he didn't. Thank God, I was able to go to college and become a teacher. But he wasn't able to go because his family was very poor. But sometimes I wish I wasn't a teacher because he is so jealous, so mad at me for making more money than he does. He is embarrassed.

Francisca's story demonstrates the complexities and stigma associated with women earning a good income in Guatemala, especially earning more income than their male partners, and how there may be serious and potentially dangerous consequences associated with women earning more income than them.

Like Francisca, Silvia lamented that it has been challenging for her to date men because of her economic stability and social positioning. Silvia, whose story and perspective I share in greater depth in Chapter Five, inherited her mother's lucrative embroidering company after her mother passed away and currently earns a reasonable income. One day, as we chatted while enjoying *café y pan* (coffee and bread) in the kitchen of the home that my fiancé and I rented, she went on to explain,

Cati, es difícil porque aquí la mayoría de los hombres son muy machistas. Muchos hombres no quieren estar con una mujer que tiene un buen trabajo y que gana su propio dinero. Muchos hombres están celosos de eso. Es difícil porque me gustaría tener un marido y una familia, pero creo que estoy bien sola. A veces pienso en ir a Estados Unidos a trabajar. Mi cantante favorita es de allí. Lana del Rey. ¿La conoce? ¡Ah! Su música es tan hermosa.

Cati, it's difficult because most of the men here are very *machistas*. Many men don't want to be with a woman who has a good job, who makes their own money. A lot of men are jealous of that. It's difficult because I would like a husband and family, but I think I am alright alone. Sometimes I think about going to the United States for work. My favorite singer is from there. Lana del Rey. Do you know her? Ah! Her music is so beautiful.

Silvia's struggles with shared by Rubi in the Municipio Altiplano, whose ex-husband was jealous of her traveling regularly for her work as a health promoter (*promotora de salud*) for a national governmental program.

Cada vez que regresaba de un viaje, me preguntaba qué hacía, con quién hablaba, si había hablado con algún hombre. Me fui de viaje por trabajo. Como profesional. Pero él estaba enojado porque quería una esposa que trabajara en la casa y limpiara todo el día, y yo viajo y trabajo como profesional. No le gustó que tuviera un título. Me cansé de soportarlo. Entonces lo dejé y viví con mi mamá. Ahora trabajo muchas jornadas y no tengo que reportarle a nadie. Puedo concentrarme en mí y en mi hija. Dejé de visitar a nuestra hija. Ella no lo había visto en años. Es difícil. Pero seguimos avanzando, poco a poco.

Whenever I would return from a trip, he would question what I did, who I spoke to, if I spoke to any men. I went on the trip for work. As a professional. But he was angry because he wanted a wife to work in the house and clean all day, and I travel and work as a professional. He didn't like that I have a degree. I got tired of enduring it. So, I left him and lived with my mom. Now, I work long days and don't have to report to anyone. I can focus on me and my daughter. He stopped visiting our daughter. She hadn't seen him in years. It's hard. But we keep moving forward, little by little.

As Silvia's story suggests, having a successful position that requires regularly being outside of the home put a strain on she and her ex-husband's relationship, because he felt that a woman should work at home conducting domestic duties and caring for children. To be a partner/ wife suggests fulfilling the societal need for submission to their partner and fulfilling societal gender roles such as staying home and caring for children, maintaining an "innocent, virginal" presence. Further, this illuminates the complex choices that many women in Guatemala have to make with regard to fulfilling their legal rights to work and obtain an education, while simultaneously living in a culture and society with a prevailing machismo ideology.

Conclusion

In Guatemala, a synergetic combination of structural, historical, and political factors works to affect the daily lives of GBV survivors. In Chapter Five, I draw from local women's lived experiences in both the Municipio Altiplano and Aldea Bocacosta to further illuminate

these distinct differences between “rural” and “urban.” In Chapter Six, I elaborate on women’s experiences seeking services in rural versus urban settings.

CHAPTER FIVE:
**INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S LIVES IN GUATEMALA: ECONOMIC
INDEPEDENDENCE AND MOVING ON FROM VIOLENCE IN LOCAL CONTEXTS**

As stated in the previous chapter, a multitude of power structures and sociopolitical factors incessantly act on Indigenous Guatemalan women’s lives, leading to precarity, disenfranchisement, and, oftentimes, fighting (*luchando*) to provide for themselves and their children. For women in local communities, GBV is something to move forward from, both economically and socially. As found through this project, women prominently focus on how to financially support themselves and their children as they move forward. In this chapter, I shift my ethnographic lens to highlight how women in local communities navigate economic sustainability and gossip after experiencing GBV, the negotiations that they make in daily life, and how God provides a keen sense of companionship and hope amid life’s uncertainties.

My goal here is to illuminate how community-based resiliency and healing play out for GBV survivors in local communities, removed from organizational bureaucracy and ideology. Additionally, I draw from ethnographic data to describe survivorship and some of the barriers women encounter at home and in their local communities as they move forward from GBV. This chapter pertains to Research Question #1: What are Indigenous Maya women and men’s perspectives on gender equality, trauma, and healing regarding GBV?

Resiliency, Economic Sustainability After Violence, and Survivors Supporting Other Women

Upon entering Doña Brenda's one-room, yet impeccably clean home, a small, wooden, historical structure on the edge of the Aldea Bocacosta, I greeted her with a kiss on the cheek and a hug. She offered me a Coca Cola in a bottle, which I gladly accepted given the searing temperatures outside. I sat down on her forest green sofa and noticed numerous family photos and decorations (*adornos*) on the painted wooden walls. As we made small talk, Doña Brenda got up, excitedly, and said that she thinks that we had met before, in 2015. She then proceeded to walk across the room and grab a picture from the wall. I told her that I didn't think so, but that it is quite possible that we had previously run into each other in town.

The picture was, coincidentally, of my friend Anna, who ran a successful non-profit organization in Guatemala, and who had previously lived in Aldea Bocacosta with her ex-husband and their children. "No, that's another *gringa*. That's my friend," I stated. We both laughed. Doña Brenda laughed as well and said that now she remembered Anna from years ago and asked how she was doing. We carried on with our conversation while eating *pan dulce* (sweet bread), from a basket adorned with a colorful cloth napkin.

While we conversed, I noticed a sizeable collection of brightly colored plastic balls in the corner. "What are those for? Your grandchildren?" I asked.

No, los vendo en el Bosque. En la piscina. Me encanta vender. Me encanta ganar dinero. Mi negocio es mi marido porque me da pisto. Todos los días voy allí desde la mañana hasta la noche y vendo. Vendo a familias cuyos niños están nadando en la piscina. Antes de ir, llamo al jefe para ver si hay gente allí. Si hay gente allí, voy. Soy una luchadora. Gano dinero como puedo. Lucho por mi dinero. A algunas mujeres no les gusta ganar dinero. No quieren salir de sus casas. Pero a mí me encanta ganar dinero.

No, I sell them at the park. At the pool. I love to sell. I love to make money. My business is my husband because it gives me money. Every day, I go there from the morning to the evening and sell. I sell to families whose kids are swimming in the swimming pool. Before I go, I call the boss to see if any people are there. If people are there, I go. I am a fighter. I make money however I can. I fight for my money. Some women, they don't like to make money. They don't want to leave their houses. But I love to make money.

During our conversation, which lasted about two hours, Doña Brenda, aged 56, talked about how, through starting and maintaining her own business, she gained financial freedom as a single woman.

Hago lo que tengo que hacer. Algunas mujeres no quieren trabajar. No entiendo eso. Me encanta trabajar. Porque sé que si trabajo y gano mi propio dinero, nunca tendré que depender de un hombre. Yo también puedo ayudar a mis hijos.

I do what I have to do. Some women, they don't want to work. I don't understand that. I love to work. Because I know if I work and earn my own money, I'll never have to rely on a man. I can help my children, too.

Doña Brenda's reclaiming of economic independence demonstrates how moving on after violence requires resiliency, creativity, persistence, and hard work. Additionally, Doña Brenda's current drive to earn an independent income is derived from her previous life experiences, where she fulfilled more traditional gender roles and depended on her male counterpart for an allocated amount of his income. It is also clear that, because economic opportunities are limited in Aldea Bocacosta, especially for women, Doña Brenda's work fills a specific niche in the community and requires long days of work to sell a few items, in contrast to more formalized positions that pay a guaranteed hourly wage. In both Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano, formalized positions are rare, thus requiring people to work for most of the day (and on weekends) doing all that they can to sell from *locales* (rented commercial retail spaces), housefront *tiendas* (stores), or in, this case, at the local pool.

Like Doña Brenda, our host mother, Doña Estrella, also works tirelessly as a single woman in her mid-fifties to earn an income for herself and her two grandchildren who reside

with her and she helps support. Our host family in the Municipio Altiplano would often joke that I was sleeping in very late (*muy tarde*) if I woke up anytime past 8:00 AM. Typically, I would wake up around 7:30 AM from the sounds of nearby roosters in the fields, but on the occasion that I would truly sleep in, I would usually be greeted with laughter and questions about what time I woke up.

One morning after taking a bucket bath, I stepped out of our house around 10:45 AM, what I thought of as still early, and Doña Estrella was just returning from the dirt road lined with *milpa* (cornstalks), where the *tuk tuk* had let her off. “I can help you with that,” I stated, as I took a few steps toward her to grab the mountain of colorful baskets, cooking pots, and decorations (*adornos*) that she was carrying on her head. “Thank you very much [*Matiox* in Kaqckikel], very kind,” she smiled as I helped her carry the items to the small gate protecting her home, I commented on how beautiful the items were, and asked her where she had bought them. I imagined she had purchased them to sell at her store, something that she does every week or so. “In the City,” she stated, laughing. “Guatemala City? You already went to the City and back?!” I exclaimed, amazed by her efforts. Depending on the city’s “zone,” this trip typically took at least two hours by taxi. In a *camioneta*, which Doña Estrella had taken, the journey was much longer.

Me desperté a las 1:30 AM. Tuve que ir a buscar algunas cosas para vender en la tienda. No podía permitirme comprar mucho, pero compré alrededor de Q300 en producto (aproximadamente \$45) para vender en mi tienda. Primero Dios.

I woke up at 1:30 AM. I had to go get some things to sell at the store. I couldn’t afford to buy a lot, but I bought about Q300 worth of product (equivalent to approximately \$45) to sell at my store. God first.

I would visit Doña Estrella’s store whenever I was in the center of town (*el centro*). Upon visiting, she would offer me a Coca Cola in a bottle, a bottled water (*agua pura*), or coffee with milk (*café con leche*), and usually some crackers or French bread (*galletas* or *pan Francés*) if she wasn’t preparing a full meal. “Come in” (*pase adelante*), she stated with a big smile, and then

would proceed to ask me about my day, what I was up to, and what my plans were for the rest of the day. The store had been in her family since the early '80s, originally functioning as a bakery (*panadería*). It is conveniently located near the market and commercial center of the town.

My fiancé (*prometido*) and I would chit chat/hang out (*platicar*) in her store often, especially in the evenings after a long day of participant observation and data collection. These nightly outings provided an opportunity to watch the local festivities, which consisted of a long line of street food stands (*comedores*) selling everything from *churros* to a grilled selection of meats (*churrasco*), a hot drink made of corn (*atoll*), to deep-fried chicken. Doña Estrella also works tirelessly at her store seven days a week. If she cannot be there herself, she relies on her thirteen-year-old granddaughter or another family member to fill in for her. Her granddaughters meet her at her store after school, where they work on their homework in the small back room, where Doña Estrella also prepares them dinner. Typically, they all stay at the store until approximately 10 PM, when she drives home, up the hill, in her SUV.

One day, she told me about how she struggled to provide for her children immediately following separation from her ex-husband.

Fue muy, muy difícil. Había días que solo comía tortillas y sal, pero siempre me aseguraba de que comieran más. Sacrifiqué mucho por ellos, pero ¿qué se puede hacer? Gracias a Dios ahora estamos bien, pero en aquel entonces luché mucho.

It was very, very difficult. There were days when I only ate tortillas and salt, but I always made sure that they ate more. I sacrificed a lot for them, but what can one do? Thank God, we are okay now, but back then, I struggled a lot.

Doña Estrella went on to tell me about how she would travel from the Municipio Altiplano to Guatemala City daily to sell coffee and breakfast to commuters. I would leave my house at 2 AM every day to go sell in the City. I didn't always sell a lot, but I had to earn money for my family, especially after separating from "the enemy, my ex" (*el enemigo, mi ex*).

In the time that I had gotten to know Doña Estrella, I had witnessed her provide support to other women in the community by speaking with them one-on-one during times of difficulty and offering them work. She hired women to clean her home and occasionally do the laundry when she was too busy with her store.

No hay tiempo para limpiar. Tengo que trabajar en la tienda. Me gusta ofrecerles trabajo cuando puedo. No tienen mucho, necesitan trabajo. Pobres cositas. Sé cómo se sienten porque yo también tuve problemas como ellas.

There's no time to clean. I have to work in the store. I like to offer them work when I can. They don't have a lot, they need work. Poor little things. I know what they feel like, because I had problems like they did, too.

When I would visit Doña Estrella's store, I would commonly see her sitting in the front with local people in the community, sometimes single women with children, other times couples. It was evident that Doña Estrella continues to serve as a community leader, offering wisdom and advice to those who come to her. Because private matters are typically kept within the family, it is evident that she is someone that people in the community deeply trust.

For many residents of Municipio Altiplano, Guatemala City, the Capital of Guatemala, offered formal employment and other economic opportunities not available in town. Many of the people I met in the Municipio Altiplano, male and female, had worked in "The City" (*La Ciudad*) at some point in their lives. For most, this required a temporary or long-term move to the City. Like Doña Estrella, some people make the long commute to-and-from the City on a daily basis to sell products or work other jobs. In doing so, sleep and leisurely activities, such as spending time with family, were often sacrificed.

Despite not being able to read herself, Doña Estrella went on to raise highly educated and successful children. Her daughter, Claudia, works as a social worker and is well-known and highly regarded in the community. She was elected Indigenous Queen (*Reina Indígena*) when she was fourteen. Receiving this title and honor was no easy feat, for she had to demonstrate

extensive knowledge of Indigenous Maya Kaqchikel ideology, culture, cosmovision, and speak fluently and effortlessly in the Kaqchikel language in front of an audience. The portrait of her as Indigenous Queen is proudly displayed in the family's small living room, above an ancestral altar. "I won a trip to Tikal!" she told me one day during our interview. I was the only one on the plane (*avión*) because I only won one ticket, but my family met me there in car," she laughed.

Doña Estrella's son, a governmental worker, frequently travels to the United States to attend trainings. Her youngest child recently migrated to the United States after the death of her child's father. Due to the dangers associated with taking a young child (especially a young girl) on the journey (*en el camino*) across the border, her daughter had to leave her now-oldest child behind. Doña Estrella is now raising both her teenage granddaughter and her ten-year-old granddaughter, who commonly help her out at the store. Her daughter works long hours as a social worker and is only home at night after 9 PM and on Sundays. Doña Estrella's incessant efforts to provide for her family have not gone unnoticed, both within the family and in the local community.

Following what I discuss in Chapter Four regarding the strong sense of independence associated with work, transportation, and independence from the government, "moving on" also required a dignified sense of independence for many of the GBV survivors that I met in Guatemala. Like Doña Estrella, Doña Irina also started a small business to support herself after separating from her ex-husband. Also a survivor of GBV, Doña Irina, 66-years-old, is grateful for the peace that she has cultivated in her home.

Mi hogar es mi santuario. Me siento paz aquí. ¿Y usted? A veces, cuando estoy en la calle, lo único que quiero es volver a casa. Hay mucha bulla en la calle. Pero aquí siento paz. Puedo leer mi Biblia, visitar a mis nietos y estar en paz. A veces uno se siente poco soltera, pero tranquilo.

My home is my sanctuary. I feel peace here, don't you? Sometimes, when I'm out on the street, all I want to do is come back home. There's a lot of noise on the street. But here, I feel peace. I can read my Bible, visit with my grandchildren, and be in peace. It's lonely sometimes, but it's peaceful.

One evening, I sat with Doña Irina in her immaculately clean living room, drinking *manzanilla* (chamomile) tea with honey. Tonight, it was particularly chilly after an evening of rain. "It's very cold, you could get sick," she said, handing me a cup of scalding-hot tea. Her living room was comforting and inviting, furnished with a tan, cloth sofa, flat screen television, coffee table, and TV stand. Her oldest son's photo, who had migrated to the U.S. over ten years ago, was proudly displayed. Now a devout Jehovah's Witness, Doña Irina attends church activities multiple times a week. "It helps with loneliness," she stated. "It's important to chat with other people. But when God is in your heart, you can never be lonely."

As we watched the evening news, Doña Irina gasped that there was a lot of violence (*mucha violencia*), shaking her head. She shared her story with me.

Intentó matarme. Era un jueves. Amenazó con matarme a mí y a los niños. Fue entonces cuando supe que tenía que irme. Gracias a Dios pude ir a casa de mi hermana. Y luego, finalmente, me mudé a mi propia casa con su ayuda. Y ahora mi hijo me envía lo que puede desde Estados Unidos. Trabaja en una finca con animales. Le encantan los animales. Mi hija cocina para mí siempre que puede. No cocino demasiado para mí, es demasiado trabajo. A veces hago algo pequeño, pero no me gusta cocinar una comida grande solo para mí. No tengo con quién compartirlo. Pero gracias a Dios ahora vivo en paz.

He tried to kill me. It was a Thursday. He threatened to kill me and the children. It was then that I knew I had to leave. Thank God, I was able to go to my sister's. And then, eventually, moved into my own house with her help. And now, my son, he sends me whatever he can from the U.S. He works on a farm with animals. He loves animals. My daughter, she cooks for me whenever she can. I don't cook too much for myself, it's too much work. Sometimes, I make something small, but I don't like to cook a big meal for just me. I have no one to share it with. But thank God, I live in peace now.

Doña Irina took pride in her *tienda* (small store), which occupied the front half of her home. She sold everything under the sun, including instant soups, some fresh fruits and vegetables, toilet paper, deodorant, cooking oil, dish soap, candy, soda/pop (*gaseosas*), dried

corn (*elote*) to make tortilla dough (*masa*), and sausage. Her store, like the others in town, provided convenience food and personal items to members of the local community. Most Aldea Bocacosta residents did their shopping at the local market (*mercado*), which primarily operated two-days-a-week in the neighboring town. The market (*mercado*) is accessible by *tuk tuk*, *microbus*, and *carro*, although walking was not recommended due to safety concerns. Locals also did some shopping at the *Dispensa*, a small supermarket owned by Walmart, located in the same town. The Aldea Bocacosta does have a small market, located in the town's center (*centro*), but, as one neighbor put it, “the selection is very limited—better to go over there.”

My fiancé and I lived with Doña Irina during my fourth month of fieldwork in Aldea Bocacosta and got to know her very well. I had known Doña Irina for eight years, having interviewed and visited her during my MA fieldwork in Aldea Bocacosta. The first day that we moved in, she was quick to show us her store, a recent addition from eight years ago.

Mira mi tienda. Empecé esta tienda con solo Q600 en producto. Ahora ha crecido bastante. Algunas personas pierden sus negocios porque no prestan atención a lo que ganan y a lo que gastan. Conozco a alguien, un primo, que perdió su tienda porque no llevaba un registro de lo que ganaba y gastaba en el producto. Hay que tener cuidado. Es importante tomar nota de estas cosas o puedes meterte en problemas. Amo y valoro los negocios (negocio). No es mucho, pero me ayuda a pagar la factura del teléfono, la electricidad y la compra. Mis hijos me ayudan con la comida y otras cosas si lo necesito. Pero aquí está tranquilo.

Look at my store. I started this store with only Q600 (\$77 worth of product. Now, it has grown quite a bit. Some people lose their businesses because they don't pay attention to what they are earning and what they are spending. I know someone, a cousin, who lost their store because they weren't keeping track of what they were earning and spending on product. You have to be careful. It's important to take note of these things, or you can get in trouble. I love and value business. It's not a lot, but it helps me pay my phone bill, electric bill, and groceries. My kids help me with meals and other things if I need it. But it's calm here.

Despite only studying through sixth grade, what the Guatemalan government considers minimum education (as opposed to 12 years here in the U.S.), Doña Irina's store is a popular spot in the local neighborhood. “¡Doña Irina, Doña Irina!,” store patrons would yell through the

black, iron bars to her living room. “I can’t rest,” she stated, laughing. Sometimes, when she was outside, cooking a hot soup (*caldo*) or other dish on the wooden stove located behind the house, it was hard for her to hear the customers (*clientas*) out front. “Doña Irina, there is someone at the store,” I would yell, to which she would respond, “I’m coming” (*Me voy*). Her teenage granddaughter’s beaded bracelets, which she sells to help earn money for college, are displayed on a white rack at the front of the store. I purchased several of them to take home to family and friends.

Doña Estrella and Doña Irina have both worked tirelessly to financially provide for themselves and their families. A prominent theme in women’s stories related to “moving forward” (*siguiendo adelante*) pertained to how they would financially provide for their children without having a male partner to provide for them. In the Aldea Bocacosta, the gender division of labor is more strongly divided compared to the Municipio Altiplano. In Aldea Bocacosta, women are socially conditioned to work within the household while men worked formal positions away from the home, typically in trades and in the surrounding cacao and coffee fields.

Like Doña Estrella and Doña Irina, Doña Lisbet also went on to start two successful and respected businesses. I first met Doña Lisbet, an Indigenous K’iche’ resident of Aldea Bocacosta in her mid-fifties, after passing her house often either while walking or taking a *tuk tuk*. She was also neighbors to one of my friends in town, whom I would visit on a regular basis, requiring me to walk directly in front of Lisbet’s tortilla stand (*tortillería*). Her tortilla stand (*tortillería*) was wildly successful, with many clients ordering tortillas in advance for their meals for rapid pick-up. Walking down her street, you could hear the “*pat pat*” sound of hands molding the tortilla dough (*masa de tortilla*). “Hi, Blondie,” (*Hola canche*) she would say, and then ask how my day was going.

I interviewed Doña Lisbet in the outdoor area in front of her home, just behind the tortilla stand (*tortillería*). We started out the interview by discussing her life growing up. When she was just eleven years old, Doña Lisbet worked on a farm to help financially support (*sostener*) her family.

Cuando éramos jóvenes, éramos muy pobres. No teníamos dinero. Mis padres no pudieron permitirnos comprar cosas para la escuela, entonces no pudimos estudiar. En cambio, tuvimos que buscar a trabajar. Siempre teníamos que seguir adelante. Y ahora, siempre tenemos que seguir adelante. Mis hijos, ellos son mi amor. Tuve cinco hijos, pero cuatro de ellos murieron. Hago lo mejor que puedo.

When we were young, we were very poor. We didn't have money. My parents couldn't afford to buy us things for school, so we couldn't study. Instead, we had to look for work. We always had to move forward. And now, we always have to move forward. My children, they are my love. I had five children, but four of them died. I do the best that I can.

She married when she was 15 years old and had her first child at sixteen. Once she started having children, she started working as a midwife (*comodrona*) to make money and has since continued. When I asked her how much money she made as a midwife (*comadrona*) she stated that "some [clients] pay, some don't." Each exam costs between Q10 and Q15 (between \$1.28 and \$1.92), equivalent to the average person's daily income in the Aldea Bocacosta.

She separated from her husband in 1989. She left him after he got drunk and hit her in the head. She said that she knew this would keep happening if she did not leave. Doña Lisbet went to the nearest Juzgado de Paz in the neighboring town. "Sometimes, one needs assistance/help." This resulted in her receiving Q100 of *alimentación* (\$12 of alimony payments) per month for all five children. In 1993, this was a considerable amount of money. "The judge attended to me well. Doña Lisbet told me that the reason she went to the Juzgado de Paz was so that he could help her. She also stated that she didn't have any complaints regarding her experience.

Estaba sola. No tenía a nadie que me ayudara. Cuando tenía siete años, mi papá abandonó a mi mamá. Crecí con mi padrastro. Fue duro. Entonces mi mamá murió. Unos años más tarde, conocí a mi exmarido. Trabajó en el campo. Los sábados y domingos bebía todo el día. A veces, cuando bebía, intentaba golpearme con su machete.

I was alone. I didn't have anyone to help me. When I was seven years old, my dad abandoned my mom. I grew up with my stepdad. It was hard. Then, my mom died. A few years later, I met my ex-husband. He worked in the fields. On Saturdays and Sundays, he would drink all day. Sometimes, when he would drink, he would try to hit me with his *machete*.

Doña Lisbet also received the spiritual calling to help women bring new life into the world. When she was eleven years old, she had a dream, telling her to be a midwife (*comadrona*). When her mother was around the same age, she also had this dream. During our interview, Doña Lisbet shared the difficulties that sometimes came with doing this job, considering modern-day medical advances:

A veces nosotras como comadronas son maltratadas en los hospitales. Ellos no nos respetan porque no hemos recibido educación formal. Solo tenemos nuestros talentos.

Sometimes, as midwives, we are mistreated in hospitals. They [the other medical staff] don't respect us because we haven't received formal education. We only have our talents.

Doña Lisbet's experiences facing discrimination by more formally educated medical staff highlight how Indigenous customs and knowledge are still frowned upon by some in more formalized and clinical medical settings. At the same time, recent GBV efforts recognize the importance and significance of midwives (*comadronas*), including the unique role that they play in local communities, especially when it comes to making strong connections with local women and maintaining Indigenous knowledge and tradition. Now, as a midwife (*comadrona*), Doña Lisbet offers advice to young women she sees:

Como comadrona, yo ofrezco apoyo a las jovencitas que no tienen esposos. Yo ofrezco este tipo de apoyo para ayudar a las madres solteras. A veces, vienen enfermedades. Si no hay dinero, no se pueden ayudar a sus hijos.

As a midwife, I offer support to young women who do not have husbands. I offer this type of support to help single mothers. Sometimes, illnesses come. If there is no money, you cannot help your children.

She went on to elaborate on how she helped clients of hers who had [GBV-related] problems (*tenían problemas*). Towards the end of our interview, Doña Lisbet stated, “Before, there wasn’t a law, but now, everything is different.” She went on to say that the laws (*las leyes*) have made a difference for women in Guatemala. “When they are beaten, they look for the judge.” But when it comes to justice, Doña Lisbet shared,

El problema es que no hay justicia. Los jueces, ellos son chismes. Una persona les tratan mal. No hay comprensión, conocimiento. La justicia devina Dios. Hoy en día, está escrito en La Biblia. Va a repetir. Dios está en carga.

The problem is that there is no justice. The judges, they are gossipy. A person treats them badly. There is no comprehension, no knowing. Justice is God. Today, it's written in the Bible. It's going to repeat. God is in charge.

When I asked Doña Lisbet what else we need in Guatemala to improve the lives of women, she stated,

Por las madres solteras, necesitamos más oportunidades de trabajo. Y para las viudas. Son muy cansadas. Necesitan ayudas. Hoy en día, nuestras mujeres tenemos que ser valoradas.

For single mothers, we need more work opportunities. And for widows. They are very tired. They need help. In this day and age, our women need to be valued.

Midwives (*comadronas*) are highly regarded as Indigenous leaders in Maya culture due to their possession of the unique gift of healing and curing. These gifts are considered a sacred gift, oftentimes inherited from one’s mother or grandmother, and passed down through ancestral knowledge and practice. Midwives (*comadronas*) were some of the first healthcare providers in Maya culture. In recent years, midwives (*comadronas*) have been mandated by the Guatemalan government to receive formal biomedical training and are occasionally blamed by biomedically trained staff for medical emergencies and other mishaps.

However, due to the small number of healthcare providers in the country (include specific number/citation here), midwives (*comadronas*) fill a vital role in healthcare, especially in rural settings. Additionally, recent, evidence-based and community-based efforts for GBV in rural communities recognize the value of midwives (*comadronas*) in assisting with familial disputes and communication within families.

As I further elaborate in the final chapter of this dissertation, engagement with midwives (*comadronas*) and other highly regarded Indigenous community leaders is essential for preventing and responding to GBV. Moving forward, increased and sustainable training and engagement with midwives is essential to offer confidential social support and sharing of educational and legal information related to GBV while also maintaining Indigenous customs (*costumbres*) and values.

