FROM LEFT TO RIGHTS:
GUATEMALAN WOMEN’S STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Anthropology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)
August 2014

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Abstract

*From Left to Rights* is a study of a social movement mobilized in the new age of rights—Guatemalan women’s organizations’ campaign to eradicate violence against women. The movement relies on and derives from women’s human rights discourse and the transnational feminist movement, yet it is a local manifestation of a search for justice, dignity and hope. The main protagonists of this campaign are Guatemalan women who have decided, for historic and strategic reasons, to use women’s human rights discourse to promote their struggle. Considering some of the discourse’s internal contradictions, and based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Guatemala City, I argue that in order for women’s human rights discourse to promote a substantial change in the lives of Guatemalans, the discourse is framed and practiced in terms of dignity.

As I illustrate, Guatemalan women’s organizations emphasize and legitimize women’s diverse lived experiences. They encourage women to see themselves as worthy beings, as actors, and as the rightful protagonists of their own lives. They also motivate women to draw support from other women and to see themselves as part of a worthy community. Hence, these organizations inspire women to begin to imagine themselves not only as worthy of life, but also as worthy of happiness. In a reality in which envisioning change is an act of resistance, hope—the ability to imagine a better future—is the key mechanism to explain the social transformation attempted by Guatemala’s women’s rights campaign. Such individual and collective transformation further requires transforming the spaces in which they live to allow and encourage these new subjectivities. This dual, dialectical transition, I illustrate, is both an outcome of a long process, and a method to keep the (transformation) process going.
Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Tal Nitsán. The fieldwork reported in chapters 1 was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board: Certificate number H08-01959; Principal Investigator: Dr. Bruce Granville Miller.
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<tr>
<td>AGMM</td>
<td>Guatemalan Association of Women Doctors (Asociación Guatemalteca de Mujeres Médicas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>Association of Women in Solidarity (Asociación de Mujeres en Solidaridad)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMG</td>
<td>Guatemala City metropolitan area (Área Metropolitana de Guatemala)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>Assembly of Civil Society (Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATRAHDOM</td>
<td>Association of Domestic and Maquila Workers (Asociacion de Trabajadoras del Hogar a Domicilio y de Maquila)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belém do Pará</td>
<td>Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CalDH</td>
<td>Center for Human Rights Legal Action (Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCPM</td>
<td>Women’s Civic Political Convergence (Convergencia Cívico Política de Mujeres)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEH</td>
<td>Historical Clarification Commission (Comision para al Esclarecimiento Historico)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CERIGUA</td>
<td>Center for Informative Reports About Guatemala (Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala)</td>
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<td>CGRS</td>
<td>The Center for Gender &amp; Refugee Studies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CICAM</td>
<td>Center for Women’s Research, Training and Support (Centro de Investigación, Capacitación y Apoyo a la Mujer)</td>
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<td>CIM</td>
<td>Inter-American Commission of Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>CODEFEM</td>
<td>Collective for the Defense of Women’s Rights in Guatemala. (Colectiva para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres en Guatemala)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONAPREVI</td>
<td>National Coordinator for the Prevention and Eradication of Interfamilial Violence and Violence against Women. (Coordinadora Nacional para prevenir y erradicar la violencia intrafamiliar y en contra la mujer)</td>
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CONAVIGUA National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows (Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala).

CUC Peasant Unity Committee (Comité de Unidad Campesina)

DEMI The Protectorate of Indigenous Women (Defensoria de la Mujer Indígena).

ECAP Team of Community Studies and Psychosocial Action (Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial)

EGP Guerrilla Army of the Poor (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres)

FAR Rebel Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes)

FLACSO Latin American Faculty for Social Science (La Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales’)

GAM Mutual Support Group for Families of the Disappeared.(Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo)

GGM Guatemalan Women’s Group (Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres)

IACHR Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

ICCPG Institute of Comparative Studies in Criminal Science Guatemala (Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales de Guatemala).

IMF International Monetary Fund

INACIF Guatemalan National Institute for Forensic Sciences (Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses de Guatemala)

INE National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística)

INGUAT Guatemala’s Tourism Institute (Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo)

MAIZ Broad Leftist Movement (Movimiento Amplio de Izquierda)


MP Public Prosecutor’s Office (Ministerio Publico)

MPA HIV+ Women in Action (Mujeres Positivas in Accion)
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>MuJER</td>
<td>Women for Justice, Education, and Awareness (Mujeres por la Justicia, Educación, y el Reconocimiento)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organization of American States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OJ</td>
<td>Judicial Body (Organismo Judicial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORPA</td>
<td>Revolutionary Organization of Armed People (Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDH</td>
<td>Human Rights Ombudsman (Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos)</td>
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<td>PGT</td>
<td>Guatemalan Party of Labour (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLANOVI</td>
<td>National Plan for the Prevention of Violence in the Family. (Plan Nacional de Prevención y Erradicación de la Violencia Intrafamiliar y contra las Mujeres)</td>
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<td>PNC</td>
<td>National Civil Police (Policía Nacional Civil)</td>
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<td>RedNoVi</td>
<td>No Violence Network (La Red de la no violencia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>REMHI</td>
<td>Recovery of Historical Memory (Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica)</td>
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<td>SEPREM</td>
<td>Presidential Women’s Secretariat (Secretaría Presidencial de la Mujer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNU</td>
<td>The United Nations System (El Sistema de las Naciones Unidas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAMG</td>
<td>National Union of Guatemalan Women (Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program (PNUD: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women (now UNwomen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund (Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>URNG</td>
<td>Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAC</td>
<td>University of San Carlos (The National University)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIF</td>
<td>Interfamilial Violence (Violencia Intrafamiliar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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Acknowledgements

One spring day I returned to my office all angry and hurt and spent an hour venting. When I was finally done, my friend Julie said: “let’s talk about privilege.” Returning my puzzled gaze, she insisted: “what makes a privilege?” After she left I opened a new word document and wrote: “privilege.” After staring at it for a while, I changed it to “I am privileged.”

I am privileged to be brought up by parents who raised me as a valuable, worthy, celebrated being. Collaborating with and writing about women who teach themselves and others that they are worthy of respect and happiness, who forcefully struggle to be acknowledged as such, fills me with admiration and humility, as well as endless gratitude to my parents. Every bridge I crossed, every obstacle I overcame, every great victory I had, is rooted in that magnificent backbone you gave me, together with the conviction that you will always have my back. There is no way to express my gratitude, but I am happy to have made you proud.

I am also privileged to communicate with the world as a survivor of violence. Becoming a survivor has been a liberating, powerful experience, and I aim to help others to turn their scars into medals. It is my hope that this dissertation will be part of this endeavor.

I want to acknowledge here how privileged I feel to have had the opportunity to converse, collaborate, and learn from so many Guatemalan women activists, political subjects and survivors. Thank you for generously making time for my endless questions in your busy schedules and for making space for me in your lives. Your ongoing, persistent commitment to transform the reality in which you live has been a great inspiration for me, and back in Vancouver I often drew strength from our recorded conversations. Hilda Morales-Trujillo and Yolanda Aguilar remain a source of inspiration and support through and
beyond my time in Guatemala. I am deeply grateful for the continuous support and guidance of Ana Silvia Monzón, Ana-Gladys Ollas, and Sonia Acabal. I was also blessed with wonderful friendships, such as Carolina Alvarez, self-appointed as my protector and advocate, and Pilar Mareque, *la otra colocha*, and a great wizard of transnational activism.

My little transnational community in Antigua has been essential for my well-being and good spirit. Many thanks to Raul, who gave me my first home in Guatemala and Antonia who gracefully managed that home; to Gloria, an outburst of feminine strength and joy; to Greg and Michelle, for their parenting presence, and to Ramelle, whose dedication to Maya youth’s education remains a vibrant inspiration. I thank Fernando and Tony, who taught me all I know about coffee and chocolate, and Laurel for her teachings and generosity. *Utz matiox* to my birthday twin and *gringo* Kaqchikel teacher, Graham Solo. Gee, I can't wait to share another spectacular birthday with you! *Hamon Todot* to Gal, who was always there to invert a crisis and offer a hug. A very special thank you to Eric, for his love and insightful listening, fundamental to the analysis I offer in this dissertation.

I sincerely thank my dissertation committee members. My supervisor, Bruce Miller, who showed me that mama-bear also comes in a large man version. I am forever indebted to his support of me and my work, from the very beginning and through this very long process, as well as his robust conviction of the quality of my work. Thank you. I also thank my committee members, Juanita Sundberg and Gastón Gordillo for their insightful comments and for their encouragement to think deeper throughout my entire process. I feel truly blessed to have had such challenge and support from these and many other wonderful scholars at UBC—especially Bill French, Erin Baines, Jon Beasley-Murray, Patrick Moore, and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá. I look forward to further conversations with you.
I am grateful to the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies at the Hastings College of Law in San Francisco and its director, Karen Musalo, for helping me with my first steps into the field. It was a great pleasure to intellectually converse and collaborate with Gina Bateson and Kedron Thomas both in Guatemala and in North America; I’m looking forward to future collaborations! Many thanks to Linda Green for insightful conversations and the title of this dissertation. A very warm and special thank you to Diane Nelson, for her encouragement and support, as well as her inspiring scholarship.

My landing in Vancouver in 2006 was cushioned by vibrant support of the Green College girl’s gang: Cary, Cindy, Joanne, Jacqueline, Judith, Kristi, Mika, Sophie, and Tara; thank you for your sisterhood in a new land. I am so very grateful for your continues presence in my life. I was further blessed with the ultimate problem solvers: The Queen, The Secretary General, The Bitch, and Sir Schultelot. I am grateful for the ongoing reunions of our pentagon, through fieldwork, graduation, and the job market. Let’s keep it that way, eh?

When I returned from the field, I was privileged to become part of the scholarly community of the Liu Institute, and take part in intellectually inspiring and challenging conversations, as well as various collaborations, looking into questions of social justice from global and local prism. I am particularly grateful for the opportunities to articulate my thoughts artistically, which broadens my understanding of my own research as well as social science and activism. I am also grateful for the opportunity to coordinate the Latin America and the Global research group, and for the thorough and thoughtful feedback I received from the group members. Having a working space at the Institute provided me with ongoing opportunities to engage with the scholars’ community and share moments of joy, frustration and hope with other scholars. Thank you, Beth, Julie, Kat, Lara, Laura, Oralia and Shayna for
your daily presence in my life, for listening, advising, and hugging. Another gift from the Liu was working with Erin Jessee, a collaboration and friendship that took both of us much further than we expected. I am so looking forward to continue working with you, Erin.

I owe a special debt to the honorable faculty of the STAC: Dr. Baloy, Dr. Kenyon, Dr. Roth, Dr. Schultz, and soon-to-be Dr. Hay. I am so privileged to have you in my life, and a bit overwhelmed with what you have done for me. There is no way I can adequately thank you for your generosity, encouragement, praising, questioning, proposing, listening, challenging, adding and editing. Tissy would have never flown without you. I especially acknowledge Kristi’s determination to get me through, and Stephen’s insistence on taking me there. You have dismantled every possible obstacle blocking my way while being situated in the other side of the continent. Thank you.

Ella Nitzani had a crucial role in keeping me sane and going, with her daily pep talks, and I’m grateful to Nurit for being such a positive addition to my life. I also thank the veterans, Ilana, Inbal, Leora, Moran, Osnat, Tamar and Yael for their ongoing presence, support, friendship challenging time and space; you are magnificent. My fabulous surrogate Vancouver family, Ana, Cindy, Franka, Ido, Morgan, Nico, Ofira, Omi, Oren, Rafa, Ramona, Stacy, and finally Tom, were there to fill the gaps. While the STAC reconstructed Tissy’s wings, you fed her nectar and supplied the fairy dust. Thank you.