As these three stories highlight, moving forward to cultivate financial stability after an abusive relationship is not an easy feat, requiring self-sustainability, creativity, and innovation-qualities that are oftentimes overlooked by those with higher education levels and in more “formalized” employment positions. It is also worth noting that all three women are in their mid-forties to early seventies, having experienced abuse long ago, leading them to not engage in future relationships and instead focus on developing a sense of economic independence. In the next section, I shift my focus to women who are currently “fighting” to financially provide for their children amid more recent GBV experiences.

“Luchando” (“Fighting”) to Support Children

“*Luchar*” (to fight) and “*estoy luchando*” (I am fighting) emerged as common expressions in both field sites when I would ask women how they were doing, before interviews and casually, while greeting women on the street. “*Luchar*” signifies a simultaneous sense of

fighting, struggling, and striving to overcome economic difficulty and life's challenges. This expression was also used to connote a sense of resiliency, of moving forward in the face of adversity and uncertainty.

Reina, a newly single, thirty-three-year-old mother of four living in Aldea Bocacosta, recently separated from her ex-husband after he left her for a woman in a neighboring town, to which he had moved. She explained the lived realities of fighting for (*luchando por*) her three young children. Only having studied up to the fourth grade, Reina expressed her concerns regarding how to financially provide for her children on her own.

Estoy luchando por mis hijos. Lucho todos los días. A veces no sé cómo voy a sostenerles, pero estoy aquí siguiendo en lo que puedo. A veces vendo un poco fruta, a veces lavo ropa por los vecinos. Cuesta.

I am fighting for my children. I fight every day. Sometimes I don't know how I am going to support them, but I am here continuing in what I can. Sometimes I sell a little bit of fruit, sometimes I wash clothing for the neighbors. It's difficult.

Reina's experience reinforces the feelings of uncertainty that single women experience, especially in Aldea Bocacosta, where the local economy is much more limited than Municipio Altiplano.

Sandi, a 37-year-old, university-educated and extremely intelligent participant, and close friend who has lived in Municipio Altiplano for her entire life, used this expression to cohesively describe Guatemala's Indigenous women's enduring fight to continue moving forward, despite disenfranchisement and unequal power structures.

Estamos en la cultura de luchar como mujeres Indígenas. Tenemos que defendernos de manera justa y digna. Sin violencia. Este país es muy machista, muy racista. Hay barreras en colegios donde los maestros dan preferencia a algunos estudiantes sobre otros. Estamos tratando de romper patrones sociales con pasos muy lentos, con infraestructura muy limitada. Es difícil porque tenemos que hacer todo en frente de la discriminación, pero poco a poco es posible si seguimos a luchar juntos.

We are in the culture of fighting as Indigenous women. We have to defend ourselves in a just and dignified way. Without violence. This country is very *machista*, very racist. There are barriers in [high] schools where the teachers have preferences of some students over others due to their gender or race. We are trying to break social patterns with very slow steps, with very limited infrastructure. It's difficult because we have to do everything in the face of discrimination, but little by little it's possible if we keep fighting together.

As Sandi's statement suggests, the concept of Indigenous women *luchando* (fighting) extends beyond local communities. This sentiment of fighting is a national phenomenon uniting Indigenous communities. It is a collective fight against racism and entrenched discrimination.

GBV survivors would commonly share their concerns about being able to afford necessary items for their children. One of the primary differences between interviews conducted in 2015 and 2023 is that, instead of describing details of abuse during interviews, participants were more vocal about their concerns (*preocupaciones*) pertaining to being able to provide for their children as they move forward (*seguir adelante*). In *Aldea Bocacosta*, where women are stigmatized for working away from the household due to entrenched gender norms and jealousy and gossip directed towards those who work outside of the household, it is even more challenging for women to find stabilized and sustaina+ble forms of income to support themselves and their children. Survivors in Municipio Altiplano may experience some of this jealousy and gender norm expectations but are generally less stigmatized and generally expected to work in positions outside of the home.

A primary concern for many GBV survivors was making enough money to purchase school supplies for their children. In *Aldea Bocacosta*, the average daily income is approximately 1-3 dollars per day. Due to reliance on the "informal" economy to earn an income, on some days, people don't make any income at all, making it even more difficult for families to make ends meet. A standard backpack, for example, costs approximately 12-15 dollars. Shoes in a

department store can cost between 25 and 50 dollars, a considerable expense, leading many families to purchase imported secondhand clothing from small local stores and larger second-hand stores known as *pacas*. However, even second-hand goods can still be more than what newly single mothers can afford. As Gladis, a mother of two from Aldea Bocacosta stated:

Cuesta. Cuesta pagar por todo. Especialmente con los precios tan altos después de la pandemia. Los precios son bastante altos, y a veces solo podemos comprar sal y tortillas a comer.

It's difficult. It's difficult paying for everything. Especially with such high prices after the pandemic. The prices are quite high, and sometimes we can only buy salt and tortillas to eat.

As Gladis stated, inflation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is another compounding factor influencing women's ability to afford basic household essentials. In both communities, money is a topic that comes up regularly in informal conversation, with both participants and everyday "local" people mentioning money, the economy, and sacrifices that they have to make due to higher-than-normal prices.

These ethnographic examples demonstrate the daily sense of uncertainty that Indigenous women experience in providing for their children. This strong sense of uncertainty poses significant challenges for single mothers especially, leading many women to turn to God as a form of hope and constant companionship.

“Abandonos:” Abandonment from Partners

Another factor related to women's GBV experiences in both communities regarding economic difficulties and sustainability is the *abandonos* (abandonment) of women and children by male partners. Two primary reasons for abandonment emerged from the data: men leaving their wives and children to start a new relationship with other women, and men leaving their

wives and children behind when migrating to the U.S. or Canada to pursue employment opportunities. Women in both field sites experienced abandonment from their former partners.

Such forms of abandonment serve as a form of emotional abuse against women, leading some women to experience tremendous distress, confusion, and feelings of hopelessness. As Barbara, a thirty-five-year-old mother of eight children, lamented after being suddenly left by her ex-husband, she was not able to sleep for a week. She also experienced tremendous hopelessness (*desesperanza*) regarding the future, and how she would pay for their expenses. Her ex-husband completely neglected her and their children, going on to act as if they were not his anymore. Barbara was fortunately able to work at her sister's store, which provides her with some income, but not enough for all of them to go to school. She also receives support from her mother, who cooks her and her children's meals on a regular basis.

Nos abandonó. Actúa como si los niños no fueran suyos. No sé cómo hace eso. Estoy aquí luchando por ellos. Trabajo en la tienda de mi madre y gano un poco de dinero. Pero no es suficiente, nunca es suficiente. Pero ahora puedo seguir adelante por mis hijos. Que hombre.

He abandoned us. He acts like the children aren't his. I don't know how he does that. I am here fighting for them. I work at my mother's store and make a little bit of money. But it's not enough, it's never enough. But now I can move forward for my children. What a man.

Chony, like Barbara, was also abandoned by her first husband, but has since gone on to remarry and now leads a happy life with her current husband.

No tengo hermanos. No tengo padres porque se murieron de enfermedades hace 10 años. No tengo hermanos. No tengo padres porque murieron de enfermedades hace 10 años. Sólo lo tuve a él, pero me trató muy mal. Me pegaba y bebía mucho. Lo soporté mucho tiempo porque no sabía qué hacer, dependía de su gasto, pero luego se fue con otra mujer. Después de que él me abandonó, encontré otro marido, Gracias a Dios. Mi nuevo marido no me pega. Bendito de Dios. Él no toma. Y me da permiso para ir a la iglesia.

I don't have siblings. I don't have parents because they died of illnesses 10 years ago. I only had him, but he treated me very badly. He would hit me and drink a lot. I endured it for a long time because I didn't know what to do, I depended on his *gasto*, but then he went off with another woman. After he abandoned me, I found another husband, thank God. My new husband doesn't hit me. Blessing from God. He doesn't drink. And he gives me permission to go to church.

Chony is now in a happy relationship with her current husband. As she mentioned in her statement, her current husband does not partake in behaviors that women associate with being “*machista*,” regularly consuming alcohol, not prohibiting her from going to church or leaving the home, and not physically abusing her. For other women in Aldea Bocacosta, these sudden changes in relationship status can have detrimental effects on their financial well-being, mental health, and overall livelihoods.

Because many women, especially in the Aldea Bocacosta, are socially conditioned to follow rigid gender norms and rely on their male counterparts to provide financial resources to the family, abandonment can be especially devastating for women without formal education or formal economic opportunities. “Abandonments” (*abandonos*) often result in abrupt and unexpected lifestyle changes, leading women to have to quickly develop new means to provide for children on their own. For other women, however, *abandonos* can have a negative impact on financial and psychological well-being. Because they involve a sudden shift in household dynamics, it makes it difficult for women to plan ahead to secure new forms of income or housing.

Doña Naomi, whose story I detail further in the following chapter, experienced sudden abandonment from her husband. A mother of six children, she is still picking up the pieces to provide them with adequate food and clothing by selling vegetables door-to-door and occasionally selling a *huipil* (handwoven top) that she embroidered. Over one year after her husband left her, she is still barely making ends meet. Several other women with whom I spoke

discussed feeling immense shock and concern for the future upon learning that their partners left with another woman (*se fue con otra mujer*).

These women's stories of abandonment collectively highlight how relationships can change within the blink of an eye, sometimes without the input of women, thus leading them to quickly develop a new plan to support them and their children, thus moving forward with a sense of uncertainty. In Chapter Three, I provide further ethnographic examples of women who were abandoned by their partners in the context of service-seeking and receiving alimony payments. When facing challenging situations such as sudden abandonment, I found that many women turn to God in times of immense uncertainty, a subject that I will further discuss in the following section.

“Jesús es Mi Novio. No Necesito Otro”/ “Jesus is My Boyfriend. I Don't Need Another One:” Religion, Decision-making, and “Moving On”

Religion and GBV survivorship

While Christianity's omnipresence is nearly tangible in both the Municipio Altiplano and the Aldea Bocacosta, the two areas strongly contrast regarding denomination. Residents of the Municipio Altiplano are primarily Catholic. There are several private Catholic schools in town, and most community celebrations revolve around Catholic tradition, celebrating specific saints' days. The Aldea Bocacosta is quite the opposite. While the town's small Catholic Church, located at the end of the main street in the town's center (*centro*) is a symbol of the community, almost all residents practice evangelicalism. There are also three Pentecostal churches and one Jehovah's Witness church in town, however these denominations have an even lesser influence.

People spoke about God in both communities very frequently, rendering him in charge of the order of the world. Men and women alike would talk about God's control over their lives, his power, as well as his companionship and his knowing what is best for them. God also served as a

form of hope, of relief during hard times. Community members attributed positive events, such as getting out of difficult situations, finding a new place to live, or curating new talents for economic benefit, to God's power and decision to give those things to them.

GBV survivors rarely attributed positive changes to their own talents, decisions, resilience, or abilities. Almost everything that occurs is because of God. And because God is all-powerful and all-mighty, several hours each week are dedicated to small prayer groups held in homes (*cultos*) where people speak openly to God about the ongoings in their life, family problems, financial problems, and upcoming decisions that they need to make. People also use this time to pray with one another in intimate settings, typically with only a few close friends and/or family members.

Because people are generally weary of others knowing their personal business and struggles, these *cultos* are generally private. Walking down the street in Municipio Altiplano during a *culto*, one can hear elongated prayers, singing and praising God, and crying amid immense vulnerability. God is thought of as perfect, making no mistakes. In addition to small groups forming private *cultos*, people also attend more public and formal church services, where personal information is less frequently shared in public.

In addition to the perception and belief of God playing a significant role in major life events, "The Church" as an institution also has a strong influence on social norms and expectations. In interviews, I had heard a lot about the Church's influence on marriage, gender roles for husband and wife, mixed information regarding different churches and denominations' stances on divorce. And, by knowing people personally in the community, I learned that most people attended church approximately two to four times per week. However, I remained curious

about what religious leaders and “the Church” as a powerful entity do to support intimate partner violence survivors in rural communities.

One day in April 2022, towards the end of my fieldwork in the Aldea Bocacosta, I interviewed a 35-year-old, male Evangelical Pastor. Accompanied by my research assistant, I sat down at the round, white plastic table situated in the middle of the church. This was my third time meeting the pastor, the first couple times were at his home, when I asked permission to conduct the interview, and during a church service that I had previously attended. The eerily quiet and sterile “scene” of the church starkly contrasted with the typical lively nature of afternoon services and loud, passionate music.

Once I felt as though I had built adequate rapport, I asked him if his church does anything to support women experiencing GBV.

Para eso están las autoridades. Si alguien en nuestra iglesia está teniendo ese tipo de problemas, no es nuestra responsabilidad como pastores involucrarnos en asuntos personales entre marido y mujer. Si alguien en nuestra iglesia está teniendo problemas con su pareja, le recomendamos que llame a las autoridades, porque para eso están.

That’s what the authorities are for. If someone in our church is having those types of problems, it’s not our responsibility as pastors to get involved in personal matters between man and wife. If someone in our church is experiencing problems with their partner, we recommend that they call the authorities, because that is what they are for.

He went on to explain that his and his wife’s time in this region is only temporary, and that they will be leaving within the next month to engage in pastoral activities elsewhere. The pastor mentioned that their church does have a women’s group, which entails women getting together and praying for one another and engaging in weekly sales (*ventas*) of food items to raise money for the church.

The pastor’s designation of GBV as a personal issue between men and women, not of direct interest to religious authorities, further demonstrates how community responses to GBV as a public health issue are largely carceral, with a primary focus on penalization in contrast to

prevention. The siloing of GBV services and responses is common, partially due to rigid bureaucratic structures, and because the response system is set up with authorities designated to specific aspects of GBV cases. However, as I further argue in the conclusion of this dissertation, there is an immense need for holistic services designed to support women's well-being and livelihoods in communities. Because of their strong presence and influence in communities, as well as their awareness of personal, private matters, there is tremendous opportunity for GBV-focused non-profit organizations to engage religious leaders and include them as part of their community response to GBV.

Thanking God for one's ability to "move on" (*seguir adelante*) was common among GBV survivors in both the Aldea Bocacosta and the Municipio Altiplano. God is often rendered as one's confidant and friend. Some participants referred to God as their confidant, someone they can trust above everyone else; someone who listens to them and helps them problem-solve and make decisions in times of difficulty.

One day, I had plans to meet up with Sandi, my friend and research assistant in a park located in Aldea Bocacosta. After about twenty minutes, I thought perhaps there was a delay in transportation, or our plans had somehow gotten mixed up. However, upon walking past the large, immaculately clean and decorated evangelical church on the main street, I saw Sandi standing close to the front of the stage where the male pastor preached with enthusiasm and vigor. I slowly entered the church, aware of the stares and gestures of the service attendees, many of them I had met at previous services. Sandi had tears running down her face, which she wiped upon my arrival. After the session, she explained that she feels a very close connection to God when she is in church, and that she was crying because she felt his presence so strongly. A

survivor of GBV herself, Sandi is very active in her local evangelical church and regularly participates in church activities, such as prayer meetings, church services, and a women's group.

As is true in essentially much of Latin America, religion, particularly the Christian faith, plays dominant role in how daily phenomena are perceived and conceptualized. In Guatemala, the concept of God is in everywhere and everything. God is all-powerful, can determine the future, but is also present in times of grief, sadness, and uncertainty. As Rosita jokingly stated, after experiencing a tumultuous relationship with her ex-husband, "God is my boyfriend. I don't need another one" (laughter). She went on to state how God is there for her in ways that her ex-husband never was:

Él me escucha. Él está. Yo sé que Dios tiene un futuro lindo para mí. Mi exesposo, él no le importo. Pero Dios está ahí para mí.

He listens to me. He's there. I know that God has a beautiful future for me. My ex-husband, he didn't care.

As is suggested by Rosita's statement, God is regarded as a stable, omnipresent force amid uncertainty. To many people in Guatemala, God's presence is not questioned in the slightest. It is absolute, certain, and omnipresent. However, the Church offers little economic support to communities. Every Sunday in Aldea Bocacosta, women churchgoers partake in *ventas* consisting of selling local foods such as *tortas*, *pollo y arroz* (chicken and rice), and *caldos* (soups). All proceeds for these *ventas* go directly to the church, rarely reaching community members themselves. This demonstrates that the Church offers forms of social support, a socially acceptable reason to *salir* (go out, leave the house), and solace in times of sadness and uncertainty. However, the Church falls short in supporting women through programmatic initiatives to help connect them with resources or other forms of formalized support during times of precarity and need.

“A veces, ya está”/ “he is still around sometimes”: GBV survivorship and daily negotiations

I first met Doña Estrella, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, while eyeing a beautiful, colorful basket stored in a glass container at the front of her shop. “It’s pretty, right?” she stated, a wide, gold-toothed smile on her face. “Yes, it is,” I stated. “I’ll buy it.” I planned to use it to store some produce items in the kitchen. She stated that the total will be Q30, equivalent to approximately 3.5 US Dollars. “Why are you here?” she asked, a curious expression on her face. “I’m doing a research project for the university. For my doctorate,” I stated.” “What is the project for?” I then explained the general concepts of my research, how I was talking with women about their problems (*problemas*) and experiences (*experiencias*) which she immediately understood.

Little did I know that this brief interaction and follow-up interview would turn into a long-standing friendship, more reminiscent of family. I got to know Doña Estrella and her family very well over the next seven months, and even ended up occupying her daughter’s home next to hers after she migrated to the U.S. to support her young daughter. My fiancé and I also attended birthday parties, visits to the local *curandera* (local healer), many family dinners, and celebrated Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Day of the Dead with Doña Estrella and her family.

She went on to passionately share her story of survivorship and stated that she wanted to talk to me more. I returned the following day to conduct the interview in a small, private space behind her family-run store. During our interview, Doña Estrella told me about the day on which she learned of her former husband’s affair. One day, upon heading home for lunch after working in her store all morning, Doña Estrella entered her residence to find her husband in bed with another woman.

Regresé a casa después de trabajar en la tienda para cada almuerzo y escuché algunas voces en nuestra casa. Fui a la parte trasera de la casa, a nuestro dormitorio, y lo vi en la cama con otra mujer. La conocía de la ciudad. Estaba tan avergonzado. No sabía qué hacer. Me golpearía y me golpearía. Pero esto fue incluso peor que eso. No le agrado. Me dijo que era vaga, gorda, fea.

I came home from working at the store to each lunch and heard some voices in our house. I went to the back of the house, to our bedroom, and saw him in bed with another woman. I knew her from town. I was so embarrassed. I didn't know what to do. He would beat me and beat me. But this was even worse than that. He didn't like me. He told me I was lazy, fat, ugly.

Exhibiting qualities such as honesty, caring about her community, kindness, an outgoing personality, and an incomparable sense of humor, qualities that are all highly admired and respected in Indigenous communities, Doña Estrella was elected as a community leader back in the 90s. "I was the only woman," she stated, still in disbelief, even after thirty years. "I can't read or write, but I was elected as a leader." She attributed this honor to God, who is in control of everything, who provided her with her talents (*talentos*). She was even personally invited by governmental officials in Norway, who were hosting a governmental summit focused on cultural exchange.

Fuimos en tren. Fue muy bonito. Oré mucho en el avión. Era mi primera vez en un avión y oré a Dios para que nos llevara allí sanos y seguros. Fue un intercambio (intercambio entre culturas). Es muy hermoso aprender unos de otros. Somos culturas diferentes, pero tenemos muchas similitudes.

We went on a train. It was very beautiful. I prayed a lot on the airplane. It was my first time on an airplane, and I prayed to God to get us there safely. It was a [cultural] exchange. It's very beautiful to learn from one another. We are different cultures, but we have many similarities.

Despite the pain that Doña Estrella went through with her ex-husband, she now stated that, with the help of God, she forgives him for everything that happened. She stated that that is what God wants her to do, and that everything is according to God's plan. She stated that her "ex," which she jokingly calls him, has tried to get back together with her, though she

continually refuses his offer. “I can tolerate him. But I don’t want to go back with him,” she affirmed.

Doña Estrella’s story reflects the negotiations that women make when occupying the same spaces as their former partners. These negotiations are a balancing act between placating their exes and staying true to themselves and other family members, while maintaining safety and saving face in the local community. In small, close-knit, rural communities such as Municipio Altiplano and Aldea Bocacosta, these negotiations are sometimes necessary to maintain safety and familial relationships.

Unlike Doña Estrella, who does not seem to feel in danger by her ex-husband’s occasional presence, Doña Elidia’s experience living across the street from her ex-husband not only serves a potential risk, but it constantly reminds her that she is still very much tied to him. On a particularly hot, humid day in March, I accompanied Choni, the Executive Director of the National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango to a town located within the Department that their agency serves, approximately one hour on bus. As we got off the bus (*camioneta*), colloquially referred to in English as a “chicken bus,” because, historically, people would bring chickens on them, we were cheerfully greeted by Doña Elidia and her seven-year-old daughter. Interviewing Doña Elidia, it quickly became clear that her experiences have been a bit more severe than other women that I had previously interviewed in both field sites combined. Her home had a dirt floor and very little furniture. Despite these challenges, she continues to live directly across the street from her ex-husband out of necessity.

No podemos permitirnos otra casa. No sé qué hacer. No me gusta saber que está justo enfrente de nosotros. Él no ha hecho nada todavía, pero todos los días vivo con miedo. Soy amable con él porque tengo miedo de que nos haga daño o nos quite la casa, que es suya. No puedo ir con mi familia porque están en otro pueblo, muy lejos de aquí y no puedo permitirme ir.

We cannot afford another home. I don't know what to do. I don't like knowing that he is right across the street from us. He hasn't done anything yet, but every day I live in fear. I am nice to him because I am afraid he will hurt us or take the house, since it is his. I can't go with my family because they are in another town, far away from here and I cannot afford to go.

Towards the end of the interview, the Choni arranged a date and time for Doña Elidia to come to the regional governmental women's office to meet with a lawyer and social worker.

Because of the direness of her situation, the director also met with social workers in the local women's office to arrange a plan for her to receive weekly food allotments. Doña Elidia's story highlights how women feel obliged to act a certain way to placate their partners, even after experiencing tremendous abuse, to maintain life for themselves and their children.

“La gente habla”/ “people talk:” gossip in rural guatemalan communities

In both rural Guatemalan communities, gossip is something to be feared. While there is a strong sense of communalism, people tend to keep personal matters private out of fear of embarrassment (*avergüenza*). Although gender norms are slowly changing, I have found that single women are often targets of gossip in local communities, with community members gossiping about why they left their husbands, how they earn an income, and why they may not choose to enter another personal relationship moving forward.

Lourdes, whom I also mention in Chapter Six, shared her experiences as a victim of gossip in her local neighborhood. Lourdes was vocal in stating that she goes against the grain when it comes to actively seeking out economic opportunities to help support her children.

Me encanta trabajar. Hago todo lo que puedo para ganar dinero. Lavo ropa, limpio casas, lo que sea. Pero las mujeres del pueblo hablan de mí. Hay muchos chismes. Hablan de mí porque salgo de casa y no creen que las mujeres deban salir de casa. Cuando llevo a los niños conmigo dicen que soy mala mamá porque no estoy en casa con ellos. Pero trabajo porque me encanta. Sé que necesito dinero, así que hago todo lo que puedo para conseguirlo.

I love to work. I do anything I can to make money. I wash clothes, I clean houses, whatever. But the women in town, they talk about me. There's a lot of gossip. They talk about me because I leave the house, and they don't think that women should leave the house. When I take the children with me, they say that I am a bad mom because I am not at home with them. But I work because I love to. I know that I need money, so I do all that I can to work for it.

Lourdes' decision and determination to work apart from the home, despite having a husband and children, was somewhat of a curiosity in Aldea Bocacosta. Compared to the Municipio Altiplano, where it was very common for women to work in "formal" and "informal" positions away from the home, it was taboo (*tabú*) for women to work away from the home and not engage primarily in care work and domestic work.

Women in both communities referred to feeling embarrassment (*avergüenza*) related to doing anything that goes against the social norm. While there are many benefits pertaining to living in close-knit communities, such as a strong sense of purpose, living near family, and feeling a strong sense of identity within the community, living in small communities can also have its challenges. The social concept of deeply rooted trust (*confianza*) is also applicable here, with women slowly building relationships over time to ensure a sense of *confianza* before revealing private relationship or family matters to others.

Machismo and gender norms in local communities

In Chapter Five, I discussed *machismo* in relation to the Guatemalan state, and how it is tied to patriarchal norms at a national level. The term "*machismo*" and associated adjective, "*machista*" were also commonly used to refer to everyday behaviors rooted in the patriarchal system at a local level. While conducting fieldwork for this project, "machismo" was used to describe male partners regarding behaviors that directly pertain to male gender norms, like regularly consuming alcohol, hitting one's wife, being in charge of all or most household

decisions, and generally operating under the strongly held belief that men are superior and physically and emotionally stronger than women.

I interviewed Freddy, a local man in Municipio Altiplano, in his recently opened store located just beyond the town's central market. Prior to starting the interview, Freddy told me about a *moto* (motorcycle) accident that he survived eight years prior, which led to a fractured femur and him walking with a limp. He needs knee surgery, he told me, but has not been able to get the surgery because he cannot afford expense.

We discussed gender roles in Municipio Altiplano. While some of the men I spoke to in Municipio Altiplano maintained more traditional perspectives about gender roles, especially those approximately 45-years-old and older, Freddy maintained a rather progressive view regarding the importance of women earning an income in order to contribute to necessary household expenses.

Hay hombres que no quieren que las mujeres trabajen. Quieren controlar mucho a las mujeres porque tienen celos. Pero creo que es mucho mejor que las mujeres se vayan a trabajar porque ayuda al desarrollo personal. Las mujeres también pueden colaborar dentro de la familia. Pueden ser más independientes. Cuando sólo trabaja el hombre, las mujeres sufren solas con los niños.

There are men who do not want women to work. They want to control women a lot because they are jealous. But I think that women leaving to work is a lot better because it helps with personal development. Women can also collaborate within the family. They can be more independent. When only the man works, women suffer alone with the children.

Freddy went on to say that his wife of fifteen years voiced her interests in wanting to work, which he supported without hesitation.

Ahora, ella me ayuda con los ingresos. Y yo sé que es algo que quiere hacer, entonces me siento feliz por ella. Ella tiene su propio ingreso y tiene la independencia gastarlo en lo que necesita.

Now, she helps me with income. And I know that it's something that she wants to do, so I am happy for her. She has her own income, and she has the independence to spend it on what she needs.

Freddy also articulated how Municipio Altiplano has undergone substantial changes with regard to gender norms and roles within the past couple decades, serving as a separation from aldeas (more rural, isolated small villages), where women are more dependent on men's *gastos*, an allocated portion of a man's income that a woman is permitted to spend to support the household.

There have been bastantes cambios. Los costumbres de antes, muchos los han dejado del lado. Antes, se esperaba que las mujeres estuvieran solas en casa con los niños. Now, it is different. Ahora es diferente. La estructura del pueblo ha crecido mucho. El machismo está cambiando con las generaciones. Algunos hombres son muy conservadores y no quieren que las cosas cambien. Quieren que las cosas vuelvan a ser como antes. En el pasado, los hombres tenían más oportunidades de estudiar. Y se esperaba que las mujeres se casaran con un marido que pudiera mantenerlas a ella y a sus hijos.

There have been quite a few changes. The customs of before, many of them have been left to the side. Before, women were expected to be alone in the house with the kids. Now, it is different. The structure of the village has grown a lot. Machismo is changing with generations. Some men are very conservative and don't want things to change. They want things to be the same as they were before. In the past, men were given more opportunities to study. And women were expected to marry a husband who can support her and her children.

Freddy's progressive perspective regarding his wife's job and independent income has not, however, been met without opposition in the local community.

La gente le pregunta si tuvo que pedirme permiso para trabajar. También le preguntan si la dejo, o si nos separamos, y si esa es la razón por la que ambos trabajamos fuera de casa. También le preguntan si la dejé.