Last, but not least, I am in awe of my brother, Prince Quetzalcoatl, my partner in all things horrible and wonderful, as well as some boring stuff in the middle. Ketzka, I’m so proud of the man you became and so privileged to have you in my life. Ata Hchi Achi!
Dedication

In memory of my grandparents,

Rivka and Avraham Luzya-Hacohen
Miryam and Yonatan Nisani

whose life I imagine in order to understand mine.

And for the life of Esther Benyamin,
who helps me to understand.
Introduction

We have to find new ways to connect with this world and this country; we have to disengage from this discourse of victims. We need to talk about violence, but not as victims, as political subjects and survivors. We need to recover happiness and hope. (Yolanda Aguilar)

The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring a genuine change. (Audre Lorde 1983:108)

Right /rɪt/

**Adjective**
Morally good, justified, or acceptable.
Healthy, sane, competent.

**Noun**
That which is morally correct, just, or honorable.
A legal, social, or moral principle of entitlement, as well as property ownership or privilege.
A political view opposing change in a liberal direction and usually advocating maintenance of the established social, political, or economic order, sometimes by authoritarian means.

**Verb**
Restore to a normal or upright position.

**Exclamation**
Used to indicate one's agreement with a suggestion or to acknowledge a statement or order.

**Synonyms**
noun. Justice – law – title
verb. Straighten – redress – rectify – correct

(Oxford English Dictionary)
INTRODUCTION

*From Left to Rights* is an ethnographic study of a social movement mobilized in the new age of rights—Guatemalan women’s organizations’ campaign to eradicate violence against women. The campaign relies on and derives from women’s human rights discourse and the transnational feminist movement, yet it is a local manifestation of a search for justice, dignity and hope.

The Guatemalan campaign to eradicate violence against women is directly related to Guatemalan socio-cultural structures of power and the manner in which they have been maintained through various forms of violence. Widespread general violence together with local meanings of gender (Merry 2009:3) affects the high prevalence of physical violence against women. However, the campaign not only addresses physical manifestations of violence, but also condemns “assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim” (Scheper Hughes and Bourgois 2004:1). Much of the campaign therefore focuses on finding ways to re/establish women’s sense of worth and value on both individual and societal levels.

Local forms of structural violence affect the everyday lives of Guatemalans yet remain invisible and normalized. Guatemalan women in general, and poor, Indigenous, and displaced women in particular, have limited access to basic services such as health and education. This inadequate access among marginalized populations results in high mortality levels. This structural violence is not only destructive, but is also a mechanism that reproduces this very inequality (Scheper Hughes and Bourgois 2004:1). Devalued individuals are more susceptible to different forms of abuse, as they lack means to resist. It is also socially justifiable to abuse them, and even rationalized as “needed” in order to maintain the
local structures of power. Institutionalizing women’s inferior social worth aggravates assaults on their personhood and self-value, at both individual and societal levels.

Due to particular socio-cultural structures of power and local meanings of gender, much of the violence experienced by Guatemalan women—such as lack of access to information and methods of family planning, or to land rights—is legalized, thus considered “legitimate.” Such forms of violence, especially among marginalized populations, are destructive, as they generate health risks and further legitimate women’s devaluation, resulting in the reproduction of violence. These consequences are particularly apparent in periods of intensified violence—such as the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the first decade of the new millennium—when sexually abusing and killing poor, displaced, often indigenous women became socially permissible, justified, and even practiced by the state. While destructive and reproductive, structural violence also forces individual women and communities to fashion “safe” ways to exist in a reality of everyday violence. Therefore, an important aspect of the structural violence discussed above is that it generates new forms of social mobilizations meant to challenge the existing reality and suggest an alternative future. The campaign to eradicate violence against women is one such productive result.

The main protagonists of this dissertation are Guatemalan women of diverse ethnicities, social classes, ages, and sexual orientations who have decided, for historic and strategic reasons, to use human rights discourse to advocate for the eradication of violence against women. Many of the women involved in this campaign, like Yolanda Aguilar, cited earlier, were previously involved with left-leaning socialist organizations struggling for
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social justice in Guatemala during the Internal Armed Conflict (1960-1996).\(^1\) Like in other locations in Latin America, their struggle to advance social justice was deemed “subversive” by the state and was eliminated with the guidance and support of the United States, as part of its campaign to “promote freedom” (Carothers 1991, Immerman 1982). Aguilar, like many other activists, continued to promote social justice while in exile, and upon returning to Guatemala, began to advocate not only for social change, but also for new ways for seeking such change.

In the post-conflict era I see three main changes in the modes of operation of left-wing women activists’, a transition I call from left to rights.\(^2\) First, the 1996 Peace Accords between the government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity or URNG), which were heavily influenced by foreign policies, opened a greater space for political participation and facilitated the inclusion of new sectors of society, including women, in the national discourse. The fact that women were acknowledged as a sector with its own needs and demands during the peace negotiations facilitated the creation of women as political subjects. Namely, beyond their participation in left-leaning socialist organizations struggling for social justice, a space was now open for women’s participation through women-specific organizations, promoting women-specific agendas.

Second, these newly established women’s organizations began to make demands of the state; i.e., their former revolutionary mode of operation was replaced with a civil sense of

\(^1\) Guatemala went through the most brutal wave of state terrorism in the western hemisphere in the late 20th century, which I address later in this introduction. Considering the extent of brutality, the term Internal Armed Conflict may seem technocratic, bureaucratic and also de-politicizing, however this is the term at use by women-activists, the Guatemalan state and much of the literature. As my research project is not focused specifically on the topic, I, with reservation, use the existing term.

\(^2\) The rights discourse was adopted by both left and right wing actors, yet this account focuses on the strategic use of the discourse by left wing activists.
being rights-worthy political subjects entitled to make demands of the state and aiming to promote reform through collaboration with the state. Similar to other social struggles taking place in Guatemala, the state became a site for struggle, not an enemy to crush (Nelson 1999:46). Third, these women’s organizations strategically chose transnational, neoliberal human rights discourse to articulate and represent their demands over the socialist discourse they had engaged with in earlier struggles. In this account I call the women who chose to assume the human rights discourse women-beings, emphasizing that one can be rights-worthy and a subject of rights while woman.3

Human rights discourse is a powerful apparatus and by using it, the transnational feminist movement was able to considerably advance women’s rights globally and in Guatemala. At the same time, it invokes practical and ideological concerns. On the practical level, the fact that global pressures motivated states to abide by international legislation, policy, and institutions in favor of women’s rights does not guarantee their fulfillment on the ground. Once they are nationalized, laws are subjected to national legal discourses that often strip them of their original intention. Redressing them through different practices and methods then tends to fall onto the shoulders of civil society actors, as I address in length in this research project.

On the ideological level, the women’s human rights agenda is a unifying discourse that collapses categories of women. Its emphasis on violence against women portrays all women as victims or potential victims; i.e., using it prevents a complex, multilayered

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3 As women—as a social category—are legally discriminated against, this term comes to mark the radical notion of their demand to be considered fully, valuable human beings, i.e. it challenges the notion of woman as a second class individual, as well as the universal perception that equates human with man. The fact that spoken, it sounds similar, further emphasizes the slight different between woman-being and (hu)man-being. Here assume the position of women-beings, refers both to “assume identity,” and to the need to imagine this specific position.
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discussion of violence experienced by different women. Again, civil society actors take it upon themselves to bring these particularities and complexities back into the conversation, as this project unfolds.

The multiple layers of discourses and interests that this campaign brings together invite an array of tensions and contradictions. In this account I discuss how the women’s movement negotiates between particular and general dimensions of violence, between local and transnational dimensions of the women’s rights discourse, and lastly, how they maneuver between transforming their own consciousness and transforming societal policies and norms.


Chronologically, my research is a continuation of these earlier projects. While I rely on these political and socio-historical accounts, my dissertation contributes a new perspective by examining the particular ways in which this movement organizes itself around transnational feminist and human rights discourses, and its potential effect on their search for justice, dignity and hope.
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While many of the activities generated by these organizations can be seen as reformist, their premise—incorporating women in the national discourse—requires a reimagining of the nation, and as such, it is a revolutionary attempt. Hence, while activists of different Guatemalan women’s groups promote a women’s rights agenda, their efforts (intentionally or unintentionally) promote a new vision of a just society. Put differently, I claim that although the ideological framework (socialism) and mode of action (revolutionary) changed in the post-conflict, neoliberal era, Guatemalan women activists, using a new ideology—women’s human rights—and a new—reformist—mode of action, are working towards the same goal: social justice for Guatemalans.

This doctoral thesis focuses on the actions of organized women in Guatemala. In order to better understand the strategic choice of Guatemalan women’s human rights platform and its challenges, it is important to first explore the circumstances and structures of power within which they operate and which they attempt to transform. In this chapter I first discuss human rights discourse and some of its strengths and critiques. Then I turn to women’s human rights agenda, which developed as a critical response and collaboration with human rights discourse. Subsequently, I look at the lived circumstances of many Guatemalans focusing on legacies of structural inequality and their violent reproduction. Having established the main structures that shape and are shaped by the Guatemalan campaign to eradicate violence against women, I turn back to women activists and the different modes of action they adopt to promote their cause.
Human rights discourse in general, and particularly women’s human rights discourse is central to this account, as so much of the movement’s activities draw on it. While popularly considered as an apolitical, neutral ideology (Habermas 1998, 2010), there is a growing body of literature that views the idea of “human rights” more critically (Abu-Lughod 2013, Bedi 2009; Benhabib 2011; Buonamano 2008; Douzinas 2000, 2007; Goodale 2005, 2006). In order to consider the potential complexities this discourse may convey, I begin this account by looking at the origin and initial motivations of the idea of human rights, the ways in which it was developed, and its contemporary relation with the new, neoliberal, world order.

*Just Rights(?)*

The idea that every person is entitled to universal and egalitarian rights by virtue of being human began to evolve during the early modern period, in relation to the political philosophy of the Enlightenment and Liberalism. These rights were meant to protect the civil and political interests of Western-educated propertied men in the public sphere and were limited to the specific sector that advanced them (Bunch 1995:13). The development of these rights as international instrument has influenced—and was influenced by—different national liberation struggles, and in relation to slavery. The establishment of the Red Cross in 1864 and the early Geneva Conventions (1864, 1906, 1929) set the foundation for the development of International Humanitarian Law, an international system attempting to legally limit human suffering.

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4 This exclusion was often intentional and conscious. Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), a French playwright and anti-slavery activist who challenged the Revolutionary government, and demanded that French women be given the same rights as French men, was executed by guillotine.

5 The International Humanitarian Law aims to regulate the conduct of armed conflict and protect non-combatants from violence. While it regulates relations between states, it legally establishes the need to view individuals of different nationalities as human, worthy of protection.
The main impetus for the age of rights, though, was the adoption of the charter of the United Nations in 1945, which made the protection of human rights one of the main stated aims of the organization. Three years later, the UN general assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a non-binding proclamation of minimum standards of treatment of citizens by their state authorities. This paved the way for hundreds of human rights conventions, treaties, declarations and agreements that have been negotiated and adopted by the United Nations, regional bodies, and states.

The suggested universal set of substantive rights was based on Western liberal values and ignored the richness of diversity in moral systems. Hence, the declaration, intended to protect the powerless from different forms of totalitarianism, reflected an imposition of Western moral values on less powerful groups of people whose patterns of behaviour were misunderstood and reviled by Western elites (Goodale 2006:486). However, while initially limited, the universal premise of human rights encouraged more people to claim them, and thus expanded the meaning of “rights” to incorporate a wider range of needs (Bunch 1995:13). Consequently, from the initial “first generation” civil and political rights associated with liberalism, human rights were diversified into “second generation” economic, social, and cultural rights associated with the socialist tradition. Finally, the “third generation” emphasized group and national sovereignty rights, associated with the decolonization process (Cmiel 2004, Goodale 2006).