People ask her if she had to ask my permission to work. They also ask her if I am leaving her, or if we are separating, and if that is the reason why we are both working away from our home. They also ask her if I left her.

This demonstrates the curiosity that local people in communities have about one another's incomes, especially when a couple defies more typical social norms and standards. Additionally, Freddy's example shows how, even though gender roles and norms continue to shift as time passes, these changes are not made without curiosity, scrutiny, and, at times, strong opposition, and jealousy within local communities.

Angie, a 27-year-old woman born and raised in a small *aldea* in the peripheral areas of Municipio Altiplano, is a mother of four children, ages 10, eight, four, and five months. During our interview, we discussed gender roles. It was evident during our conversation that Angie had experienced some ups and downs with her husband, but they were able to move forward.

Angie shared that she gets up at 5:30 AM each morning to wash clothes (*lavar*), make a breakfast consisting of eggs and beans, *hierba* (leafy plant like collard greens) for lunch, and rice and beans for dinner. In addition to conducting nearly all of the household duties, Angie also embroiders, and goes to the neighboring mountainside to plant seeds (agricultural work). She stated that one of the main differences between men and women's daily lives in Guatemala is that the men don't cook. She was quick in telling me that her husband gives her permission to leave (*da permiso a salir*) but not all women are given such freedom. "I can leave, but I never leave alone," she stated. "When there are [marital] problems, I leave." During our conversation, Angie shared that there are always disagreements, going on to say that she once found photos of another woman on her husband's phone, but she did not say anything about it to him.

In the past, they also had another big fight when her husband learned that their fourth baby was not a boy, causing him to not want the child. "But now we get along well," she stated. "If we have issues, we end them. So our children don't hear them," she stated. Angie's story highlights how, despite the expectation to adhere to strict gender norms and roles in relationships, relationship dynamics can change. Sometimes, as in this example, these norms are something that women endure to maintain the relationship.

In a focus group with local women in Municipio Altiplano, we discussed gender norms and roles in detail. One participant in her forties stated,

A veces como mujeres Indígenas, nos sentimos como no tenemos valor. Antes, y también hoy en día, nos dicen que no necesitamos un estudio porque nos quedamos en la casa. Los hombres creen que una mujer que trabaja en una fábrica como ingeniera es débil. Pero tratamos de defendernos contra la ignorancia.

Sometimes as Indigenous women, we feel like we don't have value. Before, and also in this day and age, they tell us that we don't need to study because we stay at home. The men think that a woman who works in a factory as an engineer is weak. But we try to defend ourselves against this ignorance.

Another middle-aged focus group participant went on to say,

Las mujeres hoy en día tienen derechos. Pero en realidad los derechos no están cumpliendo. Ya hay preferencia a los chicos, a los hombres. Antes, el pasado, solo los hombres podían estudiar. Los derechos han cambiado un poco porque la mujer es poco más estudiada que antes. Las mujeres trabajan y los hombres trabajan. Así pueden independizar del esposos.

Women nowadays have rights. But in reality, the rights are now coming true. There is preference to boys, to men. Before, in the past, only men could study. The rights have changed a little bit because women are a little more studious than before. Women work and men work. That is how they become independent from their husbands.

This conversation reveals how gender norms and roles are still gray in many ways, still influenced by the past, while simultaneously changing.

Alcohol

Alcohol, particularly alcohol consumption by male partners, plays a significant role in the intersection of intimate relationships and GBV. Alcohol consumption is largely gendered in nature, with men engaging in most public drinking activities. Small, local *cantinas* line the streets of rural and urban communities alike, decorated with posters of scantily clothed women, pick-up trucks, and ice-cold beer. Partners' alcohol consumption emerged as a prominent factor during conversations with women about the GBV that they have endured.

Alcoholism and excessive alcohol consumption emerged in conversations with participants and local people alike as a significant public health issue. However, due to limited funding and collective disenfranchisement, this public health concern continues to have an

impact on communities, families, and relationships. Evangelical churches also hold strong teachings against alcohol consumption. A Myra, a close friend in her fifties whom I had known since 2015, had long operated a *cantina* (local bar) from her household, generating a substantial income for her and her daughter. Upon revisiting her in 2022, however, I was surprised to see that the *cantina* had shut down since 2018 when I had last seen her. “Where is the *cantina*?” I asked. She responded,

Dejé de vender cervezas porque ahora voy a la Iglesia. No puedo venderlos e ir a la Iglesia, porque va en contra de la palabra de Dios. Oré y Dios me dijo que dejara de venderlos y que fuera a la Iglesia.

I stopped selling beers because now I go to Church. I can't sell them and go to Church, because it is against God's word. I prayed, and God told me to stop selling them, to go to Church.

Despite a strong evangelical and Christian influence, public intoxication remains a concern throughout Guatemala. During an interview with a woman police officer in the Municipio Altiplano, I asked her what the police do when they see intoxicated people sleeping on the sidewalks. “We don't do anything,” she laughed. I then asked her why not, and she said, “We are afraid,” and then laughed. There are rehabilitation facilities, however, they are rather expensive and not accessible to everyone who may need their services. These facilities may also pose significant human rights concerns. After visiting one such facility in Municipio Altiplano, I witnessed a man being handcuffed facing the wall due to “bad behavior.”

While there are some efforts to aid those struggling with alcoholism, this issue is generally normalized in Guatemalan society. It was not uncommon in both the Aldea Bocacosta and the Municipio Altiplano to see men of all ages passed out on the sidewalks (never women), seemingly unaware of their surroundings. People would walk past them, not thinking much of it, as it is a common scene. Sometimes, passersby would laugh or say, “drunk” (*borracho*) under their breath, and then move on. I always wondered about the loved ones of these men. Did they

know where they were? Did anyone tell them that they saw them on the street? Are they simply used to them leaving and not coming back for days?

On the night of Day of the Dead celebrations in the Municipio Altiplano, we were heading back home after leaving flowers, food, and drinks at the graves of our host family's deceased loved ones in Cemetery Two (*Cemetario Dos*). My fiancé and I, along with the rest of the family, were packed tightly in the back seat of Doña Estrella's SUV. I was seated near the window, gazing out at the local "scene" of the homes and storefronts. This was a big night of celebration, and many men drink as a celebratory act.

As I looked out the window, I saw a very intoxicated man stumble uncontrollably, barely able to walk. I grew concerned, asking the family if we should do something to help him. "No, no. He's OK. He's just drunk." Tears in my eyes, I was worried that he would get a traumatic brain injury from falling on the sidewalk, but there was not much we could do. This was not the first time that we witnessed severe public intoxication. One evening, on our way back from another town in our host family's SUV, there was a sudden "bang bang" sound. Upon looking at where the noise was coming from, we were surprised to see a middle-aged man kicking the side of the vehicle. "Who is that?" I asked our host mother. "It's my cousin's husband," she laughed. "No, no, he's OK. He's just drunk."

As this incident further suggests, public intoxication is stigmatized, yet simultaneously normalized in local communities, with those who are intoxicated thought of as "*borrachos*" (drunks). *Tomar mucho*" (to drink a lot) is generally viewed as something that (mostly) men do as a pastime in social settings with other men. When I asked Enrique, a member of our host family in Aldea Bocacosta, why he thinks men in Guatemala drink so much, he responded,

A veces los hombres toman mucho porque intentan impresionar a sus amigos. Toman mucho con sus amigos porque son machistas. Tratan de parecer fuertes.

Sometimes men drink a lot because they want to impress their buddies. They drink a lot with their friends because they are sexist. They try to appear strong.

Additionally, men also drink to escape life's problems and to ease the discomfort of working long, laborious jobs in the fields and other locations. As Enrique, a member of my host family in Municipio Altiplano, mentioned,

Muchos hombres toman mucho después del trabajo. Solo trabajan y toman, y regresen a sus casas bien borrachos. No es bueno por las familias. Pero no pueden decir, "no más" porque son tan machistas. Quieren tomar más y más y más.

Many men drink a lot after work. They only work and drink and return to their houses very drunk. It's not good for families. But they can't say "no more" because they are so sexist. They want to drink more and more and more.

Drinking serves as a socially sanctioned and normalized form of escape for many men, a way to escape from life's challenges and shortcomings. However, as suggested by Enrique's statement, this escape has its consequences on families and intimate partnerships.

In more recent years, increasing evangelical influence in communities has led to a decrease in drinking among men, due to teachings that regularly consuming alcohol is incompatible with being a faithful evangelical. Although drinking remains a prominent public health concern in communities across Guatemala, including Municipio Altiplano and Aldea Bocacosta, religious influence has made a difference in encouraging men to drink less.

During a focus group that I held with seven local women in Municipio Altiplano, I asked the women participants, ranging from 18 to 62 years of age, if women can also go with female friends to drink in the *cantinas* when life gets stressful. Although I was generally aware of what the answer would be, I asked anyway to see what their reactions would be:

"Ay, no!" one participant responded. "It's not possible for us." When I asked why not, another participant chimed in,

Simplemente no es posible para nosotras como mujeres. No es una posibilidad porque la gente va a chismear. No es algo que nos permiten hacer. No es una costumbre aquí para las mujeres. Para los hombres, sí. Ellos tienen el derecho a salir con sus amigos. Una mujer, no se puede. ¿Qué va a decir a la gente? Como gente Indígena, somos muy conservativas. Las mujeres no se pueden tomar en público.

It simply is not possible for us as women. It is not a possibility because the people will gossip. It is not something that we are permitted to do. It is not a custom here for women. For men, yes. They have the right to go out with their friends. A woman cannot. What would the people say? As Indigenous people, we are very conservative. Women can't drink in public.

While I have heard that some women “closet drink,” and that there is an occasional female community member in both field sites who regularly consumes alcohol, collectively, women consuming alcohol in public settings is socially frowned upon and starkly contrasts with gender norms associated with being an Indigenous woman. In Municipio Altiplano, I noticed that women with higher formal education levels would indulge in an occasional glass of wine or beer during a social event, but do not publicly consume alcohol in settings with acquaintances out of fear of being called a “*borracha*” (drunk woman). I did not see women drink at all in Aldea Bocacosta.

Interviews with survivors in both Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano attributed the abuse that they endured to their partners consumption of alcohol. Women commonly stated that their former or current partners would physically hit (*pegar*) them when they were intoxicated. Partners' heightened states of aggression were also attributed to drinking copious amounts of alcohol.

Pati, a 23-year-old woman born and raised in a very small *aldea* located in the highlands above Municipio Altiplano, moved away from her mother when she was just 15 years old to reside with her current partner. Pati currently has two children, ages six, four, and another baby on the way. Pati works from home, as is the case for women residing in very rural areas. She

spends her days washing clothes, making food at home, and taking care of her children. Pati also collects wood to fuel her stove (a task that typically takes about three hours to complete). Her husband works in the countryside (*campo*), where he spends hours every day using a *machete* for his agricultural work, trimming carrots.

As we continued our conversation, Pati made a point to state that one of the main differences between men and women is that men come home and drink beer after a long day's work. "It's the problem with husbands," she lamented. She went on to share that when her husband comes home from work, he "hurts her a lot."

Cuando regresa del trabajo me pega mucho. Me dice que no trabajé lo suficiente en casa y que estaba hablando con hombres en el mercado.

When he returns from work, he hits me a lot. He tells me that I didn't work hard enough at home and tells me that I was talking to men at the market.

Pati initially went to church while experiencing these problems with her husband, but was not satisfied with the messages that she received during church services:

Fui a la iglesia, pero el pastor dijo que las mujeres tienen que ser muy submisas al hombre. Que tenemos que servir a los hombres. Pero en realidad uno tiene que tener valor.

I went to church, but the pastor said that women have to be submissive to the man. That we have to serve men. But in reality, one has to have worth.

Pati's criticism of her church's message about women needing to be submissive to men suggests a shift in collective attitudes regarding gender norms and roles. This statement demonstrates that Pati has internalized messaging regarding women's rights and women's empowerment, despite her church's teachings.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted the lived, local experiences of Indigenous women as they navigate life's challenges, including both economic instability and GBV. As the data in this

chapter show, there is not a template for how one navigates life, decision-making, and relationships while or after experiencing GBV. Moving forward from GBV requires change, resilience, and negotiation, with oneself, one's partner, with God, and others. In the following chapter, I shift my lens to examining the lived experiences of women who sought and received formalized forms of assistance from governmental organizations and NGOs. By highlighting the lived experiences of Indigenous women who have personally sought out and received formalized forms of support for GBV, I illuminate the existing challenges associated with the Guatemalan legal system in its attempts to penalize GBV and offer formalized support to survivors.

CHAPTER SIX:
INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES SEEKING AND RECEIVING GBV
SERVICES IN GUATEMALA

Introduction

As I describe in Chapter Four, legal changes regarding GBV in Guatemala within the past sixteen years have resulted in increased public attention, both in formal and informal settings, regarding emergent women’s rights and empowerment efforts. In addition to shifting conversations, this decade has also seen an increase in “services” provided by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. While conducting fieldwork, I was curious about what services for GBV survivors exist, where Indigenous women in both the Municipio Altiplano and Aldea Bocacosta typically seek services, beliefs regarding institution types, the challenges associated with seeking services, and the outcomes of such service-seeking. These interests directly correspond to dissertation Research Question #3: What are Indigenous Maya service seekers’ experiences with governmental agencies and NGOs’ services designed to prevent and reduce GBV?

The majority of “service seekers” had gone to multiple agencies for assistance with their case (*caso*), thus demonstrating the effort and resources that GBV survivors expend while seeking formalized assistance. In this chapter, I first provide a general overview of how services are governmentally and non-governmentally provisioned. I then discuss the most prominent service “types” that I encountered during fieldwork, provide an overview of how themes of trust, literacy, transportation, childcare, fear, participants’ feelings entering organizations and receiving services affect service access. I conclude this section by discussing participants’

experiences healing after violence and illuminate different perspectives of justice. Lastly, I provide a brief discussion and further analysis of the themes covered in this section.

General Overview of GBV Service System

I find it useful to begin this section with a brief description of the overall GBV service system in Guatemala. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, there is a pronounced separation between rural and urban geographic areas in Guatemala when it comes to formal and informal employment opportunities, economic resources, health-related information, and services including legal services, specialized trainings, and access to commercial goods and food products. As made even more clear through this research, there is also a distinct cultural difference related to gender norms and expectations between rural and urban areas.

In the more remote, rural *aldeas* that I visited and lived in throughout the course of this project, at times, it is socially frowned upon for women to leave their homes. This social expectation is even more pronounced for women in abusive relationships, especially those experiencing coercive control (Hamberger et al. 2017). It is also less common for women to travel independently to neighboring towns, and many of the women whom I talked to expressed fear of traveling to unknown areas due to “not knowing” people there and what could possibly happen. This information is important to keep in mind when examining and discussing formal services for GBV.

Geographically, Guatemala is divided between 22 departments. Each department has a departmental center, often possessing the same name as the entire department, but not always. Out of these 22 departments, there are a total of 340 municipalities. Additionally, each municipality has several small, remote villages (*aldeas*), sometimes up to 20, under its governance, located in peripheral areas. Police presence in *aldeas* is typically non-existent

because police stations are primarily located in Departmental Centers and Municipalities. Each municipal center, a prominent building that is in the center of each municipality, now has a one-roomed Small Governmental Women's Office dedicated to processing formal, legal complaints (*denuncias*) and alimony cases and offering community outreach workshops (*charlas*) and small food donations to GBV survivors. These offices are certainly a step in the right direction in increasing service access for women, but, as I mention in the section discussing my conversation with Ofilia (social worker at the municipal women's office in the Municipio Altiplano), the services and staff members are limited regarding the needs of the women in underserved and hard-to-access communities.

Municipalities are also home to local "justice of peace" offices called "El Juzgado de Paz," where women can also file formal, legal complaints (*denuncias*) for abuse cases, file for alimony and protection orders, and receive other services as needed. Local branches of the Ministerio Público, the investigative body governed by the Guatemalan Attorney General, are also housed in municipalities, with their larger, regional offices housed in Departmental Centers. These branches are dedicated solely to investigating and processing criminal caseloads.

In addition to these small women's offices, another organizational product of the 2008 femicide law is the creation of specialized courts dedicated specifically to femicide cases and cases pertaining to additional forms of violence against women. Seventeen of Guatemala's 22 departments have Courts for Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women. While it is not uncommon for non-profit and governmental organizations to offer services to rural communities, the primary locations for these agencies are almost uniquely present in either municipalities or departmental centers, thus limiting access for rural women and almost always

requiring rural service-seekers to travel to either municipalities or departmental centers for services other than those rarely, yet occasionally offered in their local *aldeas*.

An overarching theme in this research is the urgent need for sustainable and specialized services in rural areas to eliminate the financial burden on survivors, eliminate fear and inconvenience associated with traveling far distances, and services tailored to local customs, languages, and cultural norms. The relationship between governmental and non-governmental institutions remains complicated. It is not uncommon for these entities to work together, although such collaboration is often impeded by governmental standards and regulations monitoring the types of programs available, whereas NGOs maintain more autonomy in terms of programmatic decision-making. Guatemala also lacks a comprehensive coalition or national domestic violence network unifying agencies working on this public health issue. In the following section, I lay out some of the most common “service types” received by GBV survivors.

Service Types and Where They Fall Short

Common service types such filing formal, legal complaints (*denuncias*), protection orders, and legally requesting alimony payments are part of the governmental system but are offered in both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Drawing from conversations with Indigenous women who have received these service types, I argue that, while these services are useful to some women, women’s conditions in Guatemala will not improve without addressing the underlying social determinants and every day, localized challenges leading to social inequities.

Denuncias/ formal, legal complaints

One of the most common “formal” services that exists for women experiencing GBV in Guatemala is filing a formal, legal complaint (*hacer una denuncia*). *Denuncias* can be filed in a variety of settings, though most women I interviewed had filed them at the Juzgado de Paz (Justice of Peace), the local women’s office located in the municipal governmental building located in every municipality, with the Policia Nacional (National Police), the Ministerio Publico (Public Ministry), and with lawyers in both governmental and non-governmental settings. In addition to these settings the following national agencies also process GBV cases: La Organismo Judicial (the Judicial Body), La Procuraduría General de la Nación (The Attorney General’s Office), La Coordinadora Nacional para la Prevención de la Violencia Intrafamiliar y en Contra de la Mujer (CONAPREVI) (The National Coordinator for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women), el Centro de Apoyo Integral para la Mujer Sobreviviente de Violencia (CAIMUS) (The Comprehensive Support System for Women Survivors of Violence), with the Secretaria Presidencial de la Mujer (SEPREM) (Presidential Secretary for Women, and the Instituto de la Defensa Pública Penal (IDPP) (The Institute of Public Criminal Defense), although these institutions are not widely spread and rarely permeate to rural areas. Drawing connections to my argument in Chapter Four, the omnipresence of locations where women can file a *denuncia* starkly contrasts with the lack of justice being achieved. Additionally, this omnipresent “*culture of denunciar*” also serves as a distraction from other educational and health-related factors that are deeply rooted in structural violence (Farmer 2004) and fail to be addressed by the state.

One morning in March 2022, I attended a celebration for International Women’s Day sponsored by the “Small Governmental Women’s Office” in the *municipio* (municipality)

governing the Aldea Bocacosta. I was invited to the event three weeks earlier by local women's office employees with whom I had built a significant rapport. Upon entering the small, hot room located above the governmental offices, I walked in on my *compañeras* (friends) constructing a balloon arch, even though the meeting was already scheduled to begin. Twenty or so women were in attendance. Approximately 50 percent of the women were wearing *traje* (traditional dress), which is less commonly worn in the Bocacosta region compared to the Altiplano. Many of the attendees smiled at me as I sat down, and a few children shyly whispered to their mothers about there being a “*gringa*” in the room. A young girl asked to touch my blonde hair, to which I agreed with a smile. The room was lively as women made small talk with family members who had accompanied them, as well as other women whom they recognized from the neighborhood. After about five minutes, the governmental employee, Kelsi, who traveled several hours by *moto* (motorbike) from Guatemala City, started the presentation.

Using PowerPoint slides, Kelsi began by discussing how Guatemala is “united in the community prevention of violence.” She went on to provide formal definitions of the terms, “*víctima*” (victim) and “*femicidio*” (femicide) and, “*misoginia*” (misogyny). She then went on to explain the legal penalties for each type of violence against women; femicide, (25 to 50 years in prison), physical violence (five to 12 years in prison), sexual violence (five to eight years in prison), and psychological violence (five to eight years in prison).

Kelsi then proceeded to discuss the “culture of making a formal, legal complaint” (*cultura de denunciar*).

La cultura de la denuncia son acciones de prevención de violencia, hacienda uso de propio derecho de petición, para poner en conocimiento de las autoridades hechos circunstancias que tiendan a vulnerar derechos protegidos, reduciendo delitos o faltas a través de la denuncia oportuna.

The culture of making a formal, legal complaint is preventative actions for violence, making use of own's right to petition, to bring facts to the attention of authorities that tend to violate protected rights, reducing crimes or misdemeanors through a timely report.

The main message of Kelsi's presentation was that Guatemalan women have a legal right to file a *denuncia* and showed a series of slides pertaining to the importance of filing one, the phone number one may call to do so, as well as the selection of offices and agencies where one can go to make a formal, legal complaint. She also described who can file a *denuncia*. In addition to the person(s) directly involved in the incident, multiple parties are legally obliged to file a formal complaint. In Kelsi's words, these parties include: 1) anyone; 2) any person, when the aggrieved victim suffers physical or mental incapacity or when the person is prevented from requesting it (the complaint) themselves, 3) any member of the family, 4) educational health service members, 5) doctors who, for occupational reasons, have contact with the aggrieved person for whom the complaint will be mandatory in accordance with Article 298, Decree Number 51 92 of the Congress of the Republic. Whoever fails to make this complaint will be punished according to those established in the criminal code, 6) non-governmental organizations and social organizations whose purpose is to promote the rights of women, minors, and, in general, those that address family problems, and 7) if the victim is a minor, he or she will be represented by the public ministry when the following circumstances occur.

However, there is a significant discrepancy between the written law and what really ends up manifesting in communities. Here, I briefly return to the anecdote of Rosa in the Municipio Altiplano, mentioned in the prologue of this dissertation, who witnessed her female neighbor being physically assaulted by her partner and wished to file a *denuncia* upon the police officers' arrival. Even though the neighbor is legally permitted to file the *denuncia* after directly witnessing the violent incident, the police officer nevertheless stated that the neighbor could not

make a complaint because they did not know the survivor, even though the information included in Kelsi's presentation states that "anyone" can file one.

Additionally, even though there are legal repercussions for medical professionals who do not report GBV cases, none of the clinical staff whom I spoke with at the health post (Puesto de Salud) in Municipio Altiplano mentioned filing a *denuncia* on behalf of the GBV survivor. This, like many other lived experiences highlighted in this dissertation, further highlights the mismatch between what exists on paper and what is practiced.

I could not help but be critical of this presentation's content for multiple reasons. Because I attended this workshop towards the end of my fieldwork, I was already aware of many GBV survivors' experiences filing *denuncias*, the results of such *denuncias*, and the daily lives and urgent needs of survivors. I also knew that, despite the legal sentences that Kelsi explained for each GBV type, very few survivors see their day in court. Questions that ran through my mind included, "What other choices do women have except for *denunciar* (filing a *denuncia*)?" "What other forms of assistance does the government provide to GBV survivors?" "What forms of support exist for women after making the choice to *denunciar*?" "Is the Guatemalan government funding any efforts to further women's education and economic opportunities in this area?" among many others. Through attending these sessions, I could not help but feel as if these events serve an opportunity for the government to show "all that they do" for women, while simultaneously neglecting the inherent structural factors such as lack of infrastructure, poverty the lack of formal employment, women's access to education, and other GBV risk factors.

Kelsi's presentation abruptly ended after discussing the "culture of *denunciar*" and provided no further suggestions for what options women can take when experiencing GBV apart from *denunciar*. Seconds after the presentation ended, the "Indigenous Queen," (similar to a

pageant winner, who has demonstrated thorough knowledge of Indigenous language, values, and *costumbres* (customs)), attending the meeting with her mother took photos with Kelsi and other workers from the local municipal women’s office in front of a decorated display with the words, “ Women’s Day” (*Día de la Mujer*) adorned with a small, purple balloon arch and twinkle lights. Other women attendees also made their way to the decorated display, giggling as they took pictures together to post on their social media pages.

After the meeting, I conversed with a few attendees who were curious about my presence, and then proceeded to walk down the steps leading to the outside of the municipal building. I started chatting with an Indigenous woman around 35-years-old named Lydia. I asked Lydia what she thought about the activity (*charla*), and if she had attended meetings like this in the past. “I always attend whatever meetings they have,” she stated. She said that she likes attending the meetings because she likes to chat with (*platicar*) and meet other women, but that she thinks there needs to be more done in the community to help women, especially GBV survivors.

She told me about how she herself had had an abusive relationship in the past, but now she mainly attends the events for her sister, who is currently in a “bad” situation. “Filing a formal, legal complaint does not mean justice. Those are two different things,” she stated. She went on to tell me about how her sister has filed a formal complaint, but it did not make a difference in her case. Lydia’s story is only one example of how legal resources fall short in offering women survivors true justice. Many of the women whom I have spoken to in both field site settings have identified the strong need for justice, also stating that justice is a possible prevention strategy with regards to its emphasis on penalizing perpetrators of violence.

After chatting with Lydia, I walked out to the main street to catch the *microbus*, a heavily used van serving as local transportation for short distances, to make my way back to the Aldea

Bocacosta, about a 15-minute ride on mostly flat roads, passing a few neighboring *aldeas* with vast tropical scenery. As I walked, I caught up with Bella, an attendee of the event. I asked her how she was doing. She said that she was doing well and went on to share her opinion of the activity (*charla*).

The workshops are very beautiful. I like to attend when I can. But I already knew to make a formal, legal complaint. But the problem is what happens after separating. There are no services to assist women with looking for an education, jobs, and money. This would help us more.

Las charlas son muy bonitas. Me gusta asistir cuando puedo. Pero ya sabía hacer una denuncia. Pero el problema es lo que pase después de separarse. No hay recursos por asistir las mujeres con buscar una educación, empleos, y dinero. Eso nos ayudaría más.

The primary form of legal/penal action offered to women clients in both governmental and non-governmental organizations is called a “*denuncia*” (formal/legal complaint). *Denuncias* are made with the assistance of a lawyer working for an organization, typically as a first step upon seeking services at an organization. These formal complaints can be made about any type of abuse, including emotional and physical abuse. I was surprised to learn during interviews with judges and lawyers that, unlike GBV court hearings in the U.S., clients (*usarias*) do not have to provide proof of physical, emotional, or other forms of abuse in the form of photographs nor text messages, WhatsApp messages, among other potential sources of information. During interviews with both local and femicide judges, I learned that the judge determines the degree to which the survivor was affected by abusive behaviors based on how they act in court (e.g., if they cry or appear physically distressed/distraught).

It is also possible for women to hire a personal lawyer to assist them with filing a *denuncia*, although this route is much less common due to the high price. While filing a *denuncia*, a client is asked a range of questions pertaining to the situation, requiring women to provide a written statement. For women without formal education, this process can be

particularly difficult and, at times, a source of embarrassment and shame for not being able to read. Also, depending on the organizational climate at that location, this can also lead to a strong power divide, leading women to feel hesitant about seeking services in the future when they need them. This concern was especially pertinent the Bocacosta region, where women are less likely to have received formal education compared to their male counterparts.

Despite the lack of resulting penal consequence and justice, this study's findings also suggest that the process of filing a *denuncia* was validating and "empowering" for women. As is true for many survivors of intimate partner violence (GBV), many women do not know that they are experiencing violence, especially emotional violence, while in it is occurring in the relationship and reach a turning point of discovery, women reported feeling a sense of comfort and relief having their story heard by organizational staff and learning that what they were experiencing is considered abuse. Women also stated that they felt empowered knowing that they have rights as mandated by the law.

There are also grave physical safety concerns associated with filing a *denuncia*. This process can be potentially dangerous for women because of its direct request for penal, legal action. Unlike agencies in the U.S., only one of the organizations had security cameras. This specific organization was run by an Executive Director from the United States, who may have had to adhere to safety standards as part of funding requirements. Additionally, due to the dearth of domestic violence shelters, there are few guaranteed, "safe" spaces for women to temporarily stay in fear of their former partner harassing or stalking them. And, while many women stay with family members out of necessity, the fact that former partners likely know of these locations can also pose as a further safety concern. As the director of the National Organization for Women Mazatenango stated,

No hay nada. Hay una necesidad tremenda de refugios aquí en Guatemala. Especialmente en las áreas rurales, donde hay menos servicios y recursos. Algunas mujeres no tienen familia con quien puedan vivir, y a veces, la pareja sabe dónde vive la familia de ella, y puede ser peligroso después de separarse.

There isn't anything. There is a tremendous need for shelters here in Guatemala. Especially in the rural areas, where there are less services and resources. Some women don't have family with whom they can stay/live, and sometimes, their partners know where their families live, so it can be dangerous after they separate.

The director went on to state that it is one of her dreams to start a shelter for GBV survivors in the Bocacosta region, she does not know where to get the funds. I asked her if her agency could apply for grant funding to support the building of a shelter, and she stated that, because they are a governmentally funded organization, they cannot petition for grant funds, and that their programming is strictly limited to what the organizational leaders govern. Therefore, the inundation of information pertaining to the importance of filing a *denuncia* very rarely leads to justice.

Alimony payments

In addition to *denuncias*, alimony payments (*pensión alimentaria* or, simply, “*alimentación*”) were the second most common service type that participants received. Women in both field site locations expressed deep concern and worry regarding the insufficient amounts of these payments compared to the total expenses of raising, at times multiple, children. For women without secure, formalized forms of income, filing a *denuncia* with a lawyer and receiving alimony payments is a critical move to be able to afford food, shelter, and children's school supplies. In some cases, being able to afford school supplies can determine whether a child will be able to attend school and further their education, even during elementary school years.

Further details pertaining to participants' lived experiences receiving alimony payments are described in the following sections, where I provide more thorough details pertaining to the service-seeking experiences of Indigenous women. After hearing several women express their concerns regarding the amounts of alimony payments insufficiently covering their children's economic needs, I made it a point to ask the local judge in the municipality governing Aldea Bocacosta how monthly alimony payment amounts are determined. He stated, "There is no specific number. We decide the amount based on the man's income." However, as one participant stated, this is problematic because some men have multiple sources of income. Additionally, some of the income sources are "informal," positions, where the person could be earning income from multiple sources without it being formally documented.

Another barrier that emerged regarding alimony payments is the waiting period that clients (*usarias*) have to endure in order to receive their payments. On average, interviewees from both field site locations had to wait an average of several months up to several years to start to receive payments. This further suggests how women disproportionately face the economic consequences of separation. Additionally, apart from economic empowerment programs, there are few programmatic efforts in place to help women bridge this gap in financial support. Several women described experiencing negative emotions related to not receiving their payments on time and not knowing when they would receive payment.

I interviewed the Juzgado de Paz in the municipality governing the Aldea Bocacosta in his office after first making an appointment two weeks in advance. An Indigenous male in his mid-to-late 50s, he was dressed in a black suit. He stated that, before becoming a judge, he worked as a lawyer, but decided to become a judge because he really wanted to help people. "It's easy to sign, it's difficult to serve and help the people. An underlying problem, however, is the

“*ciclo de violencia domestica*” (domestic violence cycle). Having personally worked as a domestic violence advocate on two separate occasions in the U.S., I had previously referred to the domestic violence cycle during educational sessions and one-on-one meetings with clients. I was curious what the judge had to say about this cycle.

Aquí en Guatemala las mujeres a veces tienen seis, siete hijos. Pero no están preparados financieramente. Luego, entran en el ciclo de violencia doméstica porque tienen que depender del hombre para obtener dinero. Y luego, cuando salen del ciclo, siguen en el ciclo porque en lugar de depender del hombre, dependen de la pensión alimenticia. Muchas mujeres intentan negociar una cantidad mayor, pero yo conozco a la gente aquí y sé lo que los hombres pueden pagar. Es típico dar Q1000 por cinco niños en un mes (equivalente a \$128). O Q1400 (\$179) por siete niños. Hoy en día hay más protección para las mujeres, pero todavía están en un ciclo.

Here in Guatemala, women sometimes have six, seven children. But they are not financially prepared. Then, they get into the domestic violence cycle because they have to depend on the man for money. And then, when they leave the cycle, they are still in the cycle because instead of depending on the man, they depend on the pension alimentaria. Many women try to negotiate for a higher amount, but I know the people here, and I know what the men can afford. Giving Q1000 for five children in one month (equivalent to \$128) is typical. Or Q1400 (\$179) for seven children. Nowadays, there is more protection for women, but they are still in a cycle.

My main conclusion after reflecting on interviews with women regarding alimony (alimentación) payments is the underlying root cause of poverty in the country and how, until these underlying, structural issues regarding education, employment, and gender and ethnic discrimination are addressed over time, programmatic efforts will continue to fall short in providing women with the resources that they desperately need, as well as true justice.

Protection orders

While less commonly received among participants compared to alimony payments, protection orders are also a legal service provided to GBV survivors. Protection orders are administered after a client expresses immediate safety concerns and can be administered and processed the very next day. Some service recipients (*usarias*) with whom I spoke stated that,

while they did not immediately request a protection order (*medida de protección*) when they initially filed a *denuncia* or sought formal, legal assistance in an organization, after speaking to staff members about their concerns, the staff members recommended that they receive a protection order in order to prevent any further physical violence from ensuing. It is also worth noting that legal protection orders can be administered to current or former partners, regardless of previous or current marital status. Through interviews with legal staff, I learned that protection orders may be granted within 24 hours of the client's initial request.

Protection orders, while sometimes effective, serve as another example of the contrasts between the legal reality and what ends up materializing. While protection orders serve as a formal, legal right that women have, and are swiftly granted. However, without regular police surveillance in many areas, especially rural areas, this legal protection can still fall short of offering women full protection and safety. And while police may end up coming, Additionally, due to the general lack of surveillance cameras, it can be difficult for women to prove that protection were violated, and many had to rely on neighbors and family members to tell them if they saw their former partner near their residence. Nonetheless, interview data suggests that despite these prominent shortcomings, legal protection orders still offered women a psychological sense of protection in that they felt that the law was on their side.

Myra, whose story I provide in greater detail in a further section of this chapter, stated that, because her ex-husband was very aggressive, especially when he consumed alcohol, she felt much better after she received a protection order. "One day, I knew that if I didn't get help, someone was going to die; my ex, me, or my children," she stated. Myra's mother, who also experienced physical abuse from her ex-husband, offered moral support to Myra during this difficult point in her life.

Silvia, a 27-year-old Indigenous woman living in the Aldea Bocacosta, also received a protection order, issued by the Justice of Peace (Juzgado de Paz) in the neighboring municipality on the same day in which she requested it.

Como tengo una orden de protección, él no puede molestarme. Cuando hablé con el Juzgado sentí que me ayudaría. Me sentí protegida en este momento.

Because I have a protection order, he can't bother me. When I spoke to the Juzgado, I felt like he would help me. I felt protected in this moment.

Silvia sought formal assistance from the Juzgado because her ex-husband was verbally threatening her and insulting her. "He spoke to me with very offensive words," she stated.

When I asked Silvia what she learned about her rights after seeking formalized support that she did not know before, she stated,

Aprendí que un marido no puede violarla con palabras ni con golpes porque eso es violencia. Aprendí que no puede tocarme por la ley.

I learned that a husband cannot violate one with words nor beatings because that is violence. I learned that he can't touch me because of the law.

Overall, Silvia stated that she felt supported by the judge and now feels safer due to the protection order. Silvia's quick receipt of the protection order is not uncommon—other women whom I interviewed who received protection orders also received them rather rapidly. Even though she was pleased with her experience, the legal system and associated processes are far from perfect, however. Silvia stated that she was pleased to have received the protection order but wishes there were more services available to improve the lives of women experiencing GBV.

Necesitamos más ayuda. Necesitamos más servicios. Lo que falta son suficientes psicólogos, licenciados, unidades. La policía siempre está en otro lado.

We need more help. We need more services. What is lacking are enough psychologists, *licenciadas* (graduates), police units. The police are always somewhere else.

Lisbet, a social worker at “National Indigenous Women’s Organization Chimaltenango” also identified police “not coming” as another significant drawback to protection orders.

Cuando una medida de seguridad este violado por una pareja, la policía no siempre viene. O tardan muchísimo. No sé por qué. Pero es un problema grave.

When a protection order is violated by a partner, the police don’t always come. Or they take a very long time. I don’t know why. It’s a serious problem.

From an organizational perspective, Silvia’s suggestions further support the immense need for more staff members and more people trained to support GBV survivors. However, because educational access continues to be limited for women and girls due to deeply rooted discrimination and economic factors, therefore leading to less Indigenous women who are available to work in such positions, it may take generations for true change to ensue.

In my conversation with the Juzgado de Paz (whom I mention in the previous section), he spoke highly of protection orders, stating that nowadays, women have more protection than in the past, and protection orders are also now more accessible in the *aldeas*. While discussing the laws, the Juzgado stated that even though the laws states that women are legally entitled to psychological and economic support, many women return to men after experiencing various forms of violence because they do not have access to money after separation.

Las mujeres necesitan tener acceso al dinero. A veces, reciben un duro golpe y no quieren que el hombre vaya a la cárcel porque no tendrán dinero para sus hijos. Necesitamos hacer algo al respecto para que las mujeres no vuelvan a ser victimizadas.

Women need to have access to money. Sometimes, they are hit badly and do not want the man to go to jail because they will not have any money for their children. We need to do something about this so that women do not become revictimized.

When I asked about the parameters associated with issuing a protection order from the judge’s perspective, he stated,

Es libre. Como juez, me adapto a la situación. Damos las órdenes de protección inmediatamente, para que los hombres puedan salir. Normalmente se tarda entre 30 minutos y una hora en dar la orden de protección. Todo depende de la mujer.

It's libre. As a judge, I adapt to the situation. We give the protection orders immediately, so that the men can leave. It usually takes between 30 minutes and one hour to give the protection order. Everything depends on the woman.

This sentiment was echoed by the police chief of the same municipality when I interviewed him at their local station, located down the street from the Juzgado de Paz office.

A veces, no sabemos qué hacer como policía porque una mujer dice que necesita una orden de protección, pero luego rápidamente cambia de opinión y dice que quiere volver con el hombre. Puede resultarnos muy confuso. A veces no sabemos qué hacer porque cambian de opinión muy rápido.

Sometimes, we don't know what to do as police because a woman will say that she needs a protection order, but then quickly change her mind and say that she wants to go back to the man. It can be very confusing for us. Sometimes, we don't know what to do because they change their mind so quickly.

This perspective suggests that, despite having participated in trainings (*talleres*) pertaining to GBV in their local municipality, the police chief may not be entirely aware of how factors such as coercive control, the domestic violence cycle, fear of death, control and manipulation, and economic vulnerability impact survivors' decision-making. In the following section, I further discuss women's experiences deciding whether to seek formalized services for GBV, illuminating the forces that influence such decision-making.

Aguantar o Pedir Ayuda/To Endure or Ask for Help: Decision-making among GBV

Survivors

I interviewed Paola, a twenty-three-year-old K'iche' woman, at "National Indigenous Women's Organization Mazatenago" in an upstairs, confidential room where the staff allocated for me to conduct interviews. After reviewing the verbal consent form and obtaining her verbal consent to conduct the interview, we drank some bread and coffee (*pan y café*) and made small

talk. Then, we started our interview. Paola was from a village (*aldea*) located in the Mazatenango Department. After separating from her child's father six months ago, she now lives with her mom, dad, and three sisters.

Nuestras vidas, como mujeres, no nos dan trabajo. Somos madres. Cuesta buscar trabajo. Vamos a cortar café, banana.

Our lives, as women, they don't give us work. We are mothers. It's difficult to look for work. We are going to cut coffee, bananas.

She went on to tell me that her father plants *semillas de café* (coffee seeds) and that he drinks and is not "responsible." Her mom, "*trata de luchar*" (tries to fight). Paola, who studied in school up until third grade, works *tejiendo* (embroidering), and also makes *huipiles* and *corte* (traditional clothing). She then continued by telling me about the relationship with her ex:

Nos casamos, pero no por la iglesia. Durante los primeros dos meses fuimos felices. Pero luego su actitud cambio por completo. El me diría que hacer y que no hacer. Me dije a mi mismo, 'Aguantare un poco.' Luego me entere que estaba embarazada y empezó a pegarme. Poco a poco, su carácter fue cambiando. Luego recibí la noticia que estaba embarazada y me empezó a pegar. Poco a poco, su carácter cambió. Aguanté ocho meses con él. Gracias a Dios, la doctora en el Centro de Salud me ayudó. Ella me dijo que, si seguía aguantando, podría perder a mi bebé. Ella me ayudó bastante. Ella me dijo que él no va a cambiar, que terminará teniendo ocho hijos, que es mejor tener uno e irse y poder concentrarme en mi hijo.

We got married, but not in the church. For the first two months, we were happy. But then, his attitude completely changed. He would tell me what to do and what not to do. I told myself, 'I will endure a little bit.' Then, I found out that I was pregnant, and he started hitting me. Little by little, his character/attitude changed. I endured eight months with him. Gracias a Dios, the [female] doctor at the Centro de Salud helped me. She told me that if I continued to endure, I could lose my baby. She really helped me. She told me that he won't change, and that she would end up having eight kids, that it's better to have one and leave and be able to focus on my son.

She then went on to tell me about how, after receiving that advice from her doctor, she "started thinking about things" and decided what she needed to do.

El consejo del doctor fue un buen consejo. "Tenía que tomar la decisión y no volver vuelta por atrás. Empecé a estudiar las palabras de ella. Tambien, consulté a la Biblia.

The doctor's advice was good advice. I had to make the decision not to go back. I started to study her words. Also, I consulted the Bible.

Paola continued by telling me how the father of her son did not have a DPI (identification card), although he owned them alimony (*pensión alimentaria*). He then left for the U.S. and is now currently paying from the US. When I asked her how she felt the first time that she went to "National Organization for Indigenous Women" to receive assistance, and she stated that she felt relaxed because her friend told her, "Don't worry, I know the place." She continued by stating, "A man shouldn't leave his son." She went to the Juzgado de Paz in her local town, eight months pregnant at the time. I asked her how she felt walking into the courtroom, and she stated, "I felt like they were going to fix the problem because "there is a law" (*hay una ley*). However, she waited from September to November and had yet to receive a response.

Le dije que por favor me ayudara. Le rogué al juez que me ayudara. Que me den los pagos de la pensión alimentaria. Al principio, el juez no habló. Pero luego me dijo que lo recibiría. Sin embargo, esperé tres meses y no recibí nada. Fue entonces cuando decidí buscar ayuda en la "Organización Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas Mazatenango." Me sentí bien recibiendo servicios en esta organización. Me sentí bien porque puedo pedir comida aquí. Me sentí un poco libre. Estuvo bien. Me ayudaron con el papeleo, con paciencia.

I said please help me. I pleaded with the judge to help me. To give me the alimony payments. At first, the judge didn't speak. But then he stated that I would receive it. However, I waited three months and had not received anything. This is when I decided to seek assistance at the "National Indigenous Women's Office Mazatenango." I felt good receiving services at this organization. I felt good because I can ask for alimony money there. I felt a little free. It was OK. They helped me with the paperwork, with patience. I also feel happy here because the staff wear traditional dress and speak K'iche.' Things that I don't understand very well, they explained.

When I asked her what she learned about the laws that she never knew before, she stated,

Aquí no está fácil dañar a una mujer. Aprendí que tengo el derecho que no me pegue" (Here, it's not easy to damage a woman. I learned that I have the right for him not to hit me). Now, I tell my friends, 'We have the right for them not to mistreat us.' I am thankful to God that the juez (a middle-aged man) had compassion conmigo.

Here, it is not easy to damage a woman. I learned that I have the right to not be hit. It's not easy to damage a woman. I learned that I have a right for him not to hit me. Now,

I tell my friends that we have the right for them not to mistreat us. I am thankful to God that the judge (a middle-aged man) had compassion with me.

Paola's story highlights some important points regarding service-seeking that also emerged during other interviews. First, as Paola mentioned in her beginning statement, I found that it is specifically challenging for women in the Bocacosta region to secure employment compared to the Municipio Altiplano, where there is more generational passing on of Indigenous customs, traditions, and family businesses. This statement is telling of the strong, patriarchal gender division of labor in this region, and the social expectation that women are supposed to conduct care work and domestic work, but not work outside of the home. However, for women like Paola, this can prove challenging when women desperately need to work to supplement family income, and especially in cases where women need to leave abusive relationships for safety purposes.

Second, Paola's experience with her ex-husband is demonstrative of the GBV risk factors associated with marriage and pregnancy (Schrubbe et al. 2023). Like many of the women I interviewed, the dynamics of Paola's relationship with her ex-partner changed after they got married, leading to increased vulnerability after having a child to support.

Additionally, Paola's interaction with the physician at the Centro de Salud in her village offers opportunities for clinical healthcare workers to receive comprehensive training related to screening for GBV. During fieldwork, I conducted informal interviews with *Centro de Salud* medical staff to learn more about their experience screening for GBV in their local communities. I learned that Centro de Salud workers in both field site locations featured in this dissertation did not receive specialized training regarding how to screen for and speak to clients about GBV. Because Centro de Salud centers are in all municipalities and some *aldeas*, these offices are oftentimes more accessible by rural women especially.

There is also significant potential for these health centers to have a staff member (e.g., social worker) to take referrals and work directly with women in case of the need for follow-up or emergency. Because women can state an ulterior reason for visit the center (e.g., physical health reasons), and receive physical exams by medical staff who can see markings of physical violence, this further supports the practicality of training medical staff on GBV detection. Further details pertaining to the utility of training medical staff on domestic violence screening and delivering trauma-informed care are included in recommendations in the concluding chapter.

Paola's experience seeking services at both the Juzgado de Paz and the departmental "National Indigenous Women's Organization" branch is also reminiscent of most clients' experiences going to multiple agencies and organizations for assistance. Paola's concerns about initially seeking services were also eased by her friend's familiarity with the location. And, after receiving services, Paola also informed her friends about the laws and where they could go to potentially receive support for GBV.

In Guatemala and other locations within Latin America, "knowing" or being familiar (*conocer*) with a specific location is closely related to the importance of having "*confianza*" and feeling comfortable with the general environment and service staff. I found that, especially in rural communities, word of mouth is very significant for While information is now available and accessible on the Internet and social media platforms, having good rapport in a community and referrals can make-or-break an organization's reputation and is important for women to feel safe to make the decision to seek support, especially when feeling specifically vulnerable and afraid.

Deciding whether to endure (*aguantar*) or ask for help- in this case, for formal assistance- (*pedir ayuda*) is not a simple decision for GBV survivors. As we know, in most cases, leaving is the most dangerous time for a survivor of domestic violence. While this statistic is most

standardly used to describe GBV cases in the U.S. and other developed countries (Constanza Baldry et al. 2020), it also relevant to the cases that I have encountered in Guatemala.

The decision-making process of whether to seek legal, psychological, and social services emerged as a theme of conversation when talking to both service seekers and women who did not seek formal services. In conversations with participants in both the Municipio Altiplano and Aldea Bocacosta, asking for help (*pedir ayuda*) and enduring (*aguantar*) emerged as two distinct categories. As I described in Chapter 4, to endure (*aguantar*) was an expression typically used in conjunction to the past, to a time before recent women's rights efforts and penal, legal repercussions to various forms of abuse and violence against women. However, with regard to service-seeking, participants used this word as an alternative option to seek formalized forms of support.

Additionally, it was not uncommon for participants to describe their experience enduring (*aguantar*) for a distinct period, and then describe a turning point, oftentimes specific event or incident, that led to them to decide to seek formalized, organizational assistance and support. Some participants would state how they endured (*aguantó*), without seeking services at all. Others would talk about how they endured (*aguantó*) for a duration of time, but then sought formalized support. The lived experiences included further on in this chapter more fully touch on this dichotomization between enduring (*aguantar*) and asking for help (*pedir ayuda*). Fear, described below, emerged in various forms, and served as an impetus for *aguantar* and *pedir ayuda*.

Fear and service-seeking

The concept of fear emerged as a central topic of discussion regarding the difficult choices that GBV survivors make when deciding whether or not to leave their current conditions

at home, and whether or not to seek formal forms of support. “*Tener miedo*” is an expression used to express all-encompassing, more generalized fear of the future, the unknown.

Additionally, like many GBV survivors all over the world, women in both the Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano expressed that they also “*tenían miedo*” (were afraid) of leaving their male domestic partners due to the concern that they could be murdered while trying to leave.

Rosita, a 22-year-old mother of two residing in the Aldea Bocacosta, explained how she felt a strong sense of fear associated with leaving her ex-partner.

Me empezó a pegar. Pero en la calle, era muy feliz, muy tranquilo. Sin embargo, tenía miedo de irme porque no sabía cómo iba a mantener a mis dos hijos.

When he would drink, he became very, very violent. I was afraid to leave, however, because I didn’t know how I would support my two children.

Here, Rosita expresses an all-encompassing sense of *miedo* to describe a general fear pertaining to uncertainty about leaving due to economic insecurity and household changes.

Temor, on the other hand, is an emotion referring to a deeply rooted, specific feeling; a feeling causing women to freeze and not know which actions to take next. *Tener temor* was used to express a strong sensation of nervousness related to apprehension or inhibition due to a specific event or circumstance. Pati, whom I interviewed in the Municipio Altiplano, described how she experienced a strong sense of *temor* when her husband was very intoxicated with alcohol and became violent with her. She stated that she didn’t know how to move, what physical actions to take because she was afraid that the physical abuse would worsen as a result. She prayed to God to calm her nerves.

Cuando tomaba, se volvía muy, muy violento. Tenía esta sensación de temor. Un temor muy, muy fuerte. Oré a mi Diosito para que me proteja.

When he drank, he would become very, very violent. I had this sensation of fear. A very, very strong fear. I prayed to my little God to protect me.

Ser tímida was the most common form of fear that women in both field site locations expressed in relation to seeking services. *Ser tímida* is closely tied to the notion of empowerment about experiencing feelings of unworthiness and uncertainty with regard to seeking services. I found that this was especially true for women in rural areas, who generally experienced a greater sense of isolation and intimidation leaving their local communities to travel to surrounding areas where they do not know many people.

In addition to the concepts of “*tener miedo*,” “*tener temor*” and “*ser tímida*,” women also expressed fear as a driving force for seeking “formal” forms of support and services for GBV. Fear of being killed by their former or current partners also served as a significant deterrent from utilizing the legal system to report domestic crimes. I describe how Doña Frida’s close proximity to dying as a result of GBV served as a catalyst for her to seek formalized forms of support and go on to serve as a leader in her local community.

I first met Doña Frida, whom I also mention in Chapter Four, in 2015 during my MA thesis work. Her story stood out, as she was the only woman of the 30 whom I interviewed who sought formal, legal assistance for the interpersonal violence that she survived. She was first married at the age of 23. She grew up in the town neighboring the Aldea Bocacosta, just a short five-minute drive away. She moved to Aldea Bocacosta after marrying her ex-husband. Doña Frida has five children, ages 24-37.

Since I had last interviewed Doña Frida in 2015, she looked pretty much the same. She re-introduced me to her children, whom I had previously met, and we sat on the porch and ate watermelon and drank coffee. However, she had since moved from the small, one-room house that was renting and residing in with her three children. Doña Frida explained why she decided

to make a *denuncia* (formal legal complaint) and go to the *juzgado* (local judge) in the neighboring *municipalidad* (municipality).

Habría terminado en el cementerio. Quería suicidarme. La mano de un hombre no es suave. La mano de un hombre le duele más que una mujer.

I would have ended up in the cemetery. I wanted to kill myself. “La mano de un hombre no es suave. The hand of a man hurts more than a woman’s.

She went on to explain that her ex-husband wanted to kill her in the *monte* (neighboring mountain) and that he tortured her and treated her badly. Because she knew she could die, she decided to make a formal, legal complaint (*denuncia*) at the Justice of Peace (*juzgado de paz*). The night before she made the *denuncia*, she awoke to her ex-husband strangling her in her bed, despite their recent separation. Doña Frida was able to get his hands off her neck and run, but when she tried to scream, she found that her vocal cords had been damaged by strangulation and that no sounds were coming out.

Corrí, corrí lo más rápido que pude hasta la casa de Doña Cami. Vivía atrás de su casa. Alejandro, su hijo, me escuchó y me dejó entrar. Doña Cami me ayudó. Ella me ayudó para que pudiera seguir adelante. Por eso estoy viva. Al día siguiente fui a la licenciada en Santo Tomás para hacer una denuncia. Nunca tenía la intención de denunciar, pero sabía que tenía que tomar una decisión. Algunas mujeres tienen miedo, especialmente en aquella época. Pero ahora es más común que las mujeres denuncien que cuando lo hacía. Gracias a Dios, ella estaba. Ella me ayudó a comprar comida para mis hijos. Me puse a trabajar. Y recibí un gasto de Q450 (\$58) al mes para los patojos. Él empezó a pagar, pero dejó de hacerlo. También él fue a la cárcel y dejó de pagar. También recibí una orden de protección ordenada por el tribunal. Entonces no teníamos donde vivir, pero yo tenía seguir adelante con mis hijos. Hoy en día no es tan fácil golpear a una mujer. No es tan fácil. Va a ir a la cárcel. Ese amor no es amor.

I ran, I ran as fast as I could to Doña Cami's house. I used to live across the street from her house. Alejandro, her son, heard me and let me in. Doña Cami helped me. She helped me so that I could move forward. Because of that I am alive. The next day, I went to the *licenciada* in Santo Tomas to file a formal, legal complaint. Doña Frida told me that she had never intended on making a formal, legal complaint, but she knew she had to make a decision. Some women are afraid, especially back then. But now, it's more common for women to make formal, legal complaints than when she did. Thank God, she was there. She helped me buy food for my children. I got to work. And I received a monthly allowance of Q450 (\$58)/month for the kids. He started paying but he stopped. He also went to jail and stopped paying. I also received a court-ordered protection order. Then, we had nowhere to live, but I had to move forward with my children. Nowadays, it isn't as easy to beat a woman. It's not as easy. They'll go to jail. That love is not love.

She spent the night at her neighbor's house and went to seek assistance from the local judge the very next day, out of fear for her life. "If I continued living with him, I know he would have killed me," she stated. The judge recommended that she go to National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango. The support that she received at the governmental organization was rather limited at that time.

However, the staff at National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango referred her to Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta, a small non-profit organization located just outside of town, and she decided to participate in their workshop (*charla*). Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta is where I first learned about discrimination against women. Even though she did not receive justice for her case, in that her ex-husband was never penalized for his actions due to fleeing Guatemala for Mexico, the psychologist at the local non-profit organization nonetheless helped her become an empowered woman throughout the course of their sessions. She was satisfied with the services that she received and because of these forms of formal support, she was able to move forward (*seguir adelante*). "With their help, one can defend themselves."

Even though a very small percentage of people who commit GBV-related crimes in Guatemala end up serving jail time, the fact that, currently, GBV-related crimes are legally criminalized to some capacity, represents a significant shift from “how it used to be.”

And despite currently having formalized GBV laws in place, Doña Frida stated,

Las leyes ya faltan mucho, Las leyes no cumplen. Pero estoy muy feliz con el apoyo que recibí. Ahora, soy una mujer empoderada. Y soy una líder en la comunidad. Pero la ley falta mucho. No cumplen las leyes.

The laws are still lacking a lot. The laws don't come true. But I'm still very happy with the support that I received. Now, I am an empowered woman. I am a leader in the community. But the law falls short a lot. The laws don't come true.

Now, Doña Frida draws from her previous experience to help other women. She is a locally appointed leader for the Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta. In her work with the agency, she educates women in her community on their legal rights. She continued,

Como mujeres tenemos un derecho. Tenemos que defendernos. Tenemos el derecho a trabajar. Los hombres y las mujeres dos tienen derecho tener acceso a dinero. Los talleres existen para las mujeres seguir adelante.