The development of the human rights concept, together with its duality as a legal category and a moral claim, helped portray human right discourses as neutral, apolitical ideology (Douzinas 2007, Habermas 1998, 2010). It is thus important to carefully examine the motivations for the discourses’ development. According to Costas Douzinas (2007), at the
end of World War II, the new superpowers’ commitment to morality and the defense of rights served their need to legitimate their new world order. The US promoted civil rights and political rights and castigated the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for their violations. The USSR viewed economic and social rights as superior because matters of survival and decent conditions of life are more important than formal liberties. Consequently, the ideological battles of the cold war were fought over human rights (2007:190) or, essentially, about what is the right (just) ideology.

Human rights, thus, is a moralistic ideology conceived and nurtured through ideological struggle. As such, it is founded on inherent contradictions. While established as a higher law, meant to protect individuals from the punitive expression of their own governments, this commitment was accompanied by the principles of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, which protected the victorious states from criticism about their own violations (Douzinas 2007).

“Rights” are inevitably in conflict with other rights or with the rights of others. Their interpretation and application determine their meaning and effects (Douzinas 2007:188-9). The emphasis on values enables ambiguity and flexibility that allows rights to be widened or narrowed, given the current priorities of those who invoke them. This ambiguity allowed the US, as part of its struggle to defend principles of formal liberties, to support some of the most oppressive regimes in the world, and to generate and fund various campaigns meant to

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6 Civil and political rights include the right to life, the right to join a political party, the right to vote, freedom of movement, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association. Economic, social and cultural rights include the rights to adequate food, to adequate housing, to education, to health, to social security, to take part in cultural life, to water and sanitation, and to work (UN Office of The High Commissioner of Human Rights, OHCHR).

7 The situation on ground, of course, was more complicated; the Soviets, for instance, delighted in pointing out how little the US lived up to (civil and political) rights claim when it came to African Americans.

8 Douzinas explains that: “Weak implementation mechanisms ensure that the shield of national sovereignty is not seriously pierced, unless the interest of the great powers dictates otherwise” (2007:25).
eliminate “subversive” social agendas that favored economic and social rights (Rabe 2012, Roniger & Sznajder 1999).

The collapse of communism not only marked the victory of the principle of market capitalism, but also signaled the victory of the formal liberties version of human rights. Human rights became “the ideology after ‘the end of ideologies,’ the only value left in a valueless world” (Douzinas 2007:177). Moral, universal, and to a certain extent legally binding, human rights became the only set of values, accepted by all.\(^9\) They became the way people speak about the world and their aspirations and the expression of what is universally good in life (Cmiel 2004:126). Human rights have become “ingrained in the new world order, their claims adopted, absorbed and reflexively insured against challenge” (Douzinas 2007:33). This conviction allowed the US, as part of “the Responsibility to Protect” doctrine to justify (military) interventions as means to address circumstances—such as the lived experiences of many Muslim women—interpreted and propagated as human rights violations (Abu-Lughod 2013, Bumiller 2008:136).

While arguably well on the way to becoming the constitution of the new world order (Kennedy 2004:169-170), human rights became the vanguard in the global consolidation and naturalization of the (neo)liberal world order (Goodale 2006:498). According to David Harvey, “Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (Harvey 2005:2, 2007:22). As the core meaning of freedom was economic—the freedom to buy and sell goods, capital, land and

\(^9\) Some ideologically identify with this ‘victorious version’ of human rights; others strategically accepted it.
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labor (Harvey 2007:24)\textsuperscript{10}—and since trade was seen as a means of liberation, its imposition on others (even by force) did not seem to undermine its original premise (Douzinas 2007:185).\textsuperscript{11} Consequently, new global legal rules were created to regulate the world neoliberal economy, including rules on investment, trade, aid and intellectual property. Broadly speaking, these rules were an attempt to redefine states and citizenship to better suit global free trade.

States that wish to benefit from foreign investment or financial aid have been required to open themselves up to the interference of international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and to foreign countries like the United States.\textsuperscript{12} These requirements routinely impose privatization, deregulation policies, market economics and conformity to human rights discourse. The impositions of neo-liberal economic politics, claims Anne Orford, “constrain the ability of peoples or their representatives to make decisions about wage levels for workers, education policy, health policy, social security provision of services, constitutional reform, levels of unemployment, and federal/state relations within federations” (1997:465). Accordingly, states become “disinterested administrators or technical managers facilitating free movement of capital, products, and labor,” while the citizens must become (neo) citizens: “individualistic, self-sufficient, and self-motivated, and thus no longer need the state’s safety net” (Berger 2006:4).

\textsuperscript{10} David Harvey claims that individual liberty and freedom were situated as sacred and central human values by the founding figures of neoliberal thought (Harvey 2007:24).
\textsuperscript{11} Some nations were ‘liberated’ through military campaigns meant to incorporate them in the ‘free world,’ others were economically pressured to participate in the ‘free’ market.
\textsuperscript{12} This practice was established in the mid-1970s, when the US Congress passed legislation linking foreign aid to human rights performance (Cmiel 1999:1235).
Further, formally adopting new (human rights related) legislation is a relatively simple way for a state to show that it is in the process of reshaping its relationship with civil society. Thus, it is not surprising that many countries emerging into the new neoliberal order adopted international human rights legal instruments (Comaroff 2006:4). However, Oona Hathway claims not only that most citizens of these countries do not benefit from the imposed neoliberal socio-economic policies, but also that the ratification of human rights treaties did not improve living conditions in target countries and further increased violations (2002:1935).

Ironically, although directly related to the formal liberties agenda, this view of human rights removes the citizen aspect of the human as it disengages the human-citizen from the state. First, states are required to limit or privatize social services and utilities, minimizing state accountability to the wellbeing of their citizens, leaving them more vulnerable to poverty and related social illnesses. The needs of these individuals are now met by civil society agents—individuals and organizations—funded by external funds.

Second, states are less autonomous to set their own moral norms, or as Douzinas puts it, “sovereignty and human rights are presented as a zero sum game,” and “sovereignty bends the knees before morality” (2007:178). Consequently, citizens become humans who are subjects of the global legal system. The global system introduces a range of international organizations and mechanisms where humans can run their grievances on the international (instead of the municipal/ provincial, national) level, based on the new global norms and legislations. At the same time, many humans lack the knowledge and resources to do so and frequently international mechanisms cannot interfere with the situation on ground.
Turning citizens into humans was meant to protect individuals from their governments. However, it also prevents people from running their lives in relation to their own cultural views and needs, relieves government from the responsibility to nurture their “humans,” and prevents them from protecting these humans from destructive external interventions done in the name of “democracy,” “development” and “free market.”

In this section I highlighted some of the complexities of a discourse popularly viewed as neutral and apolitical, as the expression of what is universally good in life (Douzinas 2007), and as a means to facilitate social justice. However, examining the origin and initial motivations of human rights discourse, the ways in which it developed, and its contemporary relation with the new neoliberal world order, helps us question this popular view, and invites us to ask whether it is a just (fair) discourse and whether this discourse is just (only) about rights.

The just (moral) representation of the human rights discourse and its largely secured status as such, is an important aspect of this study. Women’s human rights agenda, a particular development of this discourse, which relies on its authority and resources, is central for the Guatemalan campaign to eradicate violence against women and thus discussed broadly in the next section.

When Women Became Human: Women’s Rights as Human Rights
In the previous section I explored the international human rights discourse as a powerful apparatus that greatly affects inter/national politics and some of its critiques. While a central point of critique is in relation to the discourse’s claim to universality, this very premise encouraged more people to claim them, and thus to expand the discourse. Women’s human rights agenda is such an endeavour. On the one hand, it challenges the discourse’s
original understanding of “human” by indicating that some humans have different needs than the ones originally declared as universal. On the other hand, acknowledging human rights’ dominant role, feminist scholars and activists advocate incorporating some of these additional needs within the discourse. The fundamental tension between critique and incorporation is inherent to women’s human rights agenda and the source of many of the challenges to its implementation discussed in this account. In this section I will look at the development of women’s human rights discourse, its accomplishments and limitations.

The 1975 UN Conference on Women in Mexico City marked the International Women’s Year that started the UN Decade for Women, and was a massive global consciousness-raising moment. The conference brought many women, both as governmental delegates and as civil society, into the orbit of the UN for the first time; and introduced activists to the potential of pursuing their interests through the UN, at a time when there were few international venues for women’s rights (Bunch 2012:214). The following UN Decade for Women, claims Elisabeth Friedman, placed women on the international intergovernmental agenda and facilitated women’s cooperation. Many women participated in the official delegations at the General Assembly at the three meetings of the Decade. More important was their participation in nongovernmental organizations forums that accompanied each official meeting, in which women from different countries met and were able to exchange strategies and develop ongoing working relationships (1995:23).

One of the most effective tools for promoting women’s equality that came out of the decade was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW, often described as an international bill of rights for women, was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It established discrimination as the root
of gender-based violence (Bumiller 2008:134), defined what constitutes discrimination against women and set up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.\footnote{The 1979 CEDAW does not mention violence against women, but the CEDAW monitoring committee formulated a wider definition that included Gender-based violence as a form of discrimination in 1992 (Merry 2009:78).}

Compliance with CEDAW is monitored by the UN by submission of national reports, but successful implementation depends on national (NGOs) and international (human rights community) pressures (Bumiller 2008:134).

The second World Conference on women in 1980 took place in Copenhagen, and was overwhelmed by North-South debate over “what are women’s issues;” polarized between a predominantly “Western” tendency to single out a limited gendered specific list of women’s issues and a more “Southern” approach that saw “all issues” as “women’s issues” (Bunch 2012:215). Acknowledging that for many women who lack access to water, food or shelter, talking feminism made no sense, feminists began to build tools to bridge this divide. They recognized that gender must also be analyzed in relation to other factors such as nationality, race, class, age, and sexual orientation in order to discern the multiple forms of human rights abuses that women suffer (Bunch 1995:12), and attempted to explain these abuses from a feminist political perspective or even in terms of how they specifically affected women (Bunch 2012:216).

Since 1981 Latin American feminist activists have been organizing as a regional women’s movement, especially around the issue of violence against women. The day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, was declared in the first Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro (Encounters) in Bogota, Colombia that year. Since then, every three years, feminists throughout the region have been meeting in broad-based, massively
attended, loosely themed gatherings to offer a plethora of workshops, exhibits, activities, plenary sessions, and maybe most importantly, possibilities for free exchange and dialogue (Alvarez et al. 2003). Overall, claim Alvarez et al., the encuentros have served as critical transnational sites in which local activists have refashioned and renegotiated identities, discourses, and practices distinctive of the region’s feminisms (Alvarez et al. 2003:537).

The Nairobi World Conference on Women in 1985 was particularly important for global feminism as it was the place where it became clear that the movement indeed was global (Bunch 2012:217). By 1985, women activists of local groups and international organizations were sharing information across regions and gaining exposure to the human rights framework, establishing the groundwork for the women’s human rights movement. Their work was further advanced using different human rights mechanisms such as international treaties, legislation, and networks. For instance, groups in many countries established international networks to promote and monitor CEDAW. Searching for mechanisms to hold their governments accountable for abusive patterns, women in specific countries began documenting abuses, using this as a resource to convince human-rights policymakers of the need to create a gender-sensitive human rights policy (Friedman 1995:24-27). The growing practice of women activists’ use of human rights law clarified the extent to which women were excluded from international human rights norms and the potential for using these norms to advance women’s rights.