As women, we have a right. We have to defend ourselves. We have the right to work. Both men and women have the right to access money. The trainings exist so that women can move forward.

Doña Frida is now happily remarried and has since moved from the one-room house that she was renting when I first met her in 2015. The last time that I visited her at her home before leaving Aldea Bocacosta to head back to the U.S., she proudly pointed across the street and told me that that is where their new, larger house is being built. After saving up for the past five years, she and her husband are looking forward to their brand-new home.

Doña Frida's experience brings forward several important points regarding the relationship between receiving formalized services and healing. First, her story highlights how severity of physical and emotional violence paired with the fear of death oftentimes leads women

to seeking both informal and formalized forms of support. The “informal” assistance and support that she received from her neighbor likely saved her life.

Additionally, her experience feeling a sense of empowerment after receiving psychological services and thus being able to move forward (“*seguir adelante*”) shows how receiving formalized support can help survivors develop increased confidence through empowerment and thus be able to heal and move forward with their lives. Lastly, Doña Frida drawing from her personal experiences with GBV to serve women in her local village (*aldea*) is demonstrative of local leadership and transnational feminism among Indigenous communities of women in rural areas. The fact that Doña Frida is now in a happy time in her life is also representative of her success after seeking assistance for the abuse and near-death-experience that she endured.

I was surprised to find that many of the women whom I spoke to in Aldea Bocacosta and peripheral areas were not generally familiar with the organization, nor its location, despite the fact that people frequently pass the building on their way to one of the commonly frequented, neighboring towns. People in Aldea Bocacosta were more familiar with the governmental organization, National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango, despite its much further location of one hour by bus versus the 15-minute bus ride to Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta.

As an applied component of this project, I met with the incoming director of “Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta to discuss some of the general themes that emerged during interviews. Because the director is also from Aldea Bocacosta, we also discussed how to better engage local women in their programs and increase knowledge of the agency in town.

Más confianza/more trust: opinions regarding governmental and non-governmental organizations

“*Confianza*,” is a common term among Latin American populations connoting a strong sense of “trust.” “Trust” or “rapport” as potential translations do not fully encompass the depths and nuances of this phenomenon. Everything pertaining to social relationships, seeking support, buying products, hiring someone to conduct a particular job, relies heavily on this concept of *confianza*. If someone does not have “*confianza*” in you, you can almost guarantee that the interaction or relationship will be limited in some way. It is also worth noting that *confianza* can also be influenced if someone that someone else has *confianza* in has *confianza* in you. *Confianza* is something that is built in relationships over time, and once it is received, relationships are oftentimes warm, trusting, open, uninhibited, and free flowing.

Participants spoke of the importance of “*confianza*” regarding relationships and interactions spanning a broad spectrum, including social relationships, community relationships, and confidence and trust entering organizations and receiving services. During interviews and informal conversations, I asked participants if they have more “*confianza*” in governmental or non-governmental organizations. Most informants were quick to respond, “non-governmental.”

However, upon asking women receiving assistance from governmental organizations, I was surprised to find that most women who did seek support and services from the governmental, Indigenous women’s organizations were pleased and satisfied with their experiences. Rather surprisingly, most people in both field sites were more aware of the governmental organizations compared to the non-governmental organizations, but non-governmental organizations generally had better reputations due to their limited affiliation with the government.

Clients (*usarias*) whom I interviewed expressed comfortability with National Organization for Indigenous Women governmental organization branches in particular because of their specific focus on Indigenous rights and because their service staff members are of Indigenous ethnicity and speak Indigenous languages. As I express elsewhere, a major drawback to this organization, however, is significant lack of funding and lack of flexibility in programmatic efforts due to being a governmental organization and strictly receiving governmental funding.

When I asked Loni, a 34-year-old K'iche' Maya mother of two in Aldea Bocacosta, about whether she has more trust (*confianza*) in governmental organizations or non-governmental organizations, she was quick to state, "governmental organizations," and went on to say that her friends and family members feel the same way. Having worked for two NGOs herself, Loni was familiar with the general culture of non-profit organizations, including details pertaining to programming, funding, management, networking, and other defining characteristics. I had known Loni since 2015 and, during my visits to Aldea Bocacosta and got to know both her and her family very well. Loni's parents placed strong emphasis on maintaining strong Christian values and emphasizing the importance of securing formal education while raising their four daughters. I always knew Loni and her sisters to really value their education and work experience first before romantic relationships, as their parents instructed.

At the time of fieldwork for this project in 2022, it had been four years since I had last seen Loni. Within the past four years, Loni had fallen deeply in love and had gone on to marry Ricardo, 20, who is fourteen years younger than her. Ricardo and Loni met after participating in several church events together. Loni stated that she was initially attracted to Ricardo because he was, "very helpful" (*muuy servicial*). They now have two young children. Loni became pregnant

with their first child before marriage. “I compromised my parents’ respect. But thankfully, they never kicked me out of their home. They just took away my inheritance and asked me to marry my baby’s father.”

After visiting with Loni several times after re-arriving to Aldea Bocacosta, I had noticed a slight change in Loni’s behavior, suggesting that something may be wrong in the relationship between her and her husband. When I asked her how things are going with her husband, she stated that overall, it is going well, but that she is tired because she wakes up at 3 AM every morning to hand-wash clothes, carry wood in from outside to power their stove, and prepare her husband’s breakfast before he heads to work in the fields. She also stated that she is a little worried (*preocupada*) because he is not accustomed to following the rules that her parents are expecting him to follow, since he resides in a home on their property.

No es fácil, pero es muy importante que él sepa las reglas. Él trabaja afuera de la casa, pero eso no significa que puede salir entre la noche. Mi familia no es así. Un matrimonio tiene reglas. Hay cosas de cumplir, responsabilidades.

It’s not easy, but it’s very important that he knows the rules. He works away from home, but that does not mean that he can go out into the night. My family is not like that. A marriage has rules. There are things to accomplish, responsibilities.

In Loni’s case, both she and her husband work full-time. She currently serves as the manager of the town’s local computer lab that is part of a small, local non-profit organization. During our conversation, we naturally discussed gender roles and marital expectations.

Es necesario mantener igualdad en la pareja. Voy a continuar a trabajar. Mi familia no quiere que solo trabajo en la casa. Mi familia no es así.

It is necessary to maintain equality in the couple. I am going to continue working. My family doesn’t want me to only work in the house. My family isn’t like that.

It is clear that, while Loni is accustomed to an upbringing that includes a great deal of gender equality, and valuing her position as a woman in society, she is currently experiencing a balancing act in her relationship with her husband. When I would return to visit Loni, usually

once a week, I noticed that she didn't have quite the same spark as I had known her to have in the past.

Returning to the concept of trusting certain types of organizations, it was evident that people, especially in the Aldea Bocacosta, were generally accustomed to and maintaining a strong sense of independence apart from governmental control and operation. The reasons for their preferences ranged from strong distrust in the government, historical factors rooted in "*La Violencia*" (the Guatemalan Civil War), and the understanding that external organizations don't discriminate and have additional funding sources. I also found that, in both field sites, governmental organizations were better known "on the street." When I asked if they knew about the NGOs that were part of this study, people were generally less aware of the NGOs in their local areas, as well as the NGO locations. Below, I discuss Doña Natali's story, whose complex situation with her ex-husband has led her to have inhibitions with regards to seeking services at a non-profit organization in her town.

I entered Doña Natali's home, a considerably large, two-story building made of white concrete, after arranging to conduct an interview about one week in advance. Despite the large size of the home, upon entering, I noticed that it was particularly bare. "I had to sell everything I had to feed the children," Doña Natali stated. There is no lighting/electricity due to not being able to pay the electric bill. After talking for a bit, we started our interview in her living room, modestly furnished with two chairs and a TV stand, but no TV.

Doña Natali told me that she is currently doing anything that she can to support her five children. She currently sells whatever she can, including chickens, small amounts of vegetables, and embroiders *huipiles* to sell. Like many women whom I interview, she is concerned with paying expenses associated with her children's schooling. Her children's father works as a police

officer and, because of this, her fear for seeking formal support was exacerbated even more due to the connections that he has and his negative portrayal of her identity in public. This was not an uncommon phenomenon among women in both field sites. Even in the Municipio Altiplano, which is about five times the geographic size and significantly more populated than the Aldea Bocacosta, women expressed fear of their partners who worked in governmental positions or other positions of power.

“He hit me many times, sometimes at 1 or 2 AM,” she stated. “He would hit me in the ribs. And I would just cry and cry on the floor, hugging myself. She was facing these very difficult challenges during the pandemic and simultaneously had to help her kids as they were conducting homeschooling. “He wouldn’t give me a *gasto*” (designated allotment of income), she stated. My friend even had to give me milk so that my six-year-old son could eat.” She went on to explain how, after her separation and due to her dire situation, she went to the “Muni” (municipal governmental building) to ask for permission to leave after the 4 PM governmental mandate to remain indoors to work. They granted her permission to do so, though it was difficult because no one else was allowed to leave their homes until the morning.

Doña Natali filed a *denuncia* at the local non-profit organization focused on women’s rights, and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, it took 1.5 years before she was interviewed for her case. In addition to the local non-profit organization, she also went to both the Ministerio Público, and another organization located in Chimaltenango. She was finally granted Q1350/month in alimony, equivalent to 175 U.S. dollars. However, this allotment is far from enough to support her five children, including food, clothing, school supplies, household items, and other necessities. Like many women in Guatemala, when was married to her ex-husband, she depended on the income from his “formal” position as a police officer to support

her family and children. When the relationship ended, Doña Natali, who only studied through the sixth grade, found herself in a desperate economic situation, barely able to afford food for her family. Additionally, her ex-husband fathered children from six different women, further complicating the situation and making the money that he owed to her even less.

Me aseguré de que los niños tuvieron suficiente para comer. Muchas veces teníamos que comer alimentos sencillos, tortillas y arroz, tal vez algunas verduras. No Podemos darnos el lujo de comer carne. A veces tengo unos pollos que podrá matar y comer, pero tiene más sentido venderlos por dinero cuando crezcan suficiente.

I made sure that the children had enough to eat. A lot of times, we had to eat simple foods, tortillas, rice, maybe some vegetables. We can't afford to eat meat. Sometimes, I have a chicken I could kill and eat, but it makes more sense to sell them for money once they grow big enough.

During our interview, Doña Natali showed me the bicycle cart that her brother recently built for her as a gift so that she can travel more easily around town to sell her small selection of fruits and vegetables door-to-door. Despite this assistance from her brother, Doña Natali's family and support system live in another village, several hours from Municipio Altiplano. She stated that, though she would love to see them, she did not have the money to go visit them. She attends church on a regular basis and receives support from close friends there, as well as from the pastor.

Doña Natali described how her current home, where she has been raising her children and where she lived with her ex-husband, is owned by him. She stated that her ex-husband is currently using the home as a form of control over her, but she has nowhere else to go. During the pandemic, she stated that being locked in the house with her ex-husband while simultaneously having to homeschool her children was very stressful and led to a general decline in her mental health.

Doña Natali's story is illustrative of the economic difficulties that many women in Guatemala experience after separating from their male partners. The lack of social support, formal education and training, and stable, sustainable economic opportunities are a palpable topics of concern for many GBV survivors. Additionally, her story highlights how, in most cases, women are disproportionately responsible for providing for children after separation. The gendered nature of economic insecurity makes it even more difficult to support themselves after separation, thus leading some women to stay in abusive relationships out of fear of not being able to support themselves and their children due to limited economic opportunities and limited formal education.

Approximately three months later, I walked a short distance down a dirt road with the research assistant for this study to see how Doña Natali was doing. "I have a little problem," she stated. She went on to tell me about how she wanted to go to the local non-governmental organization for assistance with her case, but her ex-husband's cousin's sister works there. I told her that, technically, the employees likely have confidentiality rules that they must follow, which I was aware of from having also conducted participant observation and interviews at that organization.

No le importa. La conozco. Yo sé que ella le hablaría de mí. Podría causar más problemas.

It doesn't matter. I know her. I know that she would talk to him about me. It could cause more problems.

I then suggested another organization that could potentially help her, one that I know helps cover the transportation costs for its clients. Doña Natali's narrative shows how, even though additional concerns such as breaches of confidentiality and gossip can impact whether

survivors feel comfortable seeking services and sharing their stories with staff members who may have local ties to the community.

In addition to Doña Natali's story, Lourdes' experience is also demonstrative of some of the unique challenges faced by GBV survivors in Guatemala, as well as how "the system" assisted her in regaining custody of her children after briefly losing custody. I first met Lourdes while visiting our next-door neighbors in Aldea Bocacosta, Doña Irina's daughter and her husband. Lourdes was cleaning their house and doing laundry, smiling, and singing as she completed her work. While I sat chatting with Doña Irina's granddaughter, Lourdes asked me why I was in town, and if I had ever been in Aldea Bocacosta before, and if I liked being in Guatemala. I answered her questions and told her about some of the work that I was doing in town. She went on to briefly share her experience with me and stated that she would like to participate in an interview.

The following day, I walked the short distance to the end of the soccer field, where I met up with Lourdes. As we climbed steps made of mud and rubber tires up the hill to her neighborhood, Lourdes and I made small talk. Upon entering her home, I handed her a "*vivere*" for her participation, consisting of fresh fruit, packaged rice and beans, cooking oil, and a few other household items. "Thank you very much," she stated, a large smile across her face.

Lourdes' home was smaller than most other homes in the Aldea Bocacosta, built from thin sheets of metal (*lámina*) and pieces of wood. "It's small, but it's mine," she stated as we walked through the wooden gate on the exterior of the home. Lourdes is a thirty-four-year-old mother of three young children, born and raised in Aldea Bocacosta. Lourdes went on to explain that, after experiencing hardships in the past with both her ex-husband and her own sister, she is

happy to have a place that she can call her own, where she and her children can live in peace, where there were no problems.

Now, she stated, even though her one-room home is much smaller than her neighbors' homes, she expressed her gratitude to God for the life that she currently lives. Lourdes has since happily remarried and states that her past experiences have allowed her to really think about what she wanted in a partner, and that she is grateful for the man that God has now put in her life. She stated that she is happy now that she has the freedom to work, to earn money for her family.

Like Doña Natali's testimonial, Lourdes' story illuminates the significant challenges that single women in Guatemala face when trying to singlehandedly provide for their children. Although she initially had familial support from her sister, her incredibly long work hours negatively impacted their relationship and almost led to her losing custody of her children. This story also suggests that, even when GBV survivors have social/familial support, these forms of support are not always without complications. The following section discusses transportation as an additional barrier complicating and affecting women's access to GBV services.

Transportation

For many women in Guatemala, the lack of safe, affordable, reliable, and efficient transportation for themselves and those accompanying them to GBV-related organizations negatively impacts their ability to seek legal and psychological services at organizations that may sometimes be up to a few hours away from their homes. For women with several children and no one to assist with reliable childcare, transportation is even more costly.

Tami, a 33-year-old resident of Aldea Bocacosta and mother of three children, expressed not being able to afford transportation costs to-and-from the organization where she was

receiving assistance. She stated that her ability to read and write caused tension in her relationship with her ex-husband, who could not. When she was pregnant with their second daughter, her ex-husband went off with another woman (*se fue con otra mujer*). “He hit me, but I didn’t endure it (*no aguanté*).” She went on to say that she was afraid that her children would have to live with him because he works all day and is rarely at home.

Tami sought assistance with custody of their children at National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango. However, she was unable to pay for her bus fare (*pasaje*) and had to cancel everything. Tami stated that, while she was treated well and was helped by the organization staff members and felt like she received good advice from them, she had to cancel her case. “I had to stop the process because there were so many costs. The case took a long time, so I had to pay for many transportation costs.” She stated that it would be helpful for the organizations to assist with paying for the clients’ passages and that this would “further help those who don’t have much.” Tami’s children now reside with their father, due to her not being able to financially provide for them. She went on to say that she feels sad because she wants to live with them, but that she has no money to pay for them to get to school. Now, their father sends her pictures of her children and calls her about once per month to give her updates.

Tami’s poignant story demonstrates how one’s ability to seek services is closely tied to economic factors. For Tami, her inability to pay for transportation costs led to the dropping of her case altogether. For women with very low income, having to physically travel to organizations that are located up to a few hours’ bus ride away is challenging. For Tami, this process required having to catch multiple vehicles ranging from “pickup” to “chicken bu” to a *tuk tuk* to walking on foot to make it to the organization. For women who have morning

appointments, this may require that they wake up and leave their homes very early in the morning.

Tami's story also highlights the importance of service accessibility for women living in rural areas, especially in areas where transportation is more difficult to obtain. As I further elaborate in the conclusion, more localized forms of legal support are necessary to help eliminate this significant transportation barrier. Additionally, while some agencies have virtualized some of their services, for women in rural areas without cell phone or Internet service, it is not possible for them to receive services this way.

In addition to the potential cancellation of services due to transportation-related inaccessibility, transportation costs are also comparably expensive for women who do not have formal employment. Private vehicle ownership is rare, especially among Indigenous women in rural areas, where income is even less compared to urbanized areas. Additionally, many women, especially in rural areas, feel a sense of fear or embarrassment related to driving a private vehicle. Gender norms, while changing, still dominate regarding men driving more often than women. Multiple forms of transportation are common in Guatemala, including "chicken buses" (also known as *camionetas*--used school buses from the U.S., sometimes up to thirty or more years-old), used vans (*microbuses*), pickup trucks with travelers riding in the open bed of the vehicle (*pickups*) and small, motorized cabs known as *tuk tuks*. Taxis and private shuttles also exist but are very rarely used by "locals" due to very high costs.

All of these public transportation options pose significant safety risks and challenges. Drivers receive little to no formalized training. During a chicken bus ride while returning to the Municipio Altiplano, I asked the driver's assistant about the drivers training process.

Empezamos muy jóvenes. A veces de los trece, catorce años. El negocio suele ser de familia. O conseguimos el trabajo de amigos. Nos enseñan a conducir, no asistimos a un programa formal.

We start very young. Sometimes around thirteen, fourteen years old. The business usually runs in the family. Or we get the job from friends. They teach us how to drive, we don't attend a formal program.

On these rides, it is abundantly evident that drivers prioritize speed over safety.

Sometimes, vehicles can reach upwards to 80 MPH or more, especially on direct roads. These public safety factors further demonstrate the risks that people take when traveling long distances throughout the country. Through my experiences living in Guatemala and from interviews with clients, I found that a "typical" day of going out required multiple forms of transportation and, thus, multiple fares. These costs are compounded when considering that women are typically accompanied by friends, family members, and/or children due to stigma and safety concerns related to traveling alone.

In my interview with Teresa, a single mother of three, at National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango, we talked about transportation prices and how they compare to relative daily income.

Los gastos de transporte son grandes. A veces, cuando tengo que venir aqu aquí, tengo que pedir a una familiar por el dinero, pero no me gusta preguntar porque me da vergüenza.

Transportation expenses are high. Sometimes, when I must come here, I have to ask a family member for money, but I don't like to ask because it makes me embarrassed.

Mimi, a 24-year-old single mother of two, left her house at 4:30 AM to make it to her 9:30 AM appointment at National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango. She had to walk approximately two miles to the location where the microbus picks up and take two chicken buses, a microbus, and a *tuk tuk* to the organization. Because she knew that she would not be able to afford food in the city due to high prices, she also brought lunch for both her and her

children. “The food here in the city is too expensive. I brought tortillas and cheese with me for us to eat for lunch.”

In addition to transportation fares, women also reported the stressors of losing a day’s worth of income because of having to take the time to travel to the organization, wait an hour or two to receive services, meet with the service provider, wait for transportation back home, and travel back home, sometimes in traffic depending on the time of day. For women in rural and/or mountainous areas, the buses may not travel as frequently, thus expending more time. “National Organization for Indigenous Women” offices, for example, are in the departmental centers, which are also among the country’s biggest cities. For women struggling to pay basic living costs with no guaranteed income, this long day of travel can be very costly.

Mabi, who is currently receiving assistance for her ongoing alimony case as well as psychological services from National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango sells *tortas* from her home in a rather remote village located in the mountains, a two-hour drive from the governmental organization. To pay her Q150 (\$19) total bus fare to-and-from the organization, (including all varied modes of transportation), she would have to sell 30 *tortas* at Q5 each. She stated that she is considering selling the *tortas* for a higher price to cover her transportation costs to-and-from the organization, as well as her son’s upcoming school supplies, but is concerned that doing so may cause neighbors to purchase them from another person on her street who also sells them. Mabi’s experience demonstrates the types of decisions that women make to balance essential costs when living with limited income and financially supporting children on their own.

As these experiences bring to the fore, transportation is an important factor to consider when assessing Indigenous women’s experiences making formal, legal complaints (*denuncias*)

and seeking legal support and other services at organizations. I include further recommendations pertaining to transportation and service accessibility in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. Next, I discuss another notable challenge associated with service recipience, choosing between bringing children along and finding reliable childcare.

“Traer mis hijos no es fácil”/ “bringing my children isn’t easy:” children and service-seeking

The lack of reliable childcare is another challenge that some women face when having to travel long distances to seek support for GBV. When I asked women and service providers alike how organizations could improve their services to Indigenous clients, one of the most salient responses was “someone to watch children.” Although Guatemala (and perhaps Latin America in general) is generally more receptive to having children enter formalized, organizational settings, this is oftentimes challenging for clients for a variety of reasons, including added transportation costs, having to purchase more food or bring more food with them during the sometimes six-hour journey, and feeling burdensome and nervous about bringing children into a formal, professional agency.

Paola, 29, whom I interviewed, in Aldea Bocacosta, had visited five organizational entities for her GBV case, stated that she would bring her four children with her out of necessity because she still resided with her mother-in-law (*suegra*), but did not want her to know that she was pressing legal charges against her son.

Ella no sabe que vengo aquí, entonces yo traigo ellos, pero tengo poco miedo. Ella cree que solo vengo por hablar con la psicóloga.

She doesn’t know that I come here, so I bring them, but I’m a little bit afraid. She thinks that I only come here to talk to the psychologist.

In some communities, going out, traveling outside of the home or town (*saliendo*) especially without children, is sometimes viewed by others as being a “bad mother” due to the social norm that women are to remain inside and conduct domestic duties for most of the days’

time. This gendered norm was particularly evident among women in the Aldea Bocacosta compared to the Municipio Altiplano, although this norm also existed in the more rural *aldeas* governed by the Municipio Altiplano. Additionally, women may not want to travel alone out of fear of a robbery or violent incident. Another related factor is that women's social support is sometimes cut off during abusive relationships and they are isolated from friends and family members who would otherwise be willing to watch their children while they leave town.

Lisbet, whom I met through my research assistant in the Municipio Altiplano, stated that directly after separating from her "ex," she did not have anyone whom she could ask to watch her son as she traveled. She found housing with the agency's help, and was able to rent a small, one-bedroom house for her and her son. She had lost contact with her family, who lived in a village approximately six hours away. Her only form of social support, at least initially, was the organization employees. She learned about the organization from a neighbor after the neighbor overheard shouting coming from her home during an argument.

In my conversations with the director of Hope for Women Guatemala City, we also discussed the impacts of bringing children along to organizations, and the effects that this may have on the mother's experience.

A veces, tener hijos consigo distrae y causa más estrés a la madre. No tiene tiempo para concentrarse en sí misma porque está muy concentrada en el comportamiento de sus hijos, si se están portando bien, si necesitan comer, y cosas así.

Sometimes, having children along is distracting and causes more stress for the mother. She does not have time to focus on herself because she is so focused on her children's behavior, if they're being good, if they need to eat, and things like that.

Some of the organizations offered small sums of financial support, usually out of their own pockets, for clients who are particularly poor or facing unique situations, but it is not guaranteed, formalized, nor counted on. The director of National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango stated that it was unjust to not offer some form of compensation for travel,

although this is not technically factored in as part of the organization's official budget. Additionally, several of the organizations where I conducted fieldwork had play areas for children, but staff members were not always available to monitor the areas. In addition to childcare, literacy also serves as a factor impacting women's experiences seeking GBV assistance from organizations.

“Cuesta No Leer”/ “Not Reading is Difficult:” Service Access and Literacy

Guatemala is home to 37 Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are more commonly spoken than written. In the Municipio Altiplano, for example, there is “cultural institution” specifically dedicated to teaching students about their cultural heritage. This school also offers private Kaqchikel lessons, although it is much more common to speak the language.

The Guatemalan state's GBV-related efforts are visually apparent when stepping into governmental offices adorned with colorful posters and handouts providing advice for women on how to take legal action if one experiences various types of violence, ranging from GBV, sexual violence among children, to extortion. On one poster, for example, Guatemalan citizens are encouraged to “file a *denuncia*” and call, “001” or go to a local women's office. However, as I further elaborate in other sections, even though this information is readily visible and available to some women, many Indigenous women (especially those of “older generations”) cannot read it due to low literacy levels, limited formal education, and a history of speaking Indigenous languages.

Illiteracy was specifically common among women approximately 45 years of age and older in both field site locations. In previous generations especially, formal education was an opportunity offered only to boys if parents had to choose between children due to limited

income. This reality carries on to today, especially in rural communities and among families that have to decide between their multiple children to attend school.

Illiteracy affected their ability to navigate smart phones and other technological equipment, in addition to accessing and reading signs on the road. However, as is known about GBV, this public health issue transcends generations and does not discriminate based on age. In addition to literacy having an impact on how clients access factual and educational information related to their legal rights, the legibility of materials also emerged as an area that could be improved related to information access.

In a conversation with Ofilia, a social worker in the municipal women's office in the Municipio Altiplano, she stated that one challenge that she has witnessed among "older" clients is their ability to read. In turn, she suggested that there should also be a set of educational materials offering educational information pertaining to governmental rights that only includes images and large-sized font for those who have reading limitations. Next, I describe one of the primary factors leading women to seek formalized support and services, the fear of dying as a result of GBV.

Fear of dying as an impetus for service-seeking: "no quería ser como las víctimas de femicidio en las noticias"/ "I didn't want to be like the femicide victims on the news"

Fear of dying served as a significant, driving force for women to seek services. "I didn't want to be like the femicide victims on the news" is something that I had heard numerous times throughout my fieldwork in both the Municipio Altiplano and the Aldea Bocacosta. Doña Irina, whom I mention in further detail in Chapter Five, used this very phrase to describe the reason for leaving her ex-husband for good. Like Doña Irina, who left her home in an instant and stayed with her sister after her former husband threatened to murder her and their three children while

intoxicated by alcohol, physical threats of homicide also served as a catalyst for Doña Esli, to definitively separate from her former partner.

I arranged to meet Doña Esli, whom I met through my former host family from 2015 at the local *tienda* (store). “I live behind the *cerro*” (historical mound that also functions as a public meeting space), she stated. She then proceeded to lead me down a narrow, dirt path surrounded by palm and fruit trees. After a brief walk, we sat down on her porch, surrounded by lush trees and shrubs. Doña Esli proudly showed me her horticultural plot and explained each plant type in detail. Just before our interview, Doña Esli took several phone calls from people in town looking to purchase fresh chicken from her. “It’s how I do business,” she laughed.

Currently 51 years old, Doña Esli told me that the abusive experiences with her ex-husband occurred fifteen years prior to our interview, when she was 36 years old. A mother of four children, Doña Esli stated that everything started out well with her ex-husband at first, but then he became jealous. He was particularly jealous of the interactions that she had to make for her *negocio* (business), where she talked to people in the local community and often joked around and laughed with them. After the situation continued to worsen, she shared her story with an older woman in town, whom she trusted.

Empecé a llorar. Sabía que no podía seguir viviendo así, pero tenía miedo de irme. Finalmente, cuando temí que me matara, que terminara como las mujeres de las noticias, le pedí ayuda. Ella me ayudó y me dio una dirección de un lugar a donde ir, donde podría recibir ayuda. Le dije que no le dijera a nadie que había ido allí. Así que al día siguiente fui al Tribunal. Me dijeron que fuera a la dirección a “Organización Nacional para Mujeres Indígenas Mazatenango” y luego, finalmente, fui a la policía. No me sentí bien. Algo pasó en mi corazón. Después de que fui a hablar con el juez local y las mujeres de “Organización Nacional para Mujeres Indígenas Mazatenango,” le dije que él no tenía derechos sobre mí. Empezó a gritarme y tuve que llamar a la policía. Yo estaba en la cama en ese momento, lavando su ropa. Vino y firmó los papeles del divorcio, pero volvió y me afectó mucho. Me he roto la rodilla. Cuando después fui a la clínica para recibir asistencia, tuve que esperar hasta que pudieran conseguirlos. Me estresé tanto que tuvieron que ponerme una inyección parra los nervios en la clínica.

I started crying. I knew that I couldn't continue to live this way, but I was afraid to leave. Finally, when I feared that he would kill me, that I would end up like the women on the news, I asked the woman for help. She helped me and gave me an address for a place to go, where I could receive help. I told her not to tell anyone that I went there. So, the next day, I went to Juzgado (local judge). They told me to go to the "National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango" and then, finally, I went to the police. I didn't feel good. Something happened in my heart. After I went to talk with the local judge and the women at "National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango," I told him that he didn't have rights over me. He started yelling at me and I had to call the police. I was on the bed at the time, washing his clothes. He had come over to sign the divorce papers but came back and hit me really badly. He broke my knee. When I went to the clinic for assistance afterwards, I had to wait to receive medical assistance because they didn't have the supplies that they needed to help me, and I had to wait until they could get the supplies. I was so stressed out afterward that they had to give me an injection for *nervios* (nerves) at the clinic.

When she showed her physical markings to the organizational staff and shared the details of her "situation" with the employees at the "National Organization for Indigenous Women Mazatenango," the *licenciada* that she was working with asked her what she would prefer; her ex-husband being locked up in prison or being able to receive alimony payments from him. Ultimately, Elsi chose to receive monthly alimony payments in lieu of her former partner going to prison.

In addition to the three formal institutions and neighbor from whom she sought support, Doña Elsi had also spoken to the pastor at the local church that she frequented. She stated that after her sharing her story with the male pastor, he advised her to stay with her ex-husband despite the physical abuse. "But I couldn't live like that," she stated.

Le duele después de matrimonio y pienso prefiero estar feliz sin un papel. Todos estamos perdidas. Se dejan manipulada por su hombre. Sufrí dolor de cabeza de todo. Pero más que todo, aprendí no depender en un hombre por dinero. Entonces, continúe a vender a mi pollo, azúcar y tamales.

It hurts after marriage, and I think I prefer to be happy without a piece of paper. All of us [women] are lost [regarding legal rights]. They let themselves be manipulated by their man. I had a headache over all of it. But more than anything else, I learned not to depend on a man for money. So, I continued to sell my chicken, sugar, and *tamales*.

Our interview was briefly put on a hold while a neighbor brought multiple StyroFoam containers of *pepián*, a signature Guatemalan stew dish consisting of chicken, cinnamon, and pumpkin seeds. “It’s because my son had a baby. So, the neighbors brought us food to celebrate. It’s a custom (*costumbre*) here,” she stated, smiling. After the visitors left, we proceeded with our conversation.

Like many of the other women participants in this study, Doña Elsi expressed satisfaction and comfort with the way service staff treated her/acted towards her. “They attended to me well,” she stated. She said that they spoke to her kindly, and never made her feel uncomfortable. This, she stated, helped her calm her nerves. Even though Doña Elsi felt comfortable in the organization where she received services, she, like many of the other women whom I interviewed, expressed negative opinions towards the governmental system.

Aquí, no hay apoyo. Hay mucho machismo aquí. Los hombres creen que somos ignorantes como mujeres. Y la policía creen que tenemos que ser sujetos a los hombres.

Here, there is no help. There is a lot of *machismo* here. The men think that we as women are ignorant. And the police think that we have to be subjected to men.

At the time of this interview in 2022, Doña Elsi lived directly next to her ex-husband on the same compound, despite the physical abuse that she experienced years ago. I asked her how she felt about him living next-door, and she said that he doesn’t bother her, because he knows that it is her land. At the end of our interview, she told me how much she loves fruit. Her ex-husband stated that he didn’t want her to take the fruit from his side of the plot. “It’s my land,” she stated. She gave me some to take home.

Much like Elsi, Myra also did not want her ex-husband to go to jail because that would mean that she and her children would have to go without alimony payments, a critical form of additional, and guaranteed, monthly income. Born, raised, and currently residing in the Municipio Altiplano, Myra married her former husband when she was only 19 years old. She

told me that they separated a few years later because he was *agresivo* (aggressive) with her.

“Also, he abandoned me and our four children,” she stated. Myra’s husband left her for another woman, a story not uncommon in neither Municipio Altiplano nor Aldea Bocacosta.

Myra decided to go to the local judge to see if she could receive some type of assistance. The male judge stated that he would like to put her ex-husband in jail as a form of justice. However, when the judge told her that he could go to jail and asked her if she would like him to go to jail, Myra responded by stating, “I don’t have the worth to do that to him.” Throughout the entirety of the experience, Myra expressed coming to the realization that women do, indeed, have legal rights. “I realized that a woman has a right to everything.”

Myra’s experience suggests the complexities associated with seeking justice, especially when faced with the difficult decision of receiving essential monthly income or seeking justice in the form of incarceration of her ex-partner. Myra relies closely on her relationship with God and regularly visiting her Evangelical church whenever she experienced stressful situations. “God never abandoned me,” she stated. Because of this, her four children did not complete their sixth-grade education because of the problems that they were experiencing at home as a family. Her older children, now ages 25 and 23, started working when they were 12 and 10 years old to try to replace the income that their father would have brought home.

These lived experiences illuminate the need for more preventative services for women survivors so that they can identify potentially life-threatening behaviors well before they experience threats of lethal violence. Additionally, Doña Elsi’s case demonstrates the difficult decisions that GBV survivors must make; between receiving alimony payments that may determine whether their children can eat, and justice/incarceration for the physical violence that they survived.

“Al principio me sentía poco tímida pero después me sentía bien”/at first, I felt timid, but then I felt OK): fear entering organizations due to ethnicity and social status

During interviews, Indigenous participants expressed how they felt nervous, or *tímida*, entering organizations for the first time. To feel timid (*sentirse tímida*) is a common expression used to describe feelings of uncertainty, fear of being judged, and feeling nervous. Women stated that they especially felt a sense of nervousness going for the first time and not knowing how they would be perceived by organizational staff. Power differentials related to race and ethnicity contribute to such feelings of timidity and insecurity. For women with little formal education, usually no more than sixth grade, entering unknown locations with college-education staff of higher socio-economic status proved worrisome for many women. Additionally, for Indigenous women wearing traditional dress (*traje*), this sense of timidity was exacerbated out of fear of being discriminated upon and treated poorly in formal, office settings with mostly college-educated employees.

In my conversation with Selbi, who had originally traveled to “National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango” six months before our interview in October 2022 to file a *denuncia* and proceed with a legal case against her former partner, this topic of initially feeling timid upon arriving to the organization emerged after I asked her how she felt receiving services from National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango.

Uno no sabe. No conocí nada de cómo son. Me sentía poca tímida de que iban a juzgarme por mi traje. Pero gracias a Dios, no eran así. Tengo poca más confianza en la “Organización Nacional Para Mujeres Indígenas Chimaltenango” porque yo sé que la mayoría de las empleas son Indígenas como yo. Ellas me entendieron. Me atendieron bien, gracias a Dios. Ya no me siento tímida. No más.

One doesn't know. I didn't know anything about how they were. I was a little bit timid that they were going to judge me for my traditional dress. But thank God, they weren't that way. I have a little more trust in the “National Organization for Indigenous Women

Chimaltenango” because I know that most of the employees are Indigenous like me. They understand me. They treated me well, thank God. Now I don’t feel timid. Not anymore.

Women generally expressed still feeling timid initially, but less timid after speaking with a staff member and building a sense of trust (*confianza*). For organizations offering services to Indigenous women in Guatemala, this sense of trust and comfortability is paramount.

Like Selbi, Myra also felt timid the first time she went to “National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango” to seek psychological support after experiencing emotional abuse from her *pareja* (partner) because she very rarely left her very small *aldea* (town), located in the mountains.

Estaba muy tímida en el bus porque nunca me salí solita. Pero esta vez, tenía que irme solita porque mi bebe era con mi mamá en casa.

I was very timid on the bus because I never left alone. But this time, I had to go alone because my baby was with my mom at home.

Many participants shared that they felt timid (*tímida*) and were fearful (*tenían temor*) about traveling (at times) long distances to governmental GBV agencies. Some women with whom I spoke from rural, mountainous areas had to travel up to three hours and take multiple forms of transportation to agencies. It is even more uncommon for women, especially Indigenous women, to drive, although gender norms continue to change.

While gender norms continue to change, in rural areas especially, women are still stigmatized for leaving their homes. As I mention in the section of this chapter dedicated to gossip in local communities, this is especially true in Aldea Bocasota, where women are sometimes publicly shamed for leaving their homes to work.

One day, the study’s research assistant and I visited some of the peripheral villages governed under the Municipio Altiplano Municipality. In contrast to the municipal center, the *aldea* is comprised of houses nestled between fields of *milpa* (cornstalks) and other crops.

Without a market of its own, townspeople travel approximately 20 minutes to Municipio Altiplano or other areas to purchase food items and other household essentials.

“Me Siento Feliz”/ “I Feel Happy:” Happy to Have Received Services

Another commonality among almost all service recipients is satisfaction with how they were treated by service staff in organizational settings. Although services may not have always led to the outcomes that they hoped for regarding speedy alimony payments and legal justice for their GBV cases, they were nonetheless happy to have received additional, formal support for their cases and expressed tremendous gratitude for the services that they did receive. Despite the initial sense of fear of being judged, nearly all women whom I interviewed who did receive services expressed having felt satisfied (“*satisfecha*”) and happy (“*feliz*”) after meeting with a psychologist, having their story heard, I was rather surprised to find that women had few negative remarks regarding their experiences at the organizations. Some women had a few negative experiences to share, but generally, they expressed positive sentiments regarding feeling comfortable (*cómoda*) with how they were treated in all settings.

“Siguiendo Adelante”/ “Moving Forward:” Healing After Violence

As I elaborated in the previous chapter, the concept of “moving on” (“*siguiendo adelante*”) was used to describe the pursuit of economic security among women striving to make ends meet for their children. For women who sought psychological assistance from psychologists and therapists, “moving on” (“*siguiendo adelante*”) served as a critical part of the healing process and also corresponded to resiliency and making future decisions and “next steps” after experiencing GBV. “*Siguiendo adelante*” is also closely tied to resiliency, to leaving the past behind out of necessity of focusing on the future. Additionally, the strong sense of adaptability

associated with *siguiendo adelante* illuminates how, when faced with adversity, moving on may also serve as a significant means of readaptation to current and future conditions and situations.

Study participants stated that, after seeking formal forms of assistance from psychologists and lawyers working in governmental and non-governmental organizations, they felt more comfortable starting their own businesses and moving forward on their own. “Moving forward” after experiencing GBV was commonly expressed by GBV survivors/research participants as a means of resilience and survival. Forty-five of the total number of participants in this study were “service seekers” from governmental or non-governmental agencies. All of these “service seekers” stated that, initially, they were afraid to seek services.

They all also stated that once they did seek services, they were treated well by employees and were generally satisfied with their experiences. While they were afraid at first, receiving professional legal and emotional support helped them with the process of “moving forward.” As China, whose experience I described earlier in this chapter stated, “After receiving services here, I can now psychologically move forward without the man.” China stated that she now draws from her personal experiences to support women in her local neighborhood, further highlighting how formalized information is passed informally in communities.

In addition to penal, legal services offered in the form of filing a formal, legal complaint (*denuncia*), psychological services were offered at all of the organizations that I visited, except for the small, women’s offices located in the municipal governmental buildings. Not all women received psychological services. The findings from this study suggest that women who did receive formalized psychological services were referred by service staff to do so based the severity of their trauma, distressed thoughts, and/or inability to cope with the circumstances that they endured.

The psychological services in governmental and non-governmental organizations alike were reminiscent of psychological services offered in the US and other Westernized nations in their overall delivery and approach. In both the governmental and governmental organizations where I conducted interviews and observations, psychological services were referred to clients who demonstrated a rather severe sense of trauma and those who needed extra help with healing. These services were also offered to women who experienced “severe” forms of physical, psychological, economic, or other forms of abuse. There was only one psychologist on staff in all organizations included in this study, except for Hope for Women Guatemala City, the large organization in Guatemala City. This organization had three psychologists on staff dedicated to both women, children, and adolescent clients.

During my two-hour-long interview with Chesi, a psychologist located at Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta, located in the outskirts of Aldea Bocacosta, we talked in depth about this sense of “moving on” and where it fits into the psychological healing process. Chesi, a ladina woman in her mid-thirties originally from Chimaltenango, received a *licenciatura* (similar to a bachelor’s degree) in clinical psychology. As a clinical psychologist, she currently works with women, children, and adolescent victims. At the time of this interview in February 2022, she had worked at the organization for just under two years. She stated that she got into this type of work because she wanted to “intervene” in the State’s normalization of violence in her country. In her work with survivors, she evaluates how GBV oftentimes repeats itself in families and leads to generational trauma. She stated that there is still a significant stigma pertaining to receiving psychological support and that, sometimes, people will say “I’m not crazy, I don’t need a psychologist.” She stated that she is passionate about creating a clinical

space where clients can speak freely. She went to say that her favorite part of her job is helping women “move forward” after violence.

Después de tres o cuatro sesiones, suelo notar un gran cambio en ellas. No siempre es rápido. Pero noto que tienen más confianza, parecen más felices. Cuando eso sucede, sé que están avanzando en sus vidas y recuperándose del trauma.

After three or four sessions, I usually see a big change in them. It’s not always fast. But I notice that they are more confident, they seem happier. When that happens, I know that they are moving forward in their lives, and healing from the trauma.

Psychological services involve a series of consultations with psychologists/therapists (the term was used interchangeably). These consultations, or sessions, were conducted in Spanish and involved talking through previous traumas associated with relationships and devising coping mechanisms for the future. “A large part of my job is listening,” Chelsi laughed.

I also interviewed Princesa, a psychologist trained in Guatemala City who had been working in the rural Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta, outside of Aldea Bocacosta, for two years during the time of our interview. She stated that being the only psychologist at the organization was hard, especially because the services were in such high demand. At Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta, clients have the option to either participate in individual or group therapy sessions. Most, however, prefer individual sessions because they do not want others to know their personal business. Princesa noted that many of her clients’ experience physical illnesses when they “start believing that they are not worth anything.” Princesa eloquently stated, “The body starts speaking when the person is not permitted to do so in the relationship.” Princesa went on to discuss how a lot of her work as a psychologist centers on helping women clients with their self-esteem after experiencing GBV.

Es desarrollo personal. Ayudo a la persona a aprender a tomar sus propias decisiones. Tanto la independencia económica como la emocional son importantes. La dependencia económica es una de las principales razones por las que las mujeres mantienen relaciones abusivas. Hay un desequilibrio de poder y son económicamente dependientes. Y en muchas zonas, especialmente en las rurales, la gente cree que las mujeres no valen más que cuidar del hogar. Entonces eso les hace muy difícil irse. En mi trabajo con mujeres, trato de ayudarlas con su confianza. Les ayudo a establecer metas para establecer el desarrollo personal, lo que luego los lleva a la independencia. Esta es otra forma de prevenir la violencia. Este es un proceso psicológico. Las tres cosas más importantes para que las mujeres avancen son la independencia, el amor propio y la creación de límites.

It's personal development. I help the person learn to make their own decisions. Both economic and emotional independence are important. Economic dependence is a main reason why women are in abusive relationships. There is an imbalance of power, and they are economically dependent. And in many areas, especially rural areas, people believe that women are worth no more than taking care of the home. So that makes it very difficult for them to leave. In my work with women, I try to help them with their confidence. I help them set goals to establish personal development, which then leads to independence. This is another way to prevent violence. This is a psychological process. The three most important things for women to move forward are independence, self-love, and creating boundaries.

During my fieldwork, I regularly “caught up with” Alba, whom I had known for the past eight years. Alba is the Co-founder and current Executive Director of a non-profit organization offering physical health services such as diabetes care, prenatal and postpartum services, nutrition services, among many other services. The organization has a local clinic on the outskirts of Aldea Bocacosta. I asked Alba what services are specifically needed in this area and the broader Bocacosta area, she stated that free and accessible psychological services continue to be largely sought-after and requested by local people (both men and women) in this area. Due to generational trauma associated with the Guatemalan Civil War, economic insecurity, and other factors, psychological support continues to be a sought-after yet largely inaccessible “service,” especially in rural communities. All in all, psychological support seems to be losing the stigma that it is only for “crazy people” (*locos*), and that it offers true benefits to healing and “moving forward.” As more fully discussed in Chapter Five, additional significant forms of “moving

forward” that women shared is their making of a “peaceful” home for them and their children and economic recovery after experiencing GBV. These forms of healing are closely tied to the notion of “empowerment,” explained in the following section.

Empowerment

A primary focus of women’s rights efforts in recent years has been on the notion of providing educational information to women with the end goal of “empowerment,” or making women feel “more empowered” by the end of the session, workshop, or program. After conducting participant observation in a variety of sessions focused on various forms of empowerment (psychological, economic, occupational), I found that women used the term “empowered,” themselves to describe a distinct shift in how they felt before and after receiving services/participating in programs. As one attendee of a Woman’s Day Event sponsored by the Small Governmental Women’s Office in the municipality governing Aldea Bocacosta stated,

Siempre que tengan charlas vamos. Es hermoso. Muy bonito para quedar con otras mujeres. Después de ir me siento feliz. Me siento empoderado, más fuerte

Whenever they have educational sessions/workshops, we will go. It’s beautiful. Very beautiful to meet up with other women. After going, I feel happy. I feel empowered, stronger.

In relation to the omnipresent machismo ideology, empowerment is an effort to reclaim a sense of confidence and decision-making power, an opportunity for women to “feel empowered” doing things that traditionally contrast with this patriarchal viewpoint/ideology. The notion of “empowerment” in relation to GBV programming is rooted in neoliberal histories of transnational human rights and women’s rights campaigns.

In addition to feeling an enhanced state of empowerment after attending educational workshops and group sessions, participants in both primary field site locations also commonly reported a sense of empowerment after learning their formal, legal rights. And even though

possessing these legal rights very rarely leads to justice, women nonetheless shared that knowing that they have such rights made them feel more empowered as Guatemalan women.

Me siento más empoderada que antes. Saber mis derechos como una mujer es muy empoderada porque puedo decir no a cosas. Antes, tenía miedo de decir no, pero ahora, yo sé que es mi derecho como una mujer decir no. Tengo muchos derechos legales que no sabía antes.

I feel more empowered than before. Knowing my rights as a woman is very empowering because I can say no to things. Before, I was very afraid of saying, “no,” but now I know that it is my right as a woman to say no. I have many legal rights that I did not know before.

Recipients also expressed the sentiment of feeling “empowered” after talking through their GBV experiences with a psychologist. Doña Frida, whose story I previously elaborated on, told me that because her case was very serious (*muy grave*) she was referred to the Economic Organization for Women Bocacosta psychologist by lawyer who was processing her case.

Ahora estoy empoderada, gracias a Dios. La Organización Económica Para Mujeres” me nominó como líder en mi comunidad ahora y me siento empoderada para ayudar a educar a otras mujeres sobre nuestros derechos. Como mujeres, tenemos derechos. Gracias a Dios la psicóloga me ayudó mucho y pude salir del trauma que estaba viviendo.

Now I am empowered, thank God. The Economic Organization for Women nominated me as a leader in my community now and I feel empowered helping educate other women about our rights. As women, we have rights. Thank God, the psychologist helped me a lot and I was able to escape the trauma I was living in.

Additionally, while speaking with Gladis, a 45-year-old woman from Guatemala City, during a women’s economic empowerment workshop offered by Hope for Women Guatemala City focused on teaching women participants how to save money and run their own business, she stated that learning about how to save money in a women’s workshop at Hope for Women Guatemala City helped her feel more empowered about the business that she wants to start selling cakes in her neighborhood.

Correspondingly, the concept of “empowerment” emerged in conversations related to the “moving on” and healing process. A notable theme that also emerged during conversations with

survivors is how, after receiving services, they felt more “empowered” and were thus able to move on and move forward. Thus, “feeling empowered” served as a significant turning point for women to feel confident making household and major life decisions on their own, earning independent incomes, starting their own business for the first time in their adult years, and helping to “empower” other women through leading local workshops focused on women’s rights.

“El Problema Es Que Hay Muchos Servicios Pero No Hay Justicia”/ “The Problem is that There are Many Services but There is No Justice:” Seeking Justice for GBV

One participant stated, “A woman can file a legal report, but not much happens after that step.” Many women make formal, legal reports, but in most cases, the perpetrators of GBV - related crimes experience no legal repercussions. Corruption and fear are key factors impacting the how Indigenous women in Guatemala receive true justice. The legal process for a GBV case can take six to seven years on average to arrive at trial. The lack of justice, “*no hay justicia*,” emerged as a drawback to the utilization of services. Despite the abundance of efforts dedicated to informing women about their rights under specific laws, and social services designed to provide women with alimony and protection orders, the lack of justice prevails as a significant setback of the overall system.

“The lack of justice” was primarily brought up by organizational staff members during interviews. When I would ask what this meant exactly, I learned that this all-encompassing “lack of justice” illuminates the shortcomings of Guatemala’s legal and penal systems in offering a sense of closure to survivors and penalty to perpetrators. As Manuel, a 70-year-old Kaqchikel man whom I interviewed in the Municipio Altiplano poignantly stated about justice and women’s rights, “It’s one thing to say, it’s another thing to do.” Through numerous

conversations with local community members and organizational representatives, despite recent legal and penal initiatives, without justice, these efforts are in vain.

Hope for Women Guatemala City, one of Guatemala's most famous and well-funded non-profit organization dedicated GBV, offers an array of services to survivors, including intake services, psychological and therapeutic support, case management, and economic empowerment programs. The inside of the organization is reminiscent of many GBV advocacy organizations in the U.S. that I have visited in the past. Upon entering the large, white iron gate serving as the agency's entrance, you must first ring a bell and state your name and reason for visiting. After being buzzed in by the agency's receptionist, you then sit down in a front room, like a waiting room at a doctor's office in the U.S. This agency is the only one out of the several agencies that I visited in Guatemala to have security cameras outside, pointing to the streets and sidewalks. This organization is in one of Guatemala City's more dangerous zones. Every single building surrounding the agency is gated, including store fronts.

On my way to my way to the first interview that I conducted during my two-week visit there, I asked the cab driver about crime in the local area. He told me that, while it is generally safe to pass through by car during the day, there is a lot of drug use and trafficking in the area, and to be careful (*tener cuidado*). This conversation got me thinking about another point that I had not yet thought of while previously conducting research in more rural areas. Women seeking GBV -related services in urbanized settings such as Guatemala City, especially those without vehicles of their own nor money to travel via taxi, face the additional challenges associated with having to travel through areas ridden in violence and trafficking in order to seek agency support to improve their current situations and livelihoods.

In September 2022, I interviewed the organization's program manager, Vicki. I had previously met Vicki during an initial, "pilot" research visit to the organization in 2018. Vicki started our interview by sharing the principles on which the organization was founded. "For the need of justice," she stated. She went on to tell me about how the founder of the organization's daughter experienced abuse and this is what drove the founder to creating the organization.

Vicki told me about the types of services and support that the agency offers to GBV survivors. We discussed the organization's main departments, including intake services, psychological services for women and children, economic empowerment workshops, and group educational and prevention efforts. The continuation of funding is a challenge for the organization. Vicki expressed her frustrations regarding the fact that GBV continues to be such a prominent issue in Guatemala, and while legal efforts have increased in recent years, there continues to be a prominent lack of justice.

She stated that the government oftentimes has personal interests, and needs to continue to increase services, psychological support, and access to justice to establish trust effectively and thoroughly with local communities. She went on to state that more prevention work should be done by the Ministry of Health because violence is a "health-related theme. Unfortunately, however, the government does not always recognize it as such. The naturalization of violence, she stated, continues to prevent true justice from being served because violence occurs without people always realizing that it is violence. "It's everywhere," she stated.

The concept of justice also emerged during my interview with Estrella, a social worker employed at the National Organization for Indigenous Women Chimaltenango, the municipality that governs the Municipio Altiplano. Estrella stated that, in addition to GBV court cases sitting without being assigned a day in court,

El proceso tarda mucho. Muchísimo. A veces ocho, once, trece años. No es justo para las mujeres esperar así.

The process takes a long time. A very long time. Sometimes eight, eleven, thirteen years. It's not fair for women to wait like that.

When I asked participants what they meant by the term, "justice," their responses mostly pertained to the incarceration of abusers and penal consequences for violent acts. Participants also mentioned feeling peace and moving on from trauma. Overall, it is evident that justice remains a distant dream for women in Guatemala. The country's efforts are becoming increasingly focused on violence prevention,

Isabel, a 30-year-old Kaqchikel woman lost her first and second child. She got married, but, as she put it, "*el matrimonio no funcionó*" (the marriage didn't work). She stated that she experienced a lot of problems in her marriage. Recently, her husband "*se fue*" (went off) with another person and took her child with him. She went on to state that her ex-husband never helped her with the "*gastos*" (expenses) for their son, and that he never supported her, that they never lived "*tranquilo*" (calm) together. Her husband abandoned both her and her son when he was only five months old. Her son then got sick, and she needed help paying for his medical expenses, but her ex-husband didn't help.

She stated that, at the beginning, everything was different. "Before, there was love. Afterward, I wasn't alive. It isn't worth it." After receiving assistance from the non-profit staff members, Isabel stated that she felt stronger. Now, she embroiders items of clothing with her sewing machine to earn money. She went on to say that her mother tried convincing her to talk to another man, but that she didn't "have that mentality."

Isabel stated that she decided to seek support at Community-based Organization for Women Municipio Altiplano because "women can't be dominated by a man, and we have to fight (*luchar*). I had this mentality to fight and knew that I had to seek legal support for what I

was living.” She stated that before, she had heard that institutions don’t support women, but leaned that “women’s rights are worth a lot.” Isabel’s process for securing alimony payments was lengthy. She stated that it took four years to receive her first payment from her ex-husband after initially filing, mostly because it took over three years to find him, since he was hiding. Isabel stated that the organization can better their services by hiring a college-educated professional, similar to an advocate (*licenciada*).

Se necesita una licenciada. Necesitan más atención al cliente. A veces, tengo que ir a reuniones y será mucho mejor si habrá una licenciada allá conmigo.

They need an advocate. They need to give more attention to the client. Sometimes, I have to go to meetings, and it would be much better if there were an advocate there with me.

Isabel then went on to say,

“Life goes on. You have to fight. You have to be strong. Sometimes the laws do not come true.” Like many of the survivors whom I encountered, Isabel utilized several “services” while seeking assistance for GBV. First, she went to the local women’s office to see what choices she had to make. She also consulted with a Justice of Peace (*Juzgado de Paz*) and relied on familial support and moving in with her parents, to help “move forward.”

I had known Lola’s extended family since 2015. During my MA fieldwork, I lived with Lola’s brother’s family, including his wife, children, and his wife’s mother. Lola, born and raised in a small village located 20 minutes walking-distance from Aldea Bocacosta, lives with her parents and her four small children. Lola spends the week working in Guatemala City, a five-hour-drive from Aldea Bocacosta, and returns on the weekends to see her children and the rest of her family. While she is gone working long days in a factory, her parents take care of her two young daughters. I had previously met Lola in 2015, 2018, and another time more recently while staying over at her brother and his wife’s house. We stayed up late talking, catching up about life and talking about family.

About three weeks later, I walked with Lola's brother and his family to visit their parents. I conducted an interview with Lola in a private location in her parent's house during the visit. Lola told me about her former relationship with her ex-husband, how, at first, life was good with him, but he grew more aggressive after she learned she was pregnant with their first child. Lola is currently separated, but not divorced, from her ex-husband because she was unable to pay the Q700, equivalent to a little under \$100, for a lawyer.