The main impetus for the age of Women’s rights took place in 1990, when Charlotte Bunch called to transform human rights from a feminist perspective: to understand women’s rights abuses as human rights abuses and women’s rights as human rights (Bunch 1990). Human rights, she noted, were originally defined in terms of the needs of the limited sector
of the population who first articulated them—Western, educated, propertied men—who most feared the violation of their civil and political rights in the public sphere. They did not fear, however, violations in the private sphere of the home, because they were the masters of that territory (Bunch 1995:13). Consequently, the dominant definition of human rights and the mechanisms to enforce them in the world, she claimed, are narrowly defined as a matter of state violation of civil and political liberties, and as such tend to exclude much of women’s (and that of many non-elite men's) experiences. However, most women, and many men, endure daily violations that are not so narrowly confined, but are part of a larger socio economic and cultural web that entrap women, making them vulnerable to abuses that cannot be delineated as exclusively political or solely caused by states (Bunch 1990:488, 1995:13).

Bunch suggests that when human rights mechanisms (such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights) are read from the perspective of women’s lives, many violations of women’s rights such as rape and battery can be interpreted as forbidden under existing clauses such as “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Since women and non-elite men were not well represented in human rights discourse, little elaboration of these rights was made from their point of view, and therefore we have no significant body of international human rights law and practice in this area (Bunch 1995:13).

The distinction between public and private, she explains, is largely used to justify female subordination and to exclude human rights abuses in the home from public inquiry (1995:14); the physical territory of this political struggle is women’s bodies (1995:15), and the most dangerous place for women, a frequent site of cruelty and torture, is home (1990:490). Focusing on violence against women’s bodies, often perpetrated by “non-state
actors,” Bunch claims, “illustrates the limited concept of human rights and highlights the political nature of the abuse of women” (1990:490).

The importance of control over women can be seen in the intensity of resistance to laws and social changes that put control of women’s bodies in women’s hands: reproductive rights; freedom of sexuality, laws that criminalize rape in marriage; and so on. Abusing women physically maintains this territorial domination and is sometimes accompanied by other forms of human rights abuse such as slavery (forced prostitution), sexual terrorism (rape), or imprisonment (confinement to the home). “Private” violations, such as confinement, limit women’s access to their “public,” civil rights (Bunch 1995:14-15).

Further, much of the exclusion and abuse women experience is related to cultural practices (Peter & Walper 1995:5). Contesting such violations in local communities can be seen as a threat to critical aspects of the social order, and is thus dismissed or provokes hostility. Hence allies across national borders and human rights discourses are essential to promote women’s demands (Friedman 2003:316).

Finally, Bunch claimed, sometimes women suffer similar political abuses to those inflicted on men. Yet most women’s experiences of human rights violations are gendered, and many forms of discriminations or abuse occur because the victim is female. Women whose rights are being violated for reasons other than gender often also experience particular forms of abuse based on gender, such as sexual assault (Bunch 1995:12).

Bunch’s call reflected and reinforced the emerging global feminist discourse, placing violence against women (and women’s bodies) as the touchstone of their struggle to develop new discourse and mechanism pertaining to Women’s Human Rights. Consequently, in the

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14 Such resistance is not limited to developing countries. The US, for instance signed, but failed to ratify CEDAW due to conservative opposition (Bumiller 2008:134).
1990s women emerged as a global force and were able to bring gendered perspectives to the UN agenda through regional campaigns and caucuses at UN World Conferences that were not specifically about “women.”

A global campaign for women’s human rights started in 1991. As part of the campaign’s strategies, women’s rights activists began commemorating *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence*, through localized actions that called attention to violence against women as a human rights issue. The campaign takes place during the sixteen days that link November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, with December 10, Human Rights Day, noticeably connecting violence against women and human rights (Friedman 1995:27-28). In addition to participating in the *16 Days* campaign, more women participated in regional human rights’ meeting, hearings and forums. They also increased their representation in UN formal forums through participation in “satellite meetings,” that could actually generate reports, to be included in the UN official documentation (1995:29). Consequently, the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, adopted by consensus at the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights, declares (paragraph 18) that women’s rights are “an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.” The declaration, though important, did not ensure compliance with its recommendations.

The next move was promoted by two regional actors, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM). Collaborating with (Latin American) civil society organizations they were inspired to create the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence
against Women (Belém do Pará). The convention was adopted in 1994 by the General Assembly. It defines violence against women as “Any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere.” Following the Vienna Declaration, it views violence against women as “A violation of their human rights, an offense against human dignity and a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men.” The Convention of Belém do Pará, unlike any other international law, is legally binding (“hard” law); If ratified by a state, it prescribes action that states must take, which makes it an unrivaled regional institutionalization of feminist norms (Friedman 2009:362).

In the same year, the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development’s Program of Action redefined Reproductive Rights as a set of rights meant to enable individuals to exercise control over their sexual and reproductive lives. Further, it set reproductive rights and health of individuals as governments’ responsibility rather than demographic targets. One of its primary stated goals was to make reproductive and sexual health services, including family planning, universally available by 2015, as part of a broadened approach to reproductive health and rights.

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15 While the Convention of Belém do Pará aims to Prevent, Punish, and Eradication Violence Against Women, November 25 was set as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the UN campaign calls to “End Violence Against Women.” Naturally, activists use all three concepts and in this account I maintain the original use, as communicated to me.

16 The US and Canada, both OAS members, did not sign/ratify the Convention of Belém do Pará.

17 Including: Family-planning counseling, pre-natal care, safe delivery and post-natal care, prevention and appropriate treatment of infertility, prevention of abortion and the management of the consequences of abortion, treatment of reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases and other reproductive health conditions; and education, counseling, as appropriate, on human sexuality, reproductive health and responsible parenthood. Services regarding HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, infertility, and delivery should be made available, As well as active discouragement of female genital mutilation (FGM). Additional, though related, goals were reducing infant, child, and maternal mortality, as well as providing universal primary education, with a specific urge to countries to provide women a wider access to education.
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In the following year (1995) the Fourth UN World Conference on women in Beijing consolidated the women’s global movement gains on the UN agenda. Meant to accelerate the implementation of previous accomplishments, such as CEDAW, the Vienna declaration that women’s rights are human rights and the Cairo focus on reproductive rights, Beijing’s action platform is an agenda for women’s empowerment in relation to women’s human rights. It aims to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle, in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. It states that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace.¹⁸

There have been no more UN world conferences on women since Beijing, but the Commission on the Status of Women has conducted three well-attended reviews on implementation of the Beijing Platform—in 2000, 2005, and 2010. These events have reaffirmed the Platform and added to it in areas, such as HIV/AIDS, but they are less bold in spirit and reflect the impact that more conservative forces have had on governments’ attitudes toward women’s issues, especially in areas like sexual and reproductive rights (Bunch 2012:219).

Claiming a space for women within human rights discourse, feminists were able to articulate a dramatic expansion of human rights. The UN Conferences set the stage for the

institutionalization of new key concepts grounded in feminist ideas as well as for their incorporation into human rights’ language, and for a wave of feminist policymaking around the globe. It called attention for the effects of different forms of violence on women’s lives and set in place methodologies for protecting women from violence (Bumiller 2008:1, 134). Once feminist ideas were established as part of human rights norms, many Latin American countries, pressured by neoliberal economic politics, signed and ratified these conventions. In accordance, signing countries adopted relevant domestic legislation.

At first glance, it seems that the expansion of the discourse generated a large scale commitment to stop violence against women. A closer look, though, reveals a more complicated situation. Being pressured to adopt international legislation and policies in favor of women’s rights does not guarantee their fulfillment on the ground. Further, often there are gaps between women’s human rights discourse and its translation into national policies. Elisabeth Friedman (2009) suggests a three-phase analysis of the process(es): first, establishing feminist ideas as international norms, second, adopting these norms through national legislation (following various pressures), and third, the local implementation of these policies, frequently subjected to additional global pressures and mechanisms, together with local advocacy and activism.

In addition to the practical gap between the new international norms and their local adoption and implementation discussed by Friedman, women’s groups committed to the new women’s rights discourse had to deal with additional ideological concerns. The first concern relates to the notion that the legal discourse that politicised the demands of millions of women and changed the way violence against women is now understood, overshadows the fact that the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of
their identities such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, and sexual orientation (Crenshaw 1991:1241-2). Patricia Hill Collins further indicates that cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, mediated by and produced through overlapping articulations of power and historical legacies (2000: 42). Hence the legal discourse that the women’s human rights agenda relies on emphasizes a communality of women’s experiences and erases the relevance of diversity.

The second concern focuses on the discourse’s tendency to depict women as thoroughly victimized—as abject, passive, incapable of exercising any will or agency. According to Sally Engel Merry, vulnerability is central to human rights interventions in general. In order to elicit help, individuals need to be represented by others, and constructed as victims, i.e. helpless, powerless, unable to make choices for themselves, and forced to endure forms of pain and suffering (Merry 2007:195). As “victims” are represented in ways that are appealing to funders and to governments, this image of vulnerability fails to capture the agency and initiative of those who endure violations (Merry 2007:202). More particularly, women’s rights discourse focuses on violence (mostly physical and sexual) and portrays all women as already victimized (or potential victims) and subjected to sustained violence. Focusing attention on the victimisation of women reinforces stereotypical assumptions about women’s dependency. As such, the women human rights agenda provides little possibility for agency or the articulation of sexuality or sexual desire in terms that are more affirming and positive.

These major concerns reflect the inherent contradictions and tensions fundamental to women’s human rights agenda and the fact that the transnational movement, by adopting the discourse accepted several problematic assumptions. On the ground, feminist activists all
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over the world are struggling to advance and implement a discourse that does not challenge and at times reinforces some of their main concerns, such as the patriarchal order. These circumstances further complicate their endeavour to promote the women’s rights agenda. At the same time, their persistent efforts to do so demonstrate that—at least for now—the women’s rights agenda might be their best option to secure a better living reality for women all around the globe.

The Guatemalan campaign to eradicate violence against women is one such an endeavour, further subjected to particular local circumstances. In this account I discuss how the Guatemalan women’s movement negotiates between recognizing differences and working together through this recognition, between the need to express their complicated life realities and the struggle to maintain and further develop their agency, between local and transnational dimensions of the discourse, and lastly, between transforming their own consciousness and transforming societal policies and norms. In order to discuss the local struggle to implement the transnational women human rights discourse, it is important to look at the ways Guatemala has been formed and shaped by and in response to external ideological interventions through history. As this research project is situated in the era of rights, in the next section I begin to explore the ways in which the neoliberal world order and human rights discourse shape the contemporary Guatemalan reality.

*GuateMala, GuateBuena*

“Guatemala,” is a distortion of the Nahuatl word Cuauhtēmallān, “place of many trees,” the name that was given to this territory by the Tlaxcaltecan soldiers who accompanied Pedro de Alvarado during the Spanish Conquest (1519). The country’s name,
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thus, maintains the violent legacy of colonial conquest as a fundamental experience in the forming of the Republic, almost two-hundred years after its independence.

In Spanish, the language of the conqueror, and the main language spoken today, Mala means bad while Buena means good, and Guate is used to distinguish Guatemala City, the capital, from Guatemala C.A., the state. GuateMala/GuateBuena is thus a common word-play to convey the multifaceted nature of the country and the city.

The contemporary Republic of Guatemala is a representative democracy with an estimated population of 15,137,600 (UNDP 2013). It is located “in the heart of the Americas,” and advertises itself as “a country of extraordinary natural beauty with glorious weather and beautiful landscapes formed by green mountains and rivers that emerge between volcanoes, magical lakes, and extensive semi-tropical jungles, framed by calm Caribbean white-sand shores and wavy Pacific shores” (Guatemala’s Tourism Institute-INGUAT). Its abundant natural resources of minerals, rare woods, and hydropower together with its agricultural production (coffee, cacao, sugarcane, bananas, beans) reflects the rich diversity of the population, represented by 24 officially recognized Amerindian languages (in addition to Spanish). Its vast cultural diversity and history are evidenced by the archaeological remains of glorious Mayan cities, together with colonial towns, contemporary rural Indigenous communities, and the modernity of the capital city.