Additionally, although Lola had a protection order for her ex-husband, it still took the police two hours to come. When they finally arrived, she showed them the protection orders that he had previously signed. Also, after her case was filed, it took her two years to receive her alimony payment from her ex-husband to help support her children. "Everything is very expensive. The kids need to study, but everything is a cost. The food, the things for school."

Lola stated that, overall, she was pleased with her experience working with a social worker at the local women's organization. However, at first, she stated that she couldn't express herself because of the nerves (*nervios*) she felt. "But I learned that the law defends you." Before, it wasn't that way, but now, yes." She went on to say that she recently provided this advice to a friend, who was also struggling in her relationship.

Yo salí de todo eso. Ahora, me siento mucho más segura. Pero antes, me sentía muy insegura, muy incómoda. Antes, me sentía muy enferma de los nervios, y entre en una depresión. No tenía ganas de comer. No tenía ganas de vivir. No me sentía bien. Tembló. Separarse no es fácil, pero la felicidad depende en uno.

I left all of that. Now, I feel much safer. But before, I felt very unsafe, very uncomfortable. Before, I felt very sick with nerves, and I entered a depression. I didn't want to eat. I didn't want to live. I didn't feel well. I shook. Separating isn't easy, but happiness depends on one.

She went on to say that she now feels much happier alone, and that, while she didn't feel safe before seeking formalized support, she feels that way now. "It's not easy for one to separate.

It took me a year to separate from him. But happiness depends on you.” Lola also recently offered advice to a friend of hers who was struggling in her relationship and was feeling suicidal. She told her friend not to stay, and to leave him. “I told her that in her head, she knows what to do.”

Lola’s story shows the complexities associated with seeking formalized services for GBV in Guatemala and the factors associated with “moving forward.” Despite Lola’s calling law enforcement and seeking social services, the lack in response time demonstrates the systematic and infrastructural stability of formalized services. Lola’s sharing of her experiences with her friends also shows how personal experiences receiving GBV services can be informally shared among social networks, thus demonstrating how formalized services and the formalized sharing of information can also be shared colloquially, yet oftentimes as effectively, in communities.

Additionally, the year-long process that Lola endured before being able to “fully” separate from her ex-husband further highlights the complexities and intricacies associated with separation and supports the idea that “leaving” is not a clear-cut, linear process. Lola was also able to “move forward” by securing a stable income in another city, although she has to sacrifice seeing her children as a result. Nonetheless, her ability to work in this position as a single mother is facilitated by strong familial support, something that not all survivors have.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This project's original objective was to examine how Indigenous Guatemalan perspectives of healing and trauma compare with GBV-related programs and associated materials designed by governmental organizations and NGOs. However, after conducting initial fieldwork, this project's scope changed slightly to specifically examine power structures, such as a history of abuse, mistreatment, and discrimination against Indigenous populations in public care facilities (Cerón et al. 2016; Fischer-Mackey et al. 2020), ethnic relations between Indigenous populations and other groups in Guatemala (Gibbons and Ashdown 2010), and fear of seeking services for GBV (Wands and Mirzoev 2021). Furthermore, after conducting the initial round of semi-structured and informal interviews, I became increasingly concerned with how these dynamics specifically affected rural Indigenous women's perceptions of governmental versus non-governmental institutions and services and perceptions of how their specific needs ¹⁰

Utilizing an engaged anthropological approach, this dissertation further examines how laws play out "in action" and become vernacularized (Merry 2006; Merry and Levitt 2017) in the lives of Indigenous Guatemalan women. "In action" refers to the realities of the laws themselves, how they transcend into local communities, and the setbacks associated with laws materializing

¹⁰ Due to high rates of economic precarity and decreased health equity among rural Indigenous populations compared to other populations within Guatemala (Gragnotati and Marini 2003).

into action (Di Ronco 2022). This project's findings reveal that, although women participants largely reported feeling more psychologically "empowered" after receiving services, the GBV "laws in action," are largely symbolic, and exacerbate existing forms of structural violence in the lives of women by failing to address underlying, structural conditions that perpetuate inequities affecting gender equality.

In addition to insufficiently meeting underlying, structural economic needs, the incessant public health messaging of these laws by the Guatemalan state led women in both field sites to feel excited and *empowered* about the possibilities of having legal rights. Yet simultaneously, this also exposed many women participants to further forms of structural violence by encouraging them to separate from male partners due to various forms of abuse, without sufficiently and sustainably devising infrastructural solutions to resolve entrenched forms of gender inequities. This left women with (sometimes several) children to financially support as single mothers, thus exacerbating feelings of uncertainty for the future.

Collectively, this dissertation's findings suggest that, while GBV laws claim to specifically protect Indigenous women's rights, as stated in Chapter Six, they are not specifically designed to address the broader forms of structural violence Indigenous women disproportionately experience, such as increased rates of illiteracy and feeling disconnected from formalized settings where workers traditionally have higher levels of education and wearing Western clothing ("*ropa Americana*").

These governmental services for Indigenous women were specifically designed to offer services and support in Indigenous languages with Indigenous employees, thus making women have more *confianza* (trust) in the service staff and feeling as though they are there "for them." At the same time, however, these services are not sufficiently equipped to accommodate for low

education rates, racism experienced by Indigenous people when entering formalized institutions, and the drastic need for sustainable economic opportunities, specifically for Indigenous women (Martínez Rodas et al. 2022).

Community-based organizations, such as “Community-based Women’s Organization,” on the other hand, has more flexibility when it comes to program creation and implementation. At the same time, however, these free-standing institutions are still bound to the state in many ways, including having to still abide by the legal system and go through the same, rigid bureaucratic processes. Additionally, because of the 2021 “NGO Law” mentioned in Chapter Two, the Guatemalan state maintains the authority to dismantle any NGOs whose philosophies or programming they disagree with. Due to the inability of NGOs and governmental service agencies in properly addressing underlying, structural inequities, I argue that, by promoting community and population-based resiliency, there is potential for the decolonization of development efforts to enact more long-term, sustainable solutions.

Cumulatively, this dissertation also explicates the multiple forms of resiliency that Indigenous women in two rural communities engage in (from a population-based perspective) to move forward from GBV. Such resiliency is often overlooked, yet requires tremendous perseverance, especially considering economic precarity experienced by women in both field sites, yet particularly in the Aldea Bocacosta.

This chapter reviews the study findings in relation to the key research questions, as well as the key contributions to the theoretical frameworks guiding the study. Three primary research questions oriented this dissertation. Q1: What are Indigenous Maya perspectives on gender equality, trauma, and healing regarding GBV? Q2: What are the narratives, goals, and practices employed by governmental agencies and NGOs dedicated to preventing and reducing GBV in

Guatemala and how do these narratives compare with Indigenous perspectives of GBV, trauma and healing? What do NGOs/governmental organizations claim to do through their programs/services designed to prevent and reduce GBV? What are Indigenous Maya women's perceptions of the effectiveness of these services in meeting their needs and how can they be improved? Q3: What are Indigenous Maya service seekers' experiences with seeking assistance for GBV through NGO programs or governmental organizations? Cumulatively, through these research questions, I aimed to investigate the tensions and power dynamics related to neoliberal frameworks for GBV and Indigenous perspectives, the efficacy of large-scale human rights initiatives emphasizing legal solutions to GBV, and Indigenous realities and lived experiences utilizing these services.

In response to research Q1, What are Indigenous Maya perspectives on gender equality, trauma, and healing regarding GBV?, my findings suggest that, as stated in Chapter Four, members of older generations (approximately 40 years of age and older) alluded to the human rights and women's rights laws as a significant improvement from the "the way things used to be," a period of time when legal consequences for acts of violence against women were non-existent. In conversations with participants at the organizational level in institutions, it is evident that these laws are signs of some "progress" regarding gender equality, demonstrating how large-scale human rights and women's rights messaging and discourse has increasingly reached these two remote, rural communities (Ekern 2006). However, as further conversations with GBV survivors and service-seekers/recipients revealed, existing, deeply entrenched gender norms still lead women to dedicate long hours to unpaid care work, including duties such as domestic labor, reproductive labor, unpaid work, and social care (Esquivel 2013).

As feminist economic approaches to care work suggest (Wehr et al. (2014); Araujo & Hirata (2021)), my findings correspond with the notion that domestic responsibilities that are typically considered “women’s duties” are undervalued in society and oftentimes considered separate from the “formal” economy, despite being equally, if not more, physically grueling and rigorous. Entrenched gender norms lead women to stay inside the home and conduct the majority of care work, especially in Aldea Bocacosta, thus creating a sense of social separation. This sense of social separation leads to further challenges rooted in economic scarcity when separating from male partners (Cepeda, Lacalle-Calderon, & Torralba 2017), and leads to feelings of hesitation when initially traveling and occupying formalized spaces in institutional settings.

Additionally, stigma regarding women working outside of the home (mostly existent in Aldea Bocacosta), women’s limited educational access compared to men, women’s limited decision-making power regarding family planning, women’s reliance on their male partners’ income illuminate how prevailing gender norms preventing equity and equality from full permeating into mainstream society. These existing gender norms are compounded by localized Indigenous populations’ disproportionate experiences with poverty, precarity, and disenfranchisement (Bryce 2015; Gentry & Metz 2017), which, I argue, are politically determined, governed (Teig et al. 2023) and exacerbated through corruption.

Therefore, changing of gender norms and roles is in no way a linear, streamlined process, and, again, requires “bottom-up,” locally specialized solutions through a transformative justice-oriented approach (McGill 2018) to slowly, sustainably, and effectively make small, localized, “everyday” changes that will change women’s social positioning over time through education and economic opportunities. A grassroots-level, community-based approach and Indigenous-led

NGOs have the most potential to enact transformed change in communities due to international donor support, institutional flexibility, and more specialized, community-based services (Destrooper 2015). There is an urgent need for more NGOs to work in remote areas where women are more socially isolated, such as Aldea Bocacosta, instead of engaging in “development tourism” and mostly working in either Antigua Guatemala (Becklake 2016) or Lake Atitlán, two frequently visited tourism sites.

Indigenous women’s interactions with large-scale human rights efforts are complex and not one-sided. Despite the neoliberalization of women’s rights initiatives largely informed by ideologies and frameworks implemented and informed by Western, international ideologies and institutions, much of this messaging is embraced by women, especially when compared to the absence of rights in the past, and when administered through a transnational feminist lens that incorporates local culture and customs (McLaren 2017).

Women responded to human rights messaging by actively going to organizations and filing *denuncias*, despite initially experiencing a sense of fear and timidness. Women also reported feeling very happy and pleased with the services that they received, despite initially feeling timid or fearful of occupying institutional spaces that they did not think were for them. Additionally, women participants reported feeling more empowered after receiving psychological services and participating in *charlas*. These cumulative findings suggest that large-scale human rights messaging is not necessarily ineffective in assisting women in these rural communities and encouraging women to seek formalized forms of assistance. However, because of politically determined factors influencing organizations and specialized courts (Beck & Stephens 2021), these findings further detail why a transitional justice approach is insufficient and directly correspond to Coker (2002)’s call for transformative justice to steer away from

purely legal solutions and instead invest in everyday concerns and needs in localized settings (Boesten 2022).

These efforts are also met with further challenges pertaining to funding transportation, bringing children along to formal meetings, and taking time off from operating independent businesses. While women's rights ideologies such as those informed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2024) are largely embraced by the two Indigenous populations featured this study, they become/are rendered moot when local communities' gendered norms and ideologies remain hegemonic and routinely practiced and when organizational infrastructure and funding fall short in adequately meeting their needs. Service accessibility and reliability directly affects GBV health equity and is therefore politically determined and acted (Dawes 2020; Mishori 2019) with legal decisions made at high levels of government, machismo ideology at high levels of government (Pardilla 2016), and corruption simultaneously working to deprive women of justice and economic stability to be able to securely move on from violent situations.

Regarding trauma and healing, these findings suggest that these two factors are significantly tied to women's economic realities. Trauma was not commonly spoken of by women, and, when it was mentioned, it was mentioned in terms of receiving psychological services at organizations. The term "*curar*" (to cure) was lightly used in both field sites, although the term "*seguir adelante*" was the most common form of expression for the overwhelming desire, and need, to continue forward, to push on and beyond relationship troubles in order to support and economically sustain oneself and one's children. Therefore, "to move forward" (*seguir adelante*) more wholly expresses Indigenous women's experiences with the after-effects of GBV than "healing" and "curing." The commonly utilized expression, *seguir adelante* (to

move forward) also connotes a sense of “getting ahead,” of persevering and resiliency with regard to making an independent income. These localized forms and desires of moving on from violence demonstrate lived realities and needs beyond what is accounted for in rights-based initiatives (Coker 2002:14).

A transformative justice approach advances the need for programmatic efforts and materials to draw from local expressions and experiences to directly inform programs, materials, and practices, as opposed to borrowing from Westernized approaches. These findings circle back to entrenched gender norms and roles, which, paired with negligence and purposeful policies and decision-making by the Guatemalan state to continue to oppress Indigenous populations, work to exacerbate their social positioning.

The data included in Chapters Five and Six overwhelmingly suggest that the primary concern among GBV survivors is being able to financially support their children as they move forward as single women. This involves finding a means to earn sufficient and sustainable income in their local communities. While there is not much supporting literature on this specific topic, this finding corresponds to evidence that a significant dearth of economic opportunities leads to forced migration among young Indigenous women, especially in recent years and in the post-COVID 19 climate (Martinez Rodas, del Valle & Zamora 2022). Correspondingly, this finding illuminates the importance and significance of organizations and governments investing in long-term, sustainable educational and employment opportunities, a topic that I return to in the following recommendations section.

Additionally, as Chapter Five articulates, due to the prominent influence of Christianity/Catholicism in the Municipio Altiplano and evangelicalism in Aldea Bocacosta, the monotheistic conceptualization of God plays a significant role in aiding women during times of

uncertainty and sadness. In addition to religion aiding women in moving forward, independence from male partners, new, happy relationships, the desire and drive to support their children and other family members, and starting businesses and earning independent income were also prominently mentioned by participants in relation to what their lives looked like after experiencing violence and abuse. These factors thus illuminate transnational forms of empowerment and independence that transcend beyond international women's rights-oriented frameworks and discourse. Further, these findings can also be utilized to inform transformative justice approaches informing potential "bottom-up" solutions (Coker 2002) to GBV, including weaving co-operatives, formalized employment training, refinement of business skills, etc.

Because fieldwork for this dissertation was collected in 2022, this pronounced economic urgency is compounded by the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. A complementary finding related to organizational service provision is, while there is a primary focus on legal reporting and filing of *denuncias* (formal legal complaints), governmental and non-governmental organizations alike fail to provide women with sustainable solutions for economic income.

These findings position women's livelihoods and desires to "*seguir adelante*" (move forward) within the larger socio-political structures in Guatemala. Thus, these findings illuminate the power dynamics at play regarding obtaining basic needs such as nutrition, housing, and education. I frame these livelihoods and lived experiences as directly related to, and resulting from, governmental policies, decisions, and power dynamics, and argue that they are politically determined and generated, further illuminating how governmental actors intentionally work to deprive certain populations, in this case, Guatemala's rural and largely Indigenous populations, from basic resources and opportunities such as while also limiting their involvement in upper-level governmental roles. I also argue that human rights-based efforts largely fall short in

meeting women's material needs, thus perpetuating existing forms of structural violence, including limited access to things like affordable transportation, housing, healthcare, and employment opportunities (Farmer 1998; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer 2016).

In addition to women's independent desires to move forward (*seguir adelante*), as emphasized in Chapter Five, there is a collective sense of recognizing the importance of women's rights movements and ideologies as a collective benefit to society. The collective concern, however, remains in how the government provisions and funds these efforts. While some male participants were opposed to women's rights ideology, other male participants, such as the conversation with Freddy included in Chapter Five, acknowledged the importance of women earning independent incomes to contribute to improve the family unit's livelihood and well-being, despite this contrasting heavily with traditional gender roles and norms rooted in the machismo ideology. This connotes a sense of change regarding gender roles and norms in the Municipio Altiplano.

Findings collectively suggest that Indigenous Maya perspectives of gender equality, trauma, and healing are strongly tied to economic realities and the desire and need to make ends meet. I argue that Indigenous women's lived experiences with GBV in both field sites cannot be removed from these larger sociopolitical structures and forces, which are largely determined by upper-level policymakers, and that these forces and structures simultaneously contribute to women's GBV experiences by leading to dependence on male counterparts while also deterring them from being able to move forward and heal after violence due to limited formalized economic opportunities available to offer economic stability and independence.

In response to research Q2, What are the narratives, goals, and practices employed by governmental agencies and NGOs dedicated to preventing and reducing GBV and GBV in

Guatemala and how do these narratives compare with Indigenous perspectives of GBV, trauma and healing? What do NGOs/governmental organizations claim to do through their programs/services designed to prevent and reduce GBV? What are Maya women's perceptions of the effectiveness of these services in meeting their needs and how can they be improved?, I found the following. The narratives informing governmental and non-governmental agencies' programmatic initiatives and services are largely informed by human rights and women's rights approaches to violence against women as a criminal act, thus emphasizing women's legal rights as efforts to obtain justice from serving as victims of crimes, and carceral approaches to abuse and violence. Governmental and non-governmental institutions alike are united in their goals of achieving justice for women by offering legal, psychological, and empowerment-focused services, as well as educational workshops and economic empowerment sessions aimed to promote women's empowerment.

As Chapter Six iterates, the most common legal services obtained by women include *denuncias* (formal, legal complaints for GBV-related incidents), followed by *alimentación* (alimony payments), and *órdenes de protección* (protection orders). Both service types are more commonly offered than in the past. While findings reveal that *órdenes de protección* (protection orders) can be granted the same day that women file a complaint to a judge, findings reveal that *alimentación* (alimony) payments take much longer to process. Findings also reveal that both service types can be difficult to fully enforce, considering limited legal staff and police patrol.

In my experiences conducting participant observation at both agency types, NGOs utilized a more community-based approach, mostly due to their flexibility in providing a range of services to women, as well as being more fully staffed compared to governmental organizations. As highlighted by ethnographic vignettes included in Chapters Four through Five, both

governmental and non-governmental organizations reached out to local communities, but nonprofit, community-based organizations tended to engage more with local communities and engage more in communities and with community leaders. Additionally, local people generally expressed having more trust/confidence (*más confianza*) in non-governmental organizations compared to governmental institutions, due to historically rooted tensions among Indigenous populations and the Guatemalan state.

This project's findings reveal that, when asked about materials, women service-seekers were less concerned with what types of information regarding rights and legal processes were distributed and more concerned about the *manner* in which such information was distributed. As I described in Chapters Five and Six, *confianza*, a deep form of trust that is earned and built over time in Guatemalan and other Latin American communities, was described by women as being a highly significant factor influencing their comfortability in both the organization's reputation, decision to initially seek support at the organization, as well as in their interactions with organizational staff.

As a related component, women mentioned having more trust/confidence (*más confianza*) in organizations where they felt comfortable, safe (*cómoda*) and free from discrimination and harsh judgment because of their ethnicity, rural origins, literacy levels, economic status, literacy levels, and other factors. Considering the treatment of Indigenous populations during the Civil War (Green 1999) and the institutional discrimination faced by this population in the post-war period (Sieder 2013), this sense of comfortability and safety is essential for women to feel safe, understood, and supported while seeking support at organizations. Also, due to lower levels of literacy and formal education and primarily working in the informal economy, Indigenous women spend less time in formalized, institutional settings

where most staff are of higher socioeconomic classes and have higher levels of formal education. When put into the sociohistorical context of the Civil War paired with modern-day discrimination and racism against Indigenous populations (Cerón et al. 2016; Brett 2011), this sense of trusting in institutions and organizations and needing to feel safe is further pronounced.

This finding further reveals the significance of organizations understanding the perspectives and hesitations of the communities that they serve, including how to make the service-seeking process comfortable (*cómoda*) as well as meeting their needs for transportation, childcare, and economic development. While achieving justice was mostly mentioned as a common goal by organizational staff during interviews, local women and service recipients spoke less about their concerns in achieving justice, and instead alluded to their desires to meet their economic needs. This finding illuminates the hierarchy in needs among participants, with economic necessities coming first, followed by psychological healing and empowerment, and followed by moving forward in the pursuit of justice.

Service-seekers and local people alike generally had positive remarks regarding the laws, describing them as beautiful (*bonitas*), and differentiating the society in the past, however, also expressed weariness, uncertainty, and doubt regarding how they were “applied,” administered, and followed through with by the government. As I discussed in Chapter Four, local participants, organizational staff members, and service recipients alike discussed women’s rights laws as being better “than the past,” but simultaneously falling short in coming true (*cumplir*) or in their application (*aplicación*). These findings demonstrate the challenges and shortcomings associated with large-scale human rights efforts, further illuminating the need for more “bottom-up solutions” offered through a transformative justice approach (Coker 2002). Correspondingly, participants stated that they do not have faith in the overall justice-seeking process, naming the

lack of justice (*falta de justicia*) as a prominent concern in this rights-based approach. This deprivation of justice is politically determined by governmental officials. Therefore, my findings reveal that large-scale efforts to reduce violence against women are failing due to existing and continuing structural violence enacted by the Guatemalan state.

Conversations with organizational staff further revealed the importance of organizational leaders and staff members coordinating and communicating with Indigenous leaders from localized governmental systems, separate from state government. Findings reveal a generational clash in values and ideologies among Indigenous community leaders and governmental organization and NGO leaders who follow a rights-based approach in their work. At the same time, communication between these two entities slowly fostered a sense of rapport, and thus offering opportunities for service provisioners to describe the significance and importance of GBV prevention work more convincingly to predominantly male, Indigenous leaders. Women service recipients and local men and women participants also reported feeling disconnected from the State and from prestigious international organizations, predominantly located in Guatemala City, and feeling forgotten by them due to their rural locale. This further calls for organizations to maintain a sense of loyalty and continuity in rural communities, training local women leaders, and regularly engaging with community members with a community-based approach to better understand and generate solutions for their needs and concerns.

These results collectively suggest that grassroots, Indigenous-led, community-based approach to GBV prevention and response is the most effective in ensuring that women feel safe and understood while sharing the particularities of their experiences with abuse and violence and moving forward with receiving formalized assistance for their case. Drawing from the concept of “vernacularization,” (Merry & Levitt 2017: 21), these findings reveal the need for human rights

and women's rights efforts to be personalized for individual communities. Considering Guatemala's regional multiculturalism (Arias 2006), this is especially pertinent and vital for efforts to succeed.

Generally, participants acknowledged having more trust/confidence (*más confianza*) in programs and practices that incorporated Indigenous customs (*costumbres*) and rituals, such as Maya rituals and weaving Indigenous dress (*traje*--moreso in Municipio Altiplano) into their provisioning. These practices aided women in feeling like these organizations were "for them" and on their side, while offering a fusion of Indigenous practices and women's rights-oriented approaches. Merry's concept of "vernacularization" is thus at work here, (Merry & Levitt 2017: 213). Additionally, these findings demonstrate how large-scale human rights and women's rights messaging is generally accepted by Indigenous women, although trust (*confianza*) is of paramount importance when it comes to feeling comfortable in social settings and disclosing personal matters, especially with a non-family member. Therefore, in the case of women's rights being offered to Indigenous women in both locations featured in this dissertation, for them to be successfully "vernacularized," they must be offered by local leaders, slowly, with *confianza*, over a period of time, be locally accessible and administered, and include solutions that are locally based.

At the same time, findings further reveal that although Indigenous women are increasingly filing *denuncias* (formal complaints) in recent years and thus responding to public women's rights messaging due to fear of death, feelings of empowerment, and other reasons, the Guatemalan legal system lacks infrastructure and funding. Women participants in both field sites openly expressed being energized and excited about the fact that laws for women now exist, yet felt simultaneous resentment and dissatisfaction regarding the realities of these laws "in action,"

and how they fail to be sufficiently applied by the state. Additionally, women sought formalized forms of assistance at the two governmental institutions with hope of receiving assistance for the financial situations that they were in after leaving their male partner. My findings suggest that women clients were generally less concerned with the GBV that they endured, and more concerned with what their futures, specifically economic futures, looked like. Because of these infrastructural limitations posed by the state, resiliency presented itself in a multitude of ways. Economic resiliency, for example, emerges in this dissertation a way to continually “*seguir adelante*” in an independent sense as a population when state structures continually perpetuate structural violence.

The data correspond to existing literature regarding how the Guatemalan state is sexist (*machista*) and how there is a general lack in the application of laws, and state-sanctioned laws that contrast with localized Maya governments (Sieder 2020). Because there is a general lack of legal application, thus compromising women’s access to justice and health equity regarding living a violence-free life, I argue that women’s access to and lived experiences with GBV are largely politically determined. Despite increased efforts within in the past decades to reduce GBV, these governmental efforts are poorly funded and fail to fully reach Indigenous populations, especially in rural areas. When examining GBV through a health equity lens (Braveman et al. 2011), the findings reveal that direct decisions made by the Guatemalan government do, in fact, impact women’s lives and livelihoods, through access to justice, as well as in access to educational and economic opportunities to help prevent violence.

Alimony payments are one potential source of income, however, as the data demonstrate, these payments are not always reliable due to rigid, bureaucratic application processes requiring a lawyer, as well as a lack of full transparency in partners’ income, judges deciding on how

much the male partner must pay, and alimony payments also foster a further sense of dependence on male partners, further perpetuating the societal norm and ideology that women must depend on men for income. Both organizations offer economic empowerment workshops, however, these workshops are generally not provisioned under a comprehensive curriculum with metrics and success measures. Program evaluations of programmatic efforts are also non-existent, and there is also a general lack of follow-up on behalf of the organizational staff to infer whether women were able to earn sustainable income after participating in the program activities and trainings.

For research Q3, What are Indigenous Maya service seekers' experiences with governmental agencies and NGOs' services designed to prevent and reduce GBV?, my findings suggest that recent studies have increasingly examined services for GBV in Guatemala. However, this study is unique in its focus and emphasis on Indigenous voices, thus contributing to the multiculturalization (Sieder 2013) of human rights and women's rights discourse by illuminating historically silenced perspectives.

As mentioned in Chapter Six, Indigenous women participants generally provided positive feedback regarding their experiences with services offered by both governmental and non-governmental agencies, the organizations, programs, and program staff. This general sense of satisfaction suggests that if resources and services exist, women will seek them out and utilize them. Women reported a general sense of happiness when being included in governmental efforts provisioning women's groups and activities, while simultaneously expressing the need for more economic and educational opportunities.

Women participants' expressions of heartfelt gratitude for being remembered and included by these institutions, further connote how they have felt abandoned by society and by

the state. Additionally, as the data included in Chapters Five and Six suggest, an organization's visibility and reputation in local communities is vital, as it is common for women to refer family members and friends to organizations for assistance, based on their personal experiences. I argue that women survivors supporting other women in both informal and more formalized manners (e.g., through sharing agency information, offering shelter, food, monetary assistance, childcare) is a form of transnational feminism that is oftentimes overlooked by largescale and organizational women's rights efforts. These daily glimpses of feminism play out in local Indigenous communities is also a form of decolonized feminism (McLaren 2017) and Third World feminism, (Herr 2014) in that it may not hold the same characteristics as mainstream, Westernized feminist movements (Dixon 2011), yet is equally feminist in its illumination of localized voices and perspectives.

Local women referring other women to agencies based on their personal experiences highlights the utility in women being able to assist other women in local communities (Dubé 2023) and suggests how camaraderie among women helping other women break free from violent cycles serves as a form of unspoken, transnational feminism (Stewart 2004). Additionally, the finding that midwives (*comadronas*) and other Indigenous Maya leaders help women in more localized forms highlights the forms of feminism that exist beyond the scope of international development efforts and discourse (Manning, Imas & Donnelly 2014). These local leaders thus have tremendous potential for further assisting in the prevention of violence and thus contributing to transformative justice efforts.