Self-defined as “multicultural and multiethnic” (INGUAT), Guatemala’s ethnic categories reflect centuries of population movements and power relations. The basic categories of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people are complex and contested—the percentage of Guatemalans who are identified or identify themselves as Indigenous depends
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on who is counting and ranges from 40 to 80 percent of the population (Nelson 2009:327).\footnote{While most Guatemalanist scholars claim that the majority of the Guatemala population is Indigenous (60%, 75%, 80%), all the official statistics I’ve seen since 2000 (INE, UNDP) indicate the opposite (at least 60% Non-Indigenous).} \textit{Ladino}, the category to refer to Non-Indigenous people, implies mixed-race individuals yet, for centuries it was a culturally-based category, referring to urban, professional, Spanish-speaking individuals. The Indigenous population includes 22 Maya and two non-Maya groups, who often self-identify in relation to their village or ethno-linguistic group. The terms Maya or Indigenous emerged into the local discourse only since the mid-1980s, and are less common for self-identification.

In Guatemala, these categorical identifications, claims anthropologist Diane Nelson, are always relational, and produced through constant repetitions in sites of power (such as law, schooling) that themselves are historically over determined, and through unconscious investments and resistance (1999:5). While the nature of these identifications is never fixed, the changes are more apparent in critical historical moments of re/construction such as the Spanish Conquest, National Independence, the Internal Armed Conflict and the Post Conflict period. As these identifications are relational, a shift in one modifies the others.

Guatemala is a rich country with rich, but mostly poor, people. While it is the biggest economy in Central America, Guatemala is among the Latin American countries with the highest levels of inequality, with poverty indicators—especially in rural and Indigenous areas—among the highest in the region (World Bank 2009).\footnote{According to the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) 2007 Human Development Report, within Latin America, Guatemala ranks among the lowest four positions (with Bolivia, Haiti and Guyana) for the overall Human Development Index, Infant Mortality rate, Under-five mortality rate, Maternal Mortality rate, Adult Illiteracy and Net Secondary Enrollment rates.} The unequal distribution of land (UNDP 2004) formed through the colonial period and further developed with the liberal reforms of the 19th century (McCreery 1990:106) resulted in inequalities in education,
литература, и доходы. Большая часть населения Гватемалы (54%) живет в бедности, из которых 13% живет в очень бедности (INE 2011).21

Эти официальные индикаторы структурной неравенств включают историю и наследие несправедливостей, злоупотреблений, и силы, используемые для поддержания этих несправедливостей. Хотя избыточные силы были вложены в поддержание этих многослойных структурных неравенств, они постоянно сопротивлялись. В некоторых случаях, против невозможных шансов, эти “каждодневные формы сопротивления” (Scott 1985) были переведены в организованное сопротивление, иногда в насилие, сопротивлении структуры.

Один из таких моментов произошел в 1944 году, когда коалиция среднего класса интеллектуалов, профессионалов, и молодых офицеров армии свергла либеральную диктатуру Хорхе Убико. Хотя Убико позиционировался в пользу США для поддержки экономического развития, два последующих “десять лет весны” промотировали разные социальные реформы включая политику разделил землю. В духе Холодной войны, эти политики казались угрозой интересам глобального капитализма, и это привело к поддержке CIA узурпации принятой правительством (Broder 1999, Immerman 1982, Schlesinger & Kinzer 1999).

В следующие четверть века правительство Гватемалы стало все более военными, не допуская политической оппозиции. Политическая репрессия привела к вооруженным силам силы мобилизации, сначала в столице и ладино-доминирующем восточном регионе, и позже в индейско-доминированной центральной и западной равинии. Социальные и культурные требования, сделанные различными организованными секторами населения были жестоко подавлены правительством, особенно между 1978 и 1982 годами, и включали уничтожение лидеров профсоюзов, крестьян, студентов и целых индейских сообществ через масштабные массовые казни, сожженную землю.

21 Эти числа увеличиваются в департаментах с большим индейским населением, таких как Алта Верапас (78% бедности, 38% очень бедности) и Солола (77% бедности, 18% очень бедности), и резко уменьшились в столице (19% бедности) (INE 2011).
tactics, and widespread disappearances and displacements aimed at annihilating anyone who was considered part of the political opposition in thoughts or deeds (CEH 2000, Falla 1994, Levenson 2011, Manz 1994, Thomas et al 2011, Torres Rivas 2010).\footnote{State-sponsored violence against ladinos tended to be selective, while violence against rural Indigenous populations was massive and indiscriminate (Nelson 2009:59).}

The high levels of violence led to international pressures to end the conflict and the country’s harsh economic situation forced it to consider these pressures and seek reconciliation. In 1985, in order to legitimate their rule and delegitimize the guerilla movement (Torres Rivas 2010:4) the military returned the government to civilian rule. Like other nation-states emerging out of conflict into the new neoliberal global order, the military government began with a legal reform to mark the national (re)constitution, and a new constitution was inaugurated in 1985.\footnote{According to Jean and John Comaroff more than one hundred new national constitutions were (re)written since 1989, to mark “a new beginning, a radical break, at once symbolic and substantive, with the past, and its difficulties,” a new constitution that represents the aspiration for “equitable, just, ethically founded pacific polities” (2006:22-23).} The same government also called for a civil presidential elections that, although free of fraud, were severely restricted and unrepresentative of large sectors of the population, as only rightist and centrist parties that had reached agreements with the Army were allowed to participate (Jonas 2000:26). The civil government elected in 1986 adopted an economic restructuring project, and began peace negotiations with the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca-URNG).

The national restructuring project has heavily depended on external support, which required the Guatemalan administration to achieve a sense of legitimacy amongst possible donors and supporters worldwide. The Peace Accords of 1996 further committed the Guatemalan government to legislative and institutional reforms, especially in the area of...
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international human right. Consequently, according to the 1985 Constitution (Article 46), in issues of human rights, international treaties and conventions accepted and ratified by Guatemala hold precedence over domestic legislation. This commitment was reinforced with the signing of the 1994 Comprehensive Accord on Human Rights.

These four decades of armed conflict are often characterized through human rights discourse, foregrounding the transition to the era of rights. The situation of violence is typically accounted through numbers (Nelson 2010), and a terminology such as “victims,” and “violations.” Namely, the conflict cost the lives of about 250,000 people and the displacement of more than a million and a half, in a population of eight million people (at the time). According to the UN Commission for Historical Clarification (Comisión para al Esclarecimiento Histórico, CEH), 92% of the victims were non-combatant civilians; 54% were younger than 25 years old, and 12% were women raped or physically attacked in various humiliating ways. The commission determined that the Guatemalan state agents were responsible for 93% of all human rights violations and the guerrillas responsible for three percent, with the remaining four percent of violations committed by unknown assailants. The CEH concluded that in accordance to international law, agents of the Guatemalan state committed acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people (CEH 2000). Those responsible for these acts have rarely been prosecuted and punished.

Although extremely troublesome, these numbers do not capture the complete postwar trauma. Four decades of state violence resulted in a torn social fabric (Godoy 2006:84), and for Guatemalans, fear continued to be “a way of life” (Green 1994,1999). While the conflict

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24 The term ‘genocide’ has been contested in relation to the Internal Armed Conflict since the release of the CEH report. In the spring and summer of 2013 this discourse reached new levels with the genocide trial of the former president General Ríos Montt.

Discussing the end/s of war, Nelson reminds us that “people make war to achieve certain ends” (2009:xiii). In the 20th century many Guatemalans went to war in order to reform and transform a social structure based on ethnic and class exclusion; in order to liberate themselves from different forms of injustice and structural violence. Others went to war in order to protect their structural privileges and the existing social order. “Depending on one’s perspective,” Nelson states, “this violence ended either the threat of or hopes for radical change” (2009:xiv). Further, the peace accord, claims anthropologist Linda Green, did not redress the various structural injustices that motivated the resistance, but set the means—through immunity and free market economy—to maintain and reproduce these structural inequalities (Green 2011:371).

As structural inequalities were maintained and reproduced through war and peace, further undermining accountability between individuals, their communities and the state; portraying collective action and spirit/ vision of community as hopeless/ irrelevant/ unattainable, it is not surprising that the post-conflict era is one of the most violent moments in Guatemala’s history. With 47 murders per capita, rising to 108 in Guatemala City, it is one of the most violent countries in the world (UNDP 2007). According to the National Civil Police (PNC), in a population of 14 million, 17 people, two of whom are women, die of violence every day. Guatemala’s current homicide rate far exceeds the average number of

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25 Guatemalan women-activists often reject the limited view of violence this estimation reflects and claim that ten women die of violence daily. To the two targeted by physical violence they add one who dies of insecure abortion, cervical cancer, HIV, two maternal deaths, and three women who die of poverty (from malnutrition to living too far from a medical center).
Guatemalans killed each year during the armed conflict (Thomas et al 2011:11). While homicide is an important measure of violence, it is also important to note that the lives of Guatemalans are shaped as well by the climbing rates of “lower level” violent crimes taking place in the capital’s commercial and residential areas and on public transit, including physical and sexual assault, theft, robbery, extortion and kidnapping, resulting in a collective, internalized sense of insecurity.

These modes of violence have been most intense in the urban areas of Guatemala City and its surrounding municipalities (Godoy-Paiz 2009), yet not all parts of the city are experienced as being “violent” in the same way. While some areas are marked as zonas rojas (red zones), i.e. affected by high levels of crime and violence, other areas, mostly inhabited by local elites, tourists and international workers, are considered safer. However, the wealthier, more protected inhabitants of these “safe areas” are exposed to other threats; they are kidnapped for ransom, their homes are robbed, and their cars are stolen from even well-guarded parking areas. They thus require higher levels of security, such as private security guards, high, barbed wire fences, and shaded car windows (Levenson 2011:46). Overall, the seemingly random “peacetime” crimes intensify a constant sense of insecurity, and Guatemalans live in a constant anxiety that they—or their loved ones—may become victims.

The national restructuring project, which began with the return to civil government in 1985, included the standard adjustments mandated in many countries via World Bank and IMF loan programs: market liberalization, privatization of industry and state services, reductions in public expenditure, and opening to foreign trade. The subsequent (required) reduction of social service expenditures, decline in formal sector employment, and lifting price controls on basic necessities, left many Guatemalans vulnerable to poverty, chronic

These neoliberal geopolitics, Green emphasizes, “make life in Central America and Mexico increasingly untenable,” and should be seen as “far-reaching magnitude crimes” that deny people a “dignified existence” (2011:378). In rural areas, two of the main paths to survive are wage labour in rural maquilas (often in dehumanizing conditions) or (illegal) migration to the US. On the personal level, these two practices are “assaults on the personhood, dignity, and sense of worth or value” (Scheper Hughes and Bourgois 2004:1) of rural Guatemalans. On the national level, it further destroys the Guatemalan social fabric (Green 2003, 2011).

The lack of jobs in rural areas has driven thousands of Guatemalans into urban areas. Lack of opportunities for employment or education drive local youth to “search for social and economic resources at the very border between legal and illegal activities” (Camus 2011:58). Further, lack of access to social services/networks in the cities drive disconnected, often domestically abused youth, to search for alternative structures of support and protection (Levenson 2013:216). The largely ineffective police force and justice system make a fertile ground for gang activity. Maras (youth gangs) are thus an increasing problem in the capital, as well as in smaller municipalities. Gang members are involved in robbery, extortion, drug

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26 The Guatemalan term for maquiladoras, or assembly plant. Maquilas are infamous for their abusive and unsafe working conditions.

27 Work migration mostly includes men in working ages, as whole villages are left behind with mostly women, children and elderly population; they are highly vulnerable to different forms of violence, at times inflicted by “war veterans.” (Linda Green, personal communication, May 2013).

28 The maras were formed in the 1980’s by immigrants (many of them demobilized army soldiers or guerillas) fleeing the brutal civil war in Central America and settling in Los Angeles and San Diego. To protect themselves from already established street gangs, they formed their own gangs, named after their barrio mara 13/18 and their place of origin (Salvatucha=Salvadorian). They began returning Central America in 1996, when the US began to deport immigrants. The maras operating in Guatemala maintain the connection to the gangs they originated from in the US (McNeish and Rivera 2012:291).
dealing, human trafficking, and turf wars with rival gangs. While violence and terror are popularly linked to the *maras*, there has not been a clear investigation in regards to their numbers, the nature of their activities, and their actual culpability for violence in the country. However, most of the nation’s security problems are attributed to them (Levenson 2013:216, McNeish and Rivera 2012:291-292, Thomas et al: 2011:12, Winton 2005).

The post-conflict violence can be characterized as “neoliberalized” (Fisher & Benson 2006); as acts of violence are outsourced and privatized, their direction or means are no longer controlled by the state. Private crime is addressed with private security and dangerous forms of community vigilante responses, including lynching (Godoy 2006, Sanford 2008, Thomas & Benson 2008). As of 2010 there is a free market of 140 security agencies, with at least 65,000 armed and poorly trained guards, while the National Police has 20,000 police officers (Dickins 2011; Torres Rivas 2010:5).

In the neoliberal age, violence is presented in the language of freedom—bringing together free marker and free choice. By focusing the attention on the *maras*, violence is explained by the media and the state as a result of informal economic activities and through a narrow focus on (individual) delinquency. The structural and social conditions that place disadvantage groups at greater risk of violent behavior or victimization are not part of the official narrative told by the state and mass media.

In this section I discussed Guatemala’s legacies of inequality, as an ongoing negotiation between domestic forces and external interventions, as well as different forms of structural violence meant to maintain these inequalities. These legacies of structural inequality were not resolved through the Armed Conflict or through the Peace Accords. The

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29 The legal reform that followed the peace accords, intended to protect the citizens from state violence, debilitated the state’s ability to control criminal violence (Personal communication with the executive director of the Justice Education Society, Rick Craig, April 2010).
new neoliberal order introduces new ideologies and structures that allow maintaining this ongoing state of inequality and injustice.

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This doctoral thesis focuses on new methods adopted by women-activists in Guatemala that attempt to promote a better society. The primarily new tool these women use is women’s human rights discourse and the platforms that support it, and in this thesis I explore the ways in which they adapt this discourse to be more suitable to their needs.

In 1979, Audre Lorde, a black, lesbian feminist, wrote a short essay criticizing the feminist movement for practicing patriarchal tools, i.e. maintaining and reproducing differences between women, in order to dismantle patriarchy. Lorde claimed that the movement’s success is dependent on adopting a new set of tools—women should not try to unite “despite our differences,” but differences between women should be acknowledged and used as a source of creativity.

In the new age of rights, I consider the idea of human rights as a moralizing agenda, a constituting set of tools for the current neoliberal world order, one that unifies individuals as humans, and replaces a local sense of community with the imagined larger global community. Borrowing from Lorde, I suggest looking at human rights discourse as the “master’s tools,” morally supporting the neoliberal world order, and wonder can the “master’s tools” be used to challenge the “master’s house”? While human rights globally motivated various improvements in people’s lives, I wonder: are these temporary achievements, or will they enable “a genuine change?” And ask: Can the practice of women’s human rights discourse in Guatemala enable a genuine, revolutionary change in the life of Guatemalans? Can these “master’s tools dismantle the master’s house”? 
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In this doctoral thesis I argue that when the idea of human rights is based on dignity, the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect, such a revolutionary change is possible. Going back to Lorde’s original critique, the success of such an endeavour depends on feminist solidarity founded on critical awareness of difference and on its creative utilization. As I show in this account, Guatemalan women’s organizations emphasize and legitimate women’s diverse lived experiences. They encourage women to see themselves as worthy beings, as actors and as the rightful protagonists of their own lives. They also motivate women to draw support from other women and to see themselves as part of a worthy community. Hence, these organizations inspire women to begin to imagine themselves not only as worthy of life, but also as worthy of happiness. Imagining oneself as worthy of dignity and thus transforming oneself into a woman-being is the first step toward a wider social transformation.

*Left, Right(s), and other Directions*

*From Left to Rights* tells the story of (women) survivors and political subjects in search of new ways to communicate with the world. Like most survivors’ stories, this account is not told in a linear form, and varies every time it is told, offering more details on some events and neglecting others. In order to highlight this quality, I chose to organize this dissertation around what one expects to be a linear event, the annual march commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. While the march has a clear beginning (6:00 am, Tierra Viva’s office), middle, and end (1:00pm, Plaza Mayor), my account continually disrupts this timeline, moving within and beyond these seven hours, visiting past experiences and imagined futures.

In the first chapter I present my encounters with the field as a process of relationship building. I situate myself, my particular experiences in Guatemala, my research, and the
The following chapters discuss various aspects of the Guatemalan campaign to eradicate violence against women, including diverse modes of action designed in response to women’s experiences of violence. The chapters represent an ongoing process of dialogue between activists and the rest of society. This dialogue illustrates how topics and methods intersect and talk to each other and demonstrates how the women’s movement negotiates between particular and general dimensions of violence, between local and transnational dimensions of the discourse, and lastly, how activists maneuver between transforming their own consciousness and transforming societal policies and norms.

Chapter 2 begins with the closing ceremony of the events commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women organized by a network of Guatemalan women’s organizations. I use this ending point to begin exploring the shift many of the women activists involved in this campaign went through: from left-wing revolutionaries to women’s human rights activists. This transition reveals how particular and general dimensions of violence experienced by Guatemalan women motivated the formation of the Guatemalan feminist movement. Once local women begin to adopt and adapt the rights-discourse and to assume an identity of rights-worthy subjects, or women-beings, they begin to demand the transformation of the social structures in which they live, i.e., the implementation of legislation, policies, and institutions in favor of women’s rights, namely, an alteration of the public sphere.

Chapter 3 begins at the same time and place as the previous chapter, yet offers a different reading of that same moment. While chapter 2 portrays a relatively formal version of the transformation process, chapter 3 suggests an alternative, complementary, aspect of the
process, which requires some familiarity with key symbols adopted and adapted by the movement. It outlines the process of transformation, emphasizing the spatial—corporal and public—aspect of the process, its dialectic nature, and hope as a key mechanism for the facilitation of social transitions.

Following the two complementary accounts of the transformation process, chapter 4 portrays the act(s) of sharing stories of violence and struggle as a way to establish political subjectivity, i.e. in itself a mode of transformation. It emphasizes different phases and audiences in the process of telling such stories, starting from intimate sharing, through collaborative creative acts that politicize individuals’ stories, to their “publication.” While the intimate sharing shed light on activists’ experiences of structural and symbolic violence, presenting their stories in public and demanding space for them in the national (hi)story, illustrate the strength of coming together.

Chapter 5 discusses a similar process in which (some) Guatemalan women begin to politicize their lived experiences and learn to see themselves as women-beings. Unlike the previous chapters, it takes place on the back stage, and serves as an intermission that allows us a closer look on the ways in which previous transformations—of individuals and society—generate further transformations. The chapter weaves together different sources: a story of a Guatemalan activist, interviews with Guatemalan activists facilitating women’s workshops, a workshop booklet created by a coalition of Guatemalan women’s organizations, observations from workshops in which I participated, and literature about popular education. Through these different viewpoints I explore how local experiences of violence are explained through the transnational language of women’s human rights and
repositioned in the local context. By grounding their transformation process within their own context, women-beings learn not only their rights, but also their right to demand these rights.

In chapter 6 we return to the front stage of the march, to witness several public political actions that I call *antiviolence performances*. These performances publically articulate the root of the problem, presenting (suggesting and performing) a vision of an alternative future, and calling for action. The public nature of these performances motivates and encourages women’s participation, encourages the general public to take a stance, and presents the ways in which the processes of denouncing a problem and suggesting an alternative and of (in)forming and (re)forming are in constant dialogue with each other.

The conclusion re-presents the Guatemalan campaign to eradicate violence against women as a product of (local experiences of) **violence** and the (transnational women’s) **human rights** discourse that transforms women into political subjects and alters the public sphere within which they operate. This brings me back to my larger argument, that when the idea of human rights is formed in terms of dignity it has the potential to enable a genuine, revolutionary change in the life of all Guatemalans. Acknowledging that the realization of the social transformation outlined here relies upon an accumulation of sociopolitical circumstances, I contextualize the Guatemalan campaign and this doctoral thesis within larger sociopolitical structures, and remind the reader that the mere act of proposing an alternative reality is in itself a challenge to that status quo reality.
Chapter 1: Moving Fieldwork

People from all over the world come to Guatemala, “a land of Eternal Spring and Eternal Tyranny” (Simon 1988), with various intentions and hopes. They don’t always find what they were looking for, yet they are often pleased with what they do find. I am one of those who came for a short visit, and was never able to completely leave.

In this chapter I present my encounters with the field as a process of relationship building. I begin by briefly describing the circumstances that motivated this research. It is the text I opened my interviews with; hence it also invites the reader to witness the first moments of these relationships. I then discuss the particularities of my field site and the challenges it poses for anthropological fieldwork. I introduce the reader to the time, place and people that this project revolves around, together with the methods I used to learn about their work. I conclude by offering an additional view of this relationship.

I first visited Guatemala in 1999 as part of a yearlong backpacking trip in Central and South America. Although I spent only three weeks in the country, it was enough for me to become attached to Guatemala, more than any other place I have visited. In those short three weeks I was captivated by the beauty of the country and the friendliness of its people. I was also exposed to (and targeted by) the everyday violence and the poverty prevailing and rising even in the touristic areas. La Antigua Guatemala, a small colonial city near the capital, which later became a place I call home, was where I started learning Spanish. It was also in

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30 A yearlong backpacking trip in Latin America (or other locations in the world) is a common practice among young Israelis, taking a year or two off between their national service and university.
that Spanish school that I was first exposed to the experience of violence Guatemala endured in the 20th century.

My fascination with Guatemala stayed with me when I returned to Israel, and I continued exploring it during my undergraduate degree at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Latin American Studies and Social Anthropology. These years were colored by the Al-Aqsa Intifada, a period of intensified Israeli-Palestinian violence, during which everyday life in Jerusalem was marked by acute violence. I supported myself delivering workshops and seminars for the Israeli Centers for Citizenship and Democracy, where I developed my understanding of the practice of human rights. Eventually, my initial interest in Guatemala, a degree in Latin America Studies, together with my everyday experience of violence woven with a discourse of human rights, matured into an interest in legacies of violence, especially gendered violence, in Latin America.

For my Masters degree in Anthropology I focused on gender violence, mainly wartime rape in different locations in the world, and wrote my MA thesis about the rarity of military rape in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. During these three years, I volunteered at the local rape crisis center, giving weekly workshops in schools. I was also involved with several left wing political initiatives, especially around the building of the West Bank Separation Barrier.31 When I planned my PhD project, I hoped to bring together my interest in wartime gender-specific violence and my interest in the legacies of violence in Latin America, more specifically, Guatemala.

31 I have been involved with different left-wing political activism since I was 14. I took an active part in the 1992 political transition from right to left, witnessed two peace accords being signed, and my prime minister murdered in a peace rally, marking the return of the political right. My 4 ‘years of spring’ ended 10 days before my 18 birthday.
I intended to study the social consequences of the prevalent wartime rape (especially of rural Indigenous women) that took place during the Guatemalan Internal Armed Conflict. I was interested to learn how this specific form of violence shaped contemporary social relations in the rural communities where state oppression was particularly widespread. Considering the rising violence, especially gender violence, in the urban areas, I also planned to explore the relations between legacies of gender violence during the armed conflict and contemporary “peace time” gender violence.