As also stated in Chapter Six, participants in both field sites expressed a strong sense of empowerment, stating that this feeling aided them in being able to move forward psychologically. This shift to feeling empowered signifies how receiving formalized support and

information regarding their legal rights aided in cultivating a shift of dignified self-worth, especially when offered in spaces fostering strong social support by organizational staff members and other Maya women. This finding is congruent with Krause (2024)'s findings regarding the importance of social networks in disseminating healthcare-related information and public messaging related to empowerment.

Therefore, neoliberal approaches to GBV are not incongruent with Indigenous perspectives and ideologies, especially when programs and services are administered by Indigenous staff members and other staff who have experience working with Indigenous populations and are thus able to earn service recipients' trust/comfortability (*confianza*). At the same time, without sufficient resources to hire more program staff and more comprehensively and frequently offer programming, governmental agencies fall short in sufficiently providing support. Additionally, this further demonstrates how the prevention and responses GBV are politically determined in many ways.

Further, women service recipients expressed several challenges associated with traveling to-and-from organizations that took over an hour on public transportation to get to. While plenty of scholarship has examined organizational settings in Guatemala (Mannin, Imas, & Donnelly 2014; Hartviksen 2022; Wands 2022;), no other study has incorporated the lived experiences of Indigenous actively seeking services for GBV in Guatemala. Thus, this study highlights the existing needs of women seeking and receiving such forms of formalized assistance.

A prominent finding includes the challenges associated with women having to take the day off work to attend meetings and appointments and having to wait for long periods of time due to limited staffing. These findings further demonstrate the economic vulnerability experienced by women, especially in rural communities. Additionally, almost all service

recipients interviewed expressed feeling a strong sense of fear and feeling timid (*tímida*) upon first traveling to organizations, as well as speaking in front of highly educated staff, such as the *juzgado de paz*. Women generally expressed feeling more comfortable interacting with and receiving assistance from institutions where women wore *traje* and incorporated Indigenous values and beliefs.

These findings correspond with transnational feminist approaches (Patterson-Markowitz 2012) to GBV in that it is best for services to be offered to local women by local women, and to maintain local contexts and ideologies for women's experiences with abuse and violence whenever possible, in addition to merging them with international and human rights-oriented approaches. Collectively, my findings reveal that, through their messaging, globalized women's rights efforts are largely effective in influencing women to file formal reports and seek services. However, these efforts simultaneously illuminate how equity while living a violence-free life is politically determined, and dependent on governmental provisioning of funds and services. Thus, drawing from localized forms of transnational feminism and fostering efforts contributing to transformative justice can potentially offer sustainable, long-term solutions for Indigenous women experiencing GBV.

Comparison between Two Primary Field Sites

Because this study employed a comparative ethnographic approach, it is necessary to discuss some of the key differences between Aldea Bocacosta and Municipio Altiplano, the two primary field sites included in this study. My findings reveal that there were not many significant differences in women's opinions regarding NGOs versus governmental organizations within the two field sites. In both field sites, women reported having more *confianza* (trust) in NGOs compared to governmental organizations. Participants in both field sites also largely reported a

general sense of distrust in the state and governmental entities. Overall, in both field sites, governmental organizations were better known compared to the two NGOs located near each site, although people said that they generally have more trust and confidence in NGOs.

In addition to geographic and other differences that I mention in Chapter Three, the most pronounced differences between the two field sites emerged regarding fears about being discriminated upon by organizational staff. As mentioned in Chapter Three, considering its history as an agricultural community colonized by German farmers in the 1800s, Aldea Bocacosta has experienced ladinoization, or the erasure of Indigenous identity. While the vast majority of town residents still identify as Indigenous, the town's inhabitants are much less connected to resources and social services compared to Municipio Altiplano. Additionally, there are significantly less economic opportunities in Aldea Bocacosta, thus leading to increased forced mobilization by women to the United States in search of economic opportunities compared to Municipio Altiplano.

Additionally, because of more pronounced Indigenous identity in Municipio Altiplano, the wearing of *traje* and speaking of Indigenous languages (Kaqchikel) by organizational staff was expressed as a significant suggestion, whereas these were not as important in Aldea Bocacosta. In addition to fear and anxiety associated with appearing "Indigenous" either through traditional dress (*traje*), skin color, and hair color, this fear of discrimination may also be tied to the stigma associated with living in rural communities that are sometimes considered "backward" or "undeveloped" compared to more urbanized areas. Collectively, women in both field sites expressed desires for increased economic opportunities to mitigate the stressors and uncertainty of raising children as single women with limited education and limited economic opportunities.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study includes the fact that my conclusions of the provisioning of GBV-related programs and services are drawn from a finite number of non-governmental and governmental organizations. While there is likelihood that the findings represented in this dissertation are also representative of other organizations in Guatemala, further research needs to be done within organizations to fully examine these intricacies and nuances concerning service provision. An additional limitation to this study includes the fact that, due to the timing of programming, bureaucratic constraints, and time limitations, I spent more time conducting interviews and observations in governmental organizations compared to non-profit organizations. Lastly, although I did re-visit many of the field site locations, my findings and conclusions are based on two-to-three months of fieldwork in each field site location. Prolonged fieldwork time in each field site location would likely reveal further ethnographic depth and detail pertaining to each field site location.

The collective findings presented in this chapter have several implications for the provisioning of GBV programs for governmental, non-governmental, and policy-level practitioners alike. In the following chapter, I will discuss key recommendations for governmental and non-governmental organizational leaders and staff members, funding institutions, and policymakers. I also revisit the main conclusions offered by this dissertation and provide suggestions for future research within these subject areas.

This dissertation examines an understudied perspective related to GBV in Guatemala; Indigenous women's direct experiences accessing and utilizing formalized services from governmental and non-governmental agencies. In this dissertation, I have utilized and interrogated a series of frameworks to illuminate the nuances, barriers, and power dynamics

affecting the structural conditions that lead challenges that Indigenous women face when striving to move on (*seguir adelante*) from abuse and violence to support themselves and their children.

This study makes a significant contribution to transformative justice literature in its examination of local Indigenous Guatemalan opinions of large-scale governmental and rights-based efforts, the efficacy of these efforts, and the need for locally informed solutions that are also community-specific. Due to the politically determined nature of programs, services, and justice, the findings support transformative justice's shift from macro-level political efforts, and a turning to everyday concerns (Coker 2002).

As discussed in Chapters Four through Six, these challenges are rooted in the overall instability of Guatemala's political climate, significantly corrupted and embedded power structures that have intentionally and purposefully prevented political power and resources from being distributed to Indigenous populations. I have utilized the political determinants of health framework to further examine how these political power dynamics have led to long-term corruption (Flores & Rivers 2020), the lack of thorough and efficient legal application of women's rights laws, institutional fragility, and the inability for the governmental system to adequately meet the increasingly high demand for GBV-related services. This study contributes to the expansion of this theory in its focus on health equity regarding GBV, underserved women's access to GBV resources, and focus on Latin America/Guatemala.

Additionally, through findings suggesting that GBV service recipients' primary/priority needs are largely economic, I argue that a transformative justice approach is urgently needed due to how entrenched gender norms foster reliance on male partners for economic resources. These economic needs can only be met by long-term and informed action through increased access to education, continued women's empowerment initiatives, and sustainable economic opportunities

for women to be able to independently provide for themselves and their children without relying on a male partner.

Further findings suggest that, despite women increasingly filing *denuncias* (formal complaints), there are insufficient judicial staff available to follow through with the sheer magnitude of complaints, thus compromising women's receipt of justice. Findings included in Chapter Five also reveal women's immense resiliency, creativity, and hard work as they move forward from violence. The women survivors in both field sites who went on to offer support to other women survivors in local communities, without formalized training, signify how transnational feminism (McLaren 2017; Blackwell, Briggs & Chiu 2015) works beyond the constraints of institutionalized and organizational settings, and takes place in homes, between neighbors, and in daily realities.

I have also demonstrated how community-based resiliency surrounding social support for GBV and devising alternative economic solutions to poorly enforced alimony laws serves as a mechanism that for women to collectively move forward when laws play out differently "in action" than what is promised by legal documents and state-sanctioned services for Indigenous women. Further, I have demonstrated through the data how these shortcomings exist in both institutional and localized community environments. I argue that women's access to legal resources and desires to "*seguir adelante*" (move on) from violence must not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon solely situated within organizational and institutional realms. Rather, increased efforts must be made to bridge gaps between organization efforts and local communities by paying attention to varying forms of community-based resiliency to further decolonize development efforts (and best orient them toward community needs).

The public health issue of gender-based violence is community and politically oriented and based, requiring both policy and community-level solutions. For informed change and transformative justice to occur, institutions and services must work within the physical geographic community locations, but also with community leaders, incorporating localized ideologies, Indigenous languages, localized power dynamics and political structures, and resources that are created with the direct input and opinions of community members.

Findings further reveal that if activities such as presentations, women's groups, or *charlas* exist, many women will utilize them. However, the existing quality and longevity of governmental programming is questionable and politically determined, thus requiring further action by funders and organizational staff to be better suited to the specific needs and lived realities of Indigenous women living in precarity. And while NGOs and other civil society organizations (Brett 2017; Casaus 2007) offer more specialized services and fill gaps in support not provided by governmental entities, these organizations are not as widely spread and, as findings from this study reveal, are lesser known to Indigenous populations.

Lastly, this study has contributed to existing applied anthropological feminist ethnography and scholarship in its multi-sited approach and focus on women's lived experiences and perspectives that have not historically been incorporated into women's rights efforts and messaging. By placing women's experiences at the center of my analysis, I have shown how human rights/women's rights approaches infiltrate local, rural communities, how they are navigated, experienced, and how they can be improved through an increased emphasis on local leadership, messaging, and programming.

Public Health Implications

In addition to contributing to applied anthropological research, this study also has various implications for the public health field. As previously mentioned, this dissertation advances the political determinants of health framework in its application to GBV as a public health issue related to health equity, and in its international application to a public health problem in Latin America (specifically Guatemala). Additionally, this dissertation examines GBV as a prominent public health issue, while simultaneously situating it within structural and localized contexts.

Findings relate directly to structural racism and are strongly tied to social justice and the need for long-term, sustainable political change. To target this public health issue and enact long-term change for Indigenous women, it is imperative for changes to also be made at all levels, ranging from policy to individual levels. Because of this study's holistic, multi-level approach, findings can be utilized to inform all levels of prevention, ranging from primordial to tertiary. Collectively, the ethnographic findings of lived experiences covered in this dissertation can be utilized by public health and other professionals to humanize this issue, and to foster informed decision-making and to provide ethnographic context to current and future programmatic efforts.

Opportunities for Future Research

The cumulative findings of this dissertation, and additional conversations held in the field, reveal that further research and practice is needed in the following areas. Although this topic was not discussed in this dissertation, sexual violence emerged as an urgent concern, especially for young girls in rural areas. Additionally, further research is needed to examine the role that religion plays in reproductive healthcare access, as well as the intersections of religiosity and religious teachings and GBV. Increased, community-based research, such as program evaluation, is also needed to assess the effectiveness of existing governmental and non-

governmental services. These initiatives can involve partnerships between university research teams and community-based practitioners. Increased community based participatory research (CBPR) is also needed to ensure that programmatic initiatives are specific to localized communities and livelihoods.

Applying the Results

I intend to return to Guatemala to continue to share my findings, however, I conducted the as many applied aspects of this project while in the field as possible, particularly prior to departure. I distributed a professional handout, Appendix 1, to organizational leaders and staff, and reviewed and explained these findings and recommendations with them. I also posted this handout on social media. I shared the printed handout and findings with the femicide judge participants in this study and discussed institutional challenges that participants experienced with them. Additionally, I routinely conversed with organizational leaders and staff throughout the course of this study, where I shared the preliminary study results of this study. I also presented results to a senior leader of an international development agency whose work focuses on GBV programs in Guatemala.

Recommendations

These findings work to inform several key recommendations for stakeholder agencies working at different levels. Below, I have included several recommendations that I have curated based on study findings. As part of my interview guides, I asked participants, frontline workers as well as locals whom I interviewed, to provide recommendations for preventing violence in Guatemala. Participants mentioned family planning, sexual education, and financial planning as potential avenues for violence prevention.

Additionally, the findings included in this dissertation suggest that, given Guatemala's regional cultural diversity among Maya populations, GBV programming needs to be culturally

and locally specific and implemented in a manner that is conducive to individual communities. Suggested improvements for GBV programs and services in Guatemala include: More women's shelters (equipped with adequate safety procedures and equipment); advocacy programs where women are assigned a caseworker to walk them through the legal process and to provide emotional support; GBV programs offered in Indigenous languages through an Indigenous ideological lens by local leaders (e.g., midwives (*comadronas*), traditional healers (*curanderas*) and Indigenous elders/governmental leaders (*alcaldes Maya/líderes Maya*)); GBV programming that incorporates Indigenous cosmology and religious perspectives, as well as Indigenous perceptions of trust (*confianza*), respect (*respeto*), communalism, reciprocity, and honesty.

It is critical that external organizations and agencies do not take a “one size fits all” approach to offering GBV services and resources when working with Indigenous populations in Guatemala. Due to Guatemala’s immense diversity and distinct cultural differences, programming should address community-specific needs of each individual population and culture. For sustainable prevention to take place, there is also an urgent need for community-based programming that engages with male perpetrators of violence to reimagine solutions that extend beyond purely carceral repercussions.

Additionally, it is recommended that all organizations working in local Maya communities correspond and meet with existing local, Indigenous leaders to discuss the specificity of GBV in that community. Doing so will allow for the development of more specialized decision-making, programming, and implementation. Additionally, community-elected, local women leaders/community health workers trained on violence prevention and response and to also increase awareness and provide education to local community members and children.

Programs should also include “decolonized” material, incorporating Indigenous practices, philosophy, and worldview/ideology, and should consult with Indigenous leaders and community members first before designing and implementing these materials. Safety planning, for example, is a largely Western construct, and is offered in governmental agencies in a manner that does not adequately account for Indigenous women’s needs and concerns, especially regarding non-Western ideals of what is considered “safe,” the communal aspects of small, rural communities, the role that the extended family plays in survivors’ lives and livelihoods, as well as the fact that, although largely enforced, protection orders are nonetheless precarious due to slow response time on behalf of the police. There are also very few shelters in Guatemala (the ones that do exist are located in Guatemala City), further complicating the “safety planning” process. Additionally, it is recommended that organization employees living in the communities that they serve are specially trained on the importance of maintaining confidentiality, and do not allow personal relationships with clients to affect the integrity and ethics of their work.

It is also highly recommended that organizations serving predominantly disenfranchised and poor clients (*usarias*) provide food and cover transportation costs for both them and anyone accompanying them to the agency. Doing so will reduce economic barriers that women encounter while simultaneously experiencing abuse and precarity.

The collective findings of this dissertation suggest that, while there have been some contemporary efforts aimed towards preventing and reducing GBV in Guatemala, these efforts will not make a significant impact on a societal level until macro-level factors such as political transparency, racism, poverty, gender discrimination, and overall well-being for members of the Indigenous population are addressed and changed for the better.

Additionally, organizational efforts in Guatemala tend to be concentrated in areas that are readily accessible to short-term international volunteers, such as Guatemala City, the surrounding areas of Antigua, Sacatepequez and Lake Atitlán. Increased community-based programming is needed in hard-to-reach, rural areas, where women experience increased isolation and limited exposure and access to formalized services and organizations, limited economic opportunities, and where more rigid, traditional gender roles prevail. In this study, for example, women in the Aldea Bocacosta and general Bocacosta region were generally less engaged with services compared to women in Municipio Altiplano. As discussed in Chapter Five, because of the strong influence that the Evangelical church has in rural (and other) communities, there is also tremendous potential for these leaders to receive collaboration and training on GBV to make a long-standing impact with women in their communities.

Additionally, because of their unique positions in working directly with women's bodies, clinical staff workers, such as physicians and nurses, should also receive comprehensive training on identifying the signs of GBV when working with patients, and conducting risk assessments to determine further courses of action. As-is, Guatemala's current violence prevention and response system remains siloed and segmented. Increased collaboration in training, programming, and practice, as well as increased communication among institutions and stakeholders that encounter survivors is critical to fostering holistic solutions for GBV prevention and response. In sum, to further prevent and respond to GBV moving forward, it is recommended that programming occurs at the local level, is community-based and community-generated, adequately and thoroughly integrates Indigenous traditions, customs (*costumbres*) and ideologies within human rights frameworks, and emphasizes educational access and economic sustainability.

The struggles associated with Guatemala's recently appointed President, Bernardo Arévalo's, transition to power on January 15, 2024, has publicly displayed the fragility of Guatemala's democracy and the systemic barriers in place to prevent long-term change in a fragmented society. The son of Juan José Arévalo Bermejo, Guatemala's first democratically elected President, is following in his late father's footsteps to promote democracy, anti-corruption, and potential for increased equity and distribution of power within the country. The new President's election holds newfound hope for Guatemalan society and hope for the future. Guatemala also appointed an Indigenous Congresswoman, Sonia Gutiérrez, in 2020, suggesting that further change is upon the horizon. I end this dissertation reflecting on this new leadership and representation's potential to enact policies and reforms to meet the various needs of Guatemala's Indigenous population, including women survivors. As these political changes ensue, Guatemala continues to move forward (*seguir adelante*), fighting (*luchando*), into the light.

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APPENDIX A: USF IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL



APPROVAL

April 5, 2021

Caitlynn Carr



Dear Ms. Caitlynn Carr:

On 2/19/2021, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY001973
Review Type:	Committee Review
Title:	The Political Economy of Trauma and Healing: Intimate Partner Violence Resource Acquisition among Indigenous Guatemalan Women
Funding:	Fulbright Commission
Approved Protocol and Consent(s)/Assent(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRO#001973 Study Protocol ; • Men, Focus Group, Verbal, English, 3.23.21 ; • Men, Focus Group, Verbal, Spanish, 3.23.21; • Men, Interview, Verbal, English, 3.18.21; • Men, Interview, Verbal, Spanish, 3.8.21; • Organization Staff, Interview, Verbal, English, 3.8.21; • Organization Staff, Interview, Verbal, Spanish, 3.8.21; • Women, Focus Group, Verbal, English, 3.23.21; • Women, Focus Groups, Verbal, Spanish, 3.23.21; • Women, Interview, Verbal, English, 3.8.21; • Women, Interview, Verbal, Spanish, 3.8.21; <p>Approved study documents can be found under the 'Documents' tab in the main study workspace. Use the stamped consent found under the 'Last Finalized' column under the 'Documents' tab.</p>

The Board approved a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent for interviews and focus groups as outlined in the federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.117(c).

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669

University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

Page 1 of 2



The IRB determined that all future reviews can be conducted under Expedited category 9 (Continuing review of research, not conducted under an investigational new drug application or investigational device exemption where categories two (2) through eight (8) do not apply but the IRB has determined and documented at a convened meeting that the research involves no greater than minimal risk and no additional risks have been identified). A full continuing review is not required.

Within 30 days of the anniversary date of study approval, confirm your research is ongoing by clicking Confirm Ongoing Research in BullsIRB, or if your research is complete, submit a study closure request in BullsIRB by clicking Create Modification/CR.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

Jennifer Walker
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS HANDOUT (ENGLISH):

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES SEEKING ASSISTANCE FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA:

Research study findings

PRIMARY CHALLENGES TO SEEKING SUPPORT:

FEAR (OF)...

- The fear or femicide is one of the primary reasons why Indigenous women decided to seek assistance for the IPV that they endured.
- At the same time, fear also serves as a deterrent for women seeking formal forms of support.
- Survivors reported feeling afraid entering both governmental and non-governmental organizations for the first time without knowing anyone.
- Increased access to information regarding legal rights and authorities/organizations serving IPV survivors is vital for moving forward from a violent situation.

TRAVELING TO SEEK ASSISTANCE

- For women living in poverty, transportation to organizations can be very costly, sometimes a day or two's worth of income.
- It can also be difficult for survivors to bring their children along, pay for their travel, and to miss a full day's worth of work in order to attend an appointment.
- There is a need for more sustainable and local programs so that women do not have to travel as long and as far to seek assistance.

LACK OF ECONOMIC RESOURCES

- Due to the lack of formal education and an unequal distribution of power within the personal relationship, many women depend on their partner's income to survive. Abandonment is another serious problem affecting women's economic situations.
- "I was very afraid to leave because I did not know how I was going to financially support my children. But thanks to God, with help from my psychologist and lawyer, I can move forward with my little business that I just started."* -Study Participant

MOVING FORWARD

- All of the 45 interviewed participants who sought some form of formal support stated that at first, they were afraid to look for assistance.
- However, all 45 clients stated that the organizations that they sought assistance from served and treated them well.
- While they were afraid to seek assistance at first, they started to have more trust in the organization once they started receiving emotional and legal support. "Moving forward" serves as a primary theme for this research study.

THE NEED FOR JUSTICE

- "There are many beautiful laws. But the laws don't always work. There is no justice. A woman can make a legal complaint but not much happens afterward."* -Study Participant
- More women are taking legal action but in the majority of cases, there are no penalties. Corruption and fear are additional factors that impact the way that women obtain justice.
- Additionally, the legal process can take a long time (sometimes six or seven years). All survivors deserve justice and we must work together to improve both informal and formal support for survivors in Guatemala.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

FAMILY LEVEL

- You can help support a survivor in your family by sharing service information and by helping take care of her children when she has to work or attend a meeting/appointment.
- You can also open the doors of your home to her, if the situation is secure. It is important for survivors to know that their family is not going to judge her and that there are options for moving forward with the support of her family and friends.

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Local leaders, including local Maya authorities, midwives, religious leaders, community health workers, lawyers, psychologists, and others can support abused women by offering support and assistance in the local community. They can offer food, emotional support, their services, and other networks of assistance.
- These leaders and local community members can also help share organization information for where women can look for help. You can support survivors by purchasing from her business and offering work to her in order to offer additional support.
- There is a need for more organized cooperatives and economic opportunities for women to have business opportunities.
- Remember that gossip can cause damage to survivors.
- There is a need for more community support to support those with alcoholism.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

- It is always important to talk to clients with empathy, patience, and compassion so that they feel safe and have more trust in organization employees.
- The majority of Indigenous participants in this study said that they had more confidence in organizations where other Indigenous women are working and where they can speak their native language and have their customs and worldview understood.

The following program types are needed:

- Shelters for women to go to when they separate from their partners.
- Advocate programs and training of local leaders to offer emotional support, attend appointments and court dates with survivors, and to discuss clients' future goals and specific needs.
- More programs offering support to single mothers, especially to help with their economic situations (e.g., materials for their children's studies) and to assist with learning a specific trade or offering financial support for further education.
- More collaboration and networking among the different organizations serving women survivors in Guatemala. There is also a need for program evaluation to see if programs are making an impact and which programs offer sustainable solutions.

GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITIES

- Many governmental organizations do not have sufficient resources to offer legal and psychological support to all of the women who need assistance.
- There is a need for more funds at the highest level in order to support all of the women who need it in order to further prevent domestic violence in Guatemala.
- There is also a need for more programs to train local leaders and advocates in rural areas, where there are less services.

THIS STUDY WAS CONDUCTED BY CAITLYNN ('CATI') CARR, MA, CPH

These results are based on a formal research study approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB) with funds obtained by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) Fellowship. Data were collected from 2022 to 2023.




APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS HANDOUT (SPANISH):

EXPERIENCIAS DE MUJERES INDÍGENAS QUE BUSCAN AYUDA POR LA VIOLENCIA DE PAREJA EN GUATEMALA: Encuentros de un estudio de investigación

RETOS PRINCIPALES DE BUSCAR AYUDA

TEMOR O MIEDO (DE...)
El temor de morir es una razón de que muchas mujeres indígenas no buscan ayuda por sus situaciones. A la misma vez, este temor también es un factor principal de que buscan ayuda. Mujeres también tienen miedo de entrar a una organización sin conocer a nadie. El conocimiento de sus derechos y a los lugares donde pueden buscar ayuda es vital para salir de la situación peligrosa.

VIAJAR POR BUSCAR AYUDA
Por mujeres con bajos recursos, cuesta mucho pagar por el transporte a las organizaciones. También, es difícil traer sus hijos a las organizaciones y no trabajar por un día entero. Hay necesidad por más programas sostenibles y locales para que mujeres no tengan que viajar tanto a buscar ayuda.

FALTA DE RECURSOS ECONOMICOS
Por la falta de educación formal y una imbalancia de poder en la relación, muchas mujeres dependen del gasto de su pareja. El abandono es otro problema grave que afecta a la situación económica de la mujer.
"Yo tenía mucho miedo salir porque no sabía cómo iba a sostener a mis hijos. Pero gracias a Dios, con la ayuda de la psicóloga y de la abogada, puedo seguir adelante con mi negocio pequeño que acabé de empezar." - Participante del estudio

SIGUIENDO ADELANTE
Todas las 45 usuarias entrevistadas por este estudio dijeron que al principio, tenían miedo de buscar ayuda. Sin embargo, también dijeron que las organizaciones que sirvieron a ellas las atendieron bien. Aunque tenían miedo al principio, tenían más confianza cuando empezaron a recibir apoyo emocional y ayuda legal y están en el proceso de seguir adelante.

LA NECESIDAD POR JUSTICIA
"Hay muchas leyes bonitas. Pero las leyes no cumplen. No hay justicia. Una mujer puede hacer una denuncia pero no mucho pasa después." - Participante del estudio
Más mujeres están denunciando pero en la mayoría de casos, no hay penales. La corrupción y el temor son factores principales que están impactando la forma en que una mujer recibe a la justicia. También, el proceso legal por el caso llega al tribunal tarda mucho, a veces seis o siete años. Todas las sobrevivientes merecen la justicia y tenemos que trabajar ambos para resolver este problema.

RECOMENDACIONES POR APOYAR MEJOR LAS SOBREVIVIENTES DE LA VIOLENCIA DE PAREJA

AL NIVEL:

FAMILIAR
Puede apoyar a una mujer en su familia con buscar ayuda, cuidar a sus hijos cuando tiene que trabajar o asistir a una reunión. También, puede abrir las puertas de su casa a ella, si la situación es segura. Es importante por una mujer abusada saber que su familia no va a juzgarla y que hay opciones seguir adelante con el apoyo de su familia y compañeros.

DE LA COMUNIDAD
Los líderes locales, incluyendo autoridades Mayas, comadronas, líderes religiosos, promotoras, y otros pueden apoyar a las mujeres abusadas en ofrecer apoyo y ayuda comunitaria. Puede compartir comida, ofrecer apoyo emocional, y organizar otros redes de ayuda. También puede compartir los lugares dónde una mujer puede buscar ayuda. Eso es especialmente importante por las madre solteras. Recuerda que el chisme puede causar daño a una sobreviviente.

ORGANIZACIONAL
Siempre es importante hablar con las usuarias con empatía, paciencia, y compasión para que tengan confianza en los empleos de la organización. La mayoría de participantes de este estudio dijeron que tienen más confianza en organizaciones dónde las empleas son indígenas y dónde pueden hablar su lengua materna y entender a sus costumbres.
Hay necesidad por estos tipos de programas:

- Refugios por mujeres cuando separarse de sus parejas.
- Programas de defensoras y líderes locales para apoyar a las mujeres emocionalmente, atender a sus reuniones y acompañarla al tribunal, y a ver cuales necesidades personales tienen.
- Más programas que sirven a las mujeres solteras, especialmente para ayudar con sus situaciones económicas (materiales por sus hijos a estudiar) y por ayudar con un trabajo o talento específico o estudiar
- Más colaboración y redes entre las organizaciones que sirven a mujeres en Guatemala

DE AUTORIDADES GUBERNAMENTALES
Muchas organizaciones gubernamentales no tienen recursos suficientes para apoyar a todas las mujeres que necesitan ayuda. Hay necesidad por más fondos y apoyo al nivel alto para apoyar a las mujeres que lo necesitan y para continuar a prevenir a la violencia de pareja en todo de Guatemala. También, hay necesidad por más programas de capacitar a más mujeres líderes y defensas en las aldeas rurales, donde el acceso a servicios es menos.













Estos resultados son basados en un estudio formal hecho de la Universidad del Sur de Florida con la ayuda de una beca de Fulbright-Hays de julio 2016 a mayo 2017.