Like every good plan, it has changed and been reshaped several times since. When I first returned to Guatemala in the summer of 2007, the changes—for better and for worse—were quite apparent. Above all, the situation of everyday violence had clearly escalated since the late 1990s. I was happy to leave the more violent urban centers and travel to the rural area of the western highlands (ironically, the former heart of state repression and terror). Spending time in a community recovering from harsh state oppression, I realized that traditional fieldwork in the area would probably not allow me to fully address my questions. How would I distinguish the social consequences of wartime rape from those of general widespread violence, such as a massacre? It seems as if I had to choose between the romantic idea of rural fieldwork, studying the aftermath of (general) violence in the area, or the contemporary gender violence in the urban areas, mainly the capital. At the time, it seemed like a minor adjustment. As I assumed the two experiences were related, I thought

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32 This visit coincided with the (notably violent) 2007 presidential campaign in Guatemala, which resulted with the election of Álvaro Colon.
33 A similar project was initiated by an alliance of women organizations (Consorsio de actoras de cambio) that developed small support groups for local women, which with time (about seven years) began to also discuss the issue of sexual violence during the internal armed conflict. Their work employed more people, more time, than the traditional year or two of fieldwork could address. The ongoing project resulted so far in a book: Tejidos que lleva el Alma (2009), a museum exhibit: sobreviví, estoy aquí y estoy viva (November 2009), a yearly festival for breaking the silence, and symbolic tribunal (March 2010).
the new project would be, in a way, a reversed version of my initial one. Instead of starting in
the past, interpreting contemporary gender violence in the city as one of the wartime rape's
consequences, I would start in contemporary violence and identify its roots in the violent
past.

The violence Guatemalan women endured was not an isolated experience. At the
beginning of the millennium, rising levels of violence against women in Latin America
became an acknowledged regional problem and led local Latin American women’s
organizations and human rights activists to adopt and adapt the concept *femicide*—the killing
of a woman for being a woman, first coined in the 1970s by Diana Russell—in order to
describe the situation of violence they live in (Fregoso & Bejarano 2010). The term femicide
helped them emphasize the notion that violence against women was not a private issue, but a
political act that requires urgent social response.34

By using the concept, local feminists mobilized an international attention to the
killings of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.35 While international attention was drawn
mostly to Juárez, some accounts about the reality of violence against women in Guatemala
began surfacing as well, with several human rights reports such as No Protection, No Justice:
Killings of Women in Guatemala (Amnesty International 2005, 2006) and Getting Away
with Murder: Guatemala’s Failure to Protect Women and Rodi Alvarado’s Quest for Safety

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34 For further discussion about the development and the uses of the concept fem(in)icidio in Guatemala see
35 The City of Juárez, in Chihuahua State, is a border city across the Rio Grande and El Paso, Texas. Several
hundred women (about 30 a year) were killed or disappeared since the beginning of the 1990s, many of them
young teen who died as a result of grotesque, sexualized torture. Most cases stayed unresolved due to
indifference, impunity and corruption. While there are similarities in the patterns of registered murders of
women in Juarez and Guatemala, the murder rate of women in Guatemala is much higher—Between 1993 and
2003, there were 370 registered murders of women in the Mexican state of Chihuahua in which Ciudad Juarez
in located (Ertürk 2005: 10). In 2003 there were 383 registered murders of women in Guatemala escalating to
720 a year in 2009, and 6731 between 2000 and 2012 (PDH). For more about the situation in Juárez see Staudt
and Campbell (2008), Monárrez Fragoso (2010), Olivera (2010).
(Center for Gender & Refugee Studies 2005, 2006), as well as the documentary film, *Killers’ Paradise* (Portenier 2007). These accounts illustrate the gravity of the situation in Guatemala, and the work done by Guatemalan activists who joined the regional movement, adopted the femicide concept, and began politically theorizing the issue.

With time I became more sensitive to the extent to which the popular and scholarly images of Latin America in general and Guatemala in particular are associated with violence and I became reluctant to contribute to this portrayal. Indeed, the Guatemalan reality has and still is embedded with different kinds of ongoing violence. However, focusing on violence risks depicting Guatemalans as victims, objects of (internal, external, regional, and global) violence in need of salvation. Such a focus can veil Guatemalans’ everyday resistance to this violence—creating life, maintaining life, and struggling for creating better life chances for themselves. Facing this representational dilemma, I decided to reorient my research, and focus on women’s responses and actions against the different forms of gender-based violence they endure.

In the summer of 2008 I returned to Guatemala to work with women’s organizations in Guatemala City that address violence against women. Before leaving, I contacted the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS) at the Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco and they suggested several key contacts from different organizations in Guatemala City. My preliminary meetings with these activists were highly inspiring. I was intrigued to learn about the different ways in which they understood violence, and fascinated with the ways they chose to struggle against it, especially considering their violent everyday reality. I

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36 I first acknowledged this growing discomfort when I presented in a panel about experiences of violence in Latin America in the Canadian Latin American Studies conference (Vancouver 2008).
then became interested in learning more about Guatemalan women as subjects, as actors who take action to change the social situation they live in. My purpose in this account is thus to bring forward experiences of anti-violence activism, taking place in a violent reality, by people whose lives were shaped by various experiences of violence.

**Timelines**

Following my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2008, I conducted my doctoral fieldwork in Guatemala City between June 2009 and December 2010 (excluding several in-and-out trips), and returned for another short follow-up trip in the fall of 2011. The time I spent in the field was framed by academic and personal constraints. Moreover, my presence in the field was subjected to several locally significant timelines: the local activity calendar, the diurnal cycle, and the political period.

First, the organizations function around a yearly calendar composed of national (Guatemalan), religious (Christian), and international dates. The year is organized around several commemorative dates, starting with a series of events taking place at the time period around March 8, International Women’s Day (sometimes called “Women’s month”) and closing with a series of events taking place in preparation for November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the following 16 Days of Activism, taking place between November 25 and Human Rights Day, December 10. The last part of the year is dedicated to year evaluations and celebrations, followed by the yearly Christmas holiday. The beginning of the year is marked by reorganization, redistribution of roles, and redefinition of goals, within each organization and its alliances and network. The cycle of

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37 Both dates are commemorated in a well-attended march. The focus of the March events varies; the November 25 events include a festival “for women’s life,” on the Sunday before November 25, and a memorial service for the killed women, *vigilia*, on November 24, as well as a variety of unfixed events. Other eventful time periods take place in May, related to women’s health and reproductive rights, and in September, related to women’s citizenship.
activity thus climaxes at specific calendric points. Other times of the year that may seem less eventful are nonetheless packed with strategizing, planning, as well as creating and maintaining collaborations.

Another important timeline that shaped my work was the **diurnal cycle**. Most of my fieldwork took place during daytime—from sunrise to sunset—in Guatemala, roughly between 6am and 6pm. Regular working hours in most organizations I studied ended before sunset. Some public activities took place outside of working hours, but they were not frequent. As my fieldwork progressed, I expanded my participation in the field to include more after-dark hours. Before dusk, lineups for public transportation were particularly long, and a sense of almost urgency (to make it on the already very crowded bus) was projected by most prospective passengers. Soon after dusk, these same streets were emptied; buses became less frequent and less crowded, and waiting for the bus became an unpleasant and at times eerie experience. Some areas of the city were still (or became) quite lively after dark, yet they usually required a different modes of mobility—namely taxis (driven by a known, trustworthy driver, _taxista de confianza_) and privately owned cars.\(^{38}\)

Politically, my fieldwork took place under the administration of Álvaro Colon, the first center-left president since the 1954 coup, who expanded social programs and access to health, education, and social security. While the social actors I discuss here have been active before and after his administration, the actions I discuss in this account took place under this particular, left-leaning administration. While difficulties in the implementation of human rights discourse under the Colon administration were often explained as “lack of political

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\(^{38}\) Contact information of a trustworthy taxi driver was one of the first resources local and foreign friends extended to me. Using a taxi meant trips needed to be pre-scheduled, and included long waiting periods.
will,” the subsequent administration – currently in power – seemed to revert much of the already limited political support (policy, financial, legal) the government extended towards the implementation of women’s rights norms. It was only after the change in administrations, and the shift in political atmosphere that accompanied it, that I realized how this particular timeline influenced the field I participated in.39

Overall, I spent 20 months in Guatemala in the past five years, and maintained an electronic contact with individuals “in the field” while being away. Fieldwork is “an inherently imperfect mode of knowledge, which produces gaps as it fills them” (Price in Clifford 1986:8). Hence the longer one stays in a certain location, the further one understands its complexities and contradictions, and one’s aspirations to represent this place become much more humble (Nelson 1999). My time in Guatemala taught me a lesson in humility. I learned a lot, on practical and theoretical levels, yet I also learned, and am still learning, how much more complex the situation that I am attempting to represent is. From Left to Rights is thus my small, partial contribution to a much bigger socio-political project, and I am solely responsible for all misunderstanding and misinterpretations.

Space(s)
My research was framed not only by timelines, but also by spaces. Indeed, I study a social movement, yet, it has long been recognized that social relations are spatial relations (Hagerstrand 1970; Lefebvre 1974 [1991 translation]; Soja 1980; Giddens 1984), and that space is the medium through which “all social relations are made or broken” (Miller

39 As many of the groups and individuals I worked with are involved with political life and advocacy, important political events that impacted the country, such as the Rosenberg case (see Grann 2011), Castresana’s resignation, the nomination of new head for CICIG (Francisco Dall’Anese Ruiz) and a new attorney general (Claudia Paz y Paz), reoriented the(ir) focus of attention and daily activity. The tropical storm, Agatha (May 2010) was also quite impactful; as it changed the situation of violence women lived in, and shift attention and priorities from general political advocacy to emergency aid. These sorts of “destructions” demonstrate the general social justice motivating their work, far beyond “women’s issues.”
Therefore, I find it important to discuss the spaces that facilitate and prevent certain flows and encounters that shape this social movement; the spaces that reify and reproduce social views in regards to how these flows (and which) should move, meet and interact. While this is not ethnography of space, I bear in mind that these same spaces are being continuously shaped by the social interactions and relations they facilitate.

The campaign to eradicate violence against women involves a wide spectrum of social spaces, i.e. spaces shaped through social interaction, from the abstract transnational community, through physical locations in the city, to the corporeal space of individuals’ bodies. The campaign is organized around physical movement of people, funds, and ideas from one location to another as well as the materials produced when these flows come together, and then distributed and posted. As a space, it is created by and continuously creating movement.

Further, a social movement, by definition, is meant to move, change, and transform social structures; to transform the social norms and spaces that maintain and reproduce these structures. The women at the center of this research endeavour to transform, from within, the social structures that have shaped not only the ways in which they learned to view the world, but also their access to resources. Therefore, the space that shapes this research project is a space of (a) movement.

Methodologically, this endeavour poses an additional challenge: how does one represent a social structure in a process of transformation? In this account I do so by maintaining the movement through the account. That is to say, I organized this dissertation around the annual November 25 march, in itself an act of movement and mobilization, but

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40 I discuss the transnational movement in chapter 2, locations in the city below, and dedicate chapter 3 to discussing the ways in which all the spaces mentioned above are negotiated and challenged.
also used it as entry point to address back-stage processes. By moving between different sections of the march and between the march and other activities, I aimed to invite the reader to experience some of this sense of movement.

It is important to acknowledge that social change relies upon an accumulation of sociopolitical circumstances. The mere act of proposing an alternative reality is in itself a challenge to that same reality. In this account of a temporary moment, I wish to portray the sense of possibility for transformation, the vision of an alternative reality, and the hope for a better future for all Guatemalan people communicated to me.

I begin this section looking at an additional space shaping my work, the space of academic research. I then address the city as a sociopolitical space, and the particular locations it enables for (the) (women’s) movement.

Guatemala has fascinated and intrigued generations of scholars: archaeologists, botanists, zoologists, linguistics, historians, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists and so on. At any given moment and at any given location—central or remote—one might encounter scholars (veterans and newly emergent) who study the land and its people. This affluence offers different levels of collaborations and mentoring as well as competition and territoriality. Further, the generation of research offers a vast scholarship to build on and facilitates interdisciplinary creativity. On the other hand, much of this information “has been multiply encoded and recoded, filtered through rumor and personal histories, and encased in a hard veneer derived from political antagonisms” (Nelson 1999:31). It is thus important to look at it as particular political reflections of Guatemalan realities.

Traditionally, ethnographic scholarship did not focus on the capital city, but on small rural Maya communities. As the massive rural to urban migration became more notable in
the 1970’s and 1980’s, more ethnographic work took place in the city, studying the rural, mostly Maya migration to the city (Bastos and Camus 1995, 1998, Camus 2002). Further, as “power” became a key analytical term in the field, anthropologists began to look at the city as the center of political, economic, and social life, in order to explain the situation in the rural areas (Thomas et al 2011). In the past decade, research on urban Ladinos (Camus 2005, 2011; González Ponciano 2013; Hale, 2006; Levanson 2005, 2011, 2013) and the city as a neoliberal space (O’Neill and Thomas 2011, Way 2012) has also increased.

Unlike the studies mentioned above, I do not study an urban community—migrant, impoverished, or Indigenous—but a social movement operating in the city. My fieldwork was based in Guatemala City, the capital and largest city of the Republic of Guatemala, and the most populous in Central America.\(^{41}\) Popularly called Guate or La Capital (the capital) it is the political, financial, and cultural center of the Republic. As such, its population is quite diverse: Ladinos, Indigenous, other Latin American groups, as well as minority-groups such as German, Jewish, Chinese, and a big international community.

Historically, the city has been associated with Ladino people and modernity while the countryside has been associated with Indigenous people and tradition. This distinction in many ways justifies, reifies and reproduces legacies of inequality in Guatemala. At the same time, a careful examination suggests that much of this distinction is imagined, as both urban and rural spaces are shaped by circulations of people, goods, and politics.

Established by a royal decree in 1776, the city is divided into 22 zonas (zones), laid out on a standard grid, with avenidas (avenues) running roughly north-south, and calles.

\(^{41}\) Estimated population in Guatemala City: 1,168,000 (INE 2011).
(streets) running east-west. It has been growing rapidly; mostly due to internal migration that peaked between the 1970s and 1980s, as the rural population relocated to the city following the devastating earthquake in 1976 as well as in response to untenable life conditions in rural areas that resulted from state oppression and long-lasting economic inequality (especially in regards to arable land).

The city, affected by similar circumstances, had very little to offer to these newcomers, many of whom, in a need of an immediate refuge, invaded unoccupied urban (private or state owned) lands, mostly on the sides of gullies within the city, producing new precarious urban settlements. Built from whatever materials newcomers could scavenge, these settlements still exist beyond the reach of most basic social services, such as water and electricity. Consequently, the city developed in a disorganized way—without infrastructure, planning, or permits. Some of this growth has been channelled to neighbouring municipalities that together form the Guatemala City metropolitan area (Área Metropolitana de Guatemala or AMG). The city faces problems common to many other rapidly expanding cities, such as transportation, employment, and high levels of crime.

Most of my research took place in a strip of five zones (1, 2, 4, 10, 14) considered, except for zone one, to be safer and wealthier. Zone One is the city’s heart, the location of many important historic, religious, and national buildings together with public spaces and low level (two to five storied) residential, academic, and office buildings. Most of the women’s organizations, and several of the relevant governmental agencies are located in

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42 City zones are ranging between 1 and 25 (excluding 20, 22, 23), and are not organized in a consecutive order.
43 Villa Nueva, San Miguel Petapa, Mixco, San Juan Sacatepequez, San José Pinula, Santa Catarina Pinula, Fraijanes, San Pedro Ayampuc, Amatitlán, Villa Canales, Palencia and Chinateula. The estimated population in Guatemala City metropolitan area is 4,100,000 (INE 2011).
Zone One. It is in the midst of renewal project by the municipal government, relocating street vendors, their clients, and public transportation in favour of car-free pedestrian zone with upscale cafes, chain restaurants and stores visited by tourists and Guatemalan elite and secured by private security guards.

Zone 2, north of zone one is a less densely populated area, with several residential communities, academic centers and governmental units. Zone 4, south of Zone One hosts the civic center, several government buildings, a modern shopping mall, mixed with the chaotic public transportation and street vendors. Zone 10, southeast to Zone 4 is a wealthier zone, the financial center of the city and is known as Zona Viva (lively zone), the center of pop culture and nightlife. It hosts many embassies, office buildings, several academic units and international agencies, together with an abundance of luxury hotels, restaurants, and shops. It is a greener area with notable high-rises. Zone 14, south of Zone 10 is another relatively international and wealthier zone, the location of the Europlaza World Business Center (four modern 19-story towers), the home of most UN agencies.

Overall, the city, while laid out on a standard grid, is a complex space. At the time I began my fieldwork, a general map was impossible to find. Maps of the more touristic area were available, but they featured separated zones, making it difficult to grasp the city’s flow and movement between the zones. While the zones I mentioned above are in walking distance, it is highly uncommon for people to do so. Most people use local public transportation (including two systems of privately owned buses and two state operated systems: transmetro and transurbano), “trustworthy” taxis and private cars. From day one I

44 A few are located in Zones 2, 3, 4, 7, 9; in relative proximity to zone one’s margins.
45 The transmetro and transurbano run on a set route, including set stops, and both are pre-paid systems. Local buses are far less organized, their routes often change, there are no set stops, or capacity limit. Passengers pay the driver or the ayudante, usually in exact change, and the fee changes after dark and during the weekend. In
learned to rely on the advice and guidance of total strangers I met in the street or on the bus, as well as bus drivers and their assistants (*ayudante*), to make it to my destination. I often walked from one destination to another, as I found it a faster and safer way to move in the city, much to the dismay of the people I worked with.

All the offices I visited are gated and the entrance is controlled by a receptionist. Most of them also have a guard (and at times an extended security team), and entering without an appointment is often impossible. They were usually a complex of personal working spaces and gathering areas. Many have documentary centers with relevant material produced by the organization and their inter/national collaborators, as well as general literature about gender, feminism and other related topics. Some dedicate personnel to maintain a learning center and keep an updated media archive; others have a shelf or two in a multipurpose space. They all have a waiting room and a non-professional employee who, once approved by the receptionist, offers the visitor a hot beverage. Some offices are located in older buildings with a traditional *pila*, a water basin that serves as an all-purpose washing station; others are in modern buildings.

Most of the public activities I observed took place on the route connecting the National Palace, the Constitutional Plaza, the Congress, and the Supreme Court (all located in the past years these buses are often robbed, resulting in injury and death of drivers and passengers. In some zones an armed guard stands behind the driver. Being privately owned (yet functioning as a cooperative) bus drivers compete for passengers, a competition that provokes additional violence. Drivers often make slight shifts in their route to make it faster than the bus ahead of them to a street corner where passengers wait. This practice of “stealing passengers,” can provoke blatant violence (for example, shooting the *ayudante*). Other times drivers race each other in the streets, a practice that often results in losing control and flipping the road. These trends (together with straightforward armed robberies) results in buses being one of the city most dangerous sites.

46 My then (North American) partner, following a visit to the city, commented on the extent to which local men are willing to go out of their way in order to guide me around. As the majority of passengers travelling to the city in the early morning bus were men, excluding particular cases, I was unaware of the way being a young woman impacted the guidance extended to me.

47 Offices with *pilas* are located in the city’s older houses, built originally for the Guatemalan elite. If well maintained, they are true architectural pearls.
in Zone 1). Some events, especially marches, had some police presence to facilitate the interaction with general society. Yet often these public gatherings were relying on (and advocating for) a sense of safety created by public participation and presence in the streets. Other events took place in gathering venues (hotel conference rooms, the Mexican embassy, academic centers) all located in Zones 1, 4 and 10. While not necessarily gated, these spaces are semipublic, guarded by thick imagined walls, which keep out uninvited, undesirable groups, marked by ethnicity, language, and dress (Velásquez Nimatuj 2011).

As I discuss in the next section, this particular social movement is composed out of diverse women’s groups, based in separated locations. They most notably come together and materialize as a community in public events, when personal and organizations’ alliances are displayed, together with the main differences and similarities between them. These events take place in public spaces, displaying the ways in which the city as a sociopolitical space shapes the women’s movement. Yet, as I will discuss through this account, these public events challenge and transform the nature of these spaces.

_Acquaintance(s)_

In this section I introduce the reader to the organs that shape and are shaped by the space of movement, the organs that move and are moved by this field. First, **Guatemalan women** who have decided, for historic and strategic reasons to use human rights discourses to advocate for the eradication of violence against women; women that see the state as a site of struggle and struggle for (a just) representation in that state/site. By choosing this particular segment of the population I attempt to understand women’s rights activism in relation to the Guatemalan state and society. Second, **local women’s organizations** created by the above mentioned activists in order to promote and facilitate their struggle. Like the women-beings, they have their own life trajectories, they are brought to the world, develop,
engage, and eventually cease to exist; while active they have their own particular views of the reality they exist in. Last, I discuss the ethnographer, who is not only conducting this research and reporting its “results,” but whose body and mind are the apparatus used by the researcher to explore the field.

The Women-Beings

The majority of the women I interviewed are urban Guatemalan activists, scholars, and state officials incorporated with the Guatemalan campaign to eradicate violence against women.48 While all currently live in the city (or the AGM), many were born and raised elsewhere in Guatemala, or spent substantial time periods outside the country.49 Most of them are employees of local women’s organizations, with a variety of professional backgrounds such as lawyers, university professors and independent researchers, psychologists, social-workers and communicators. A few have advanced degrees from foreign universities, others have local post-secondary education, or much less. Some of the scholars are well established and participated in the same professional conferences I attended (in North America) during and after my fieldwork.50

They come from diverse economic and ethnic locations in Guatemalan society and have varied life histories; most of them are survivors of violence and still struggle with different aspects of violence in their everyday life (political, domestic, criminal, HIV,

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48 Four of them were not nationally Guatemalan, but were highly involved with the campaign (an independent scholar, two international activist incorporated in a UN organizations, and an international activist incorporated in a local NGO). Two were not directly involved with a specific organization at the time of the interview but are well incorporated in the campaign.
49 I find it important to address the point that i was not the only one moving in and out of the field, we are all constantly moving (Clifford 1997) and it is this movement that enables our physical and intellectual encounters.
50 Scholar activists attended papers I delivered about this research in the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) conference in 2010,2012, 2013 (and I, naturally, attended theirs). My “subjects” presence in international academic conferences attests to the mobile and transnational nature of the field. The first time I experienced it, while I was still doing my fieldwork, was a bit unnerving, but grew to be a reassuring and supportive experience, marked by a public sense of approval and collegiality.
poverty, racism, lesbophobia, and all the above). They live and raise children and
grandchildren in a *machista* society, dominated by patriarchal, sexist, and at times,
misogynist ideologies. Many, but not all, self-identify as feminists, and view it as a political
position. Some of them have been incorporated in social justice campaigns in Guatemala
since 1960s onward, while others are young adults taking their first steps into the field of
social action.\(^{51}\)

Many of these women, often the principal financial supporter of their families, are
over-worked and underpaid. While some of them maintain long term affiliation with a
specific organization, other move between organizations and projects. There are key actors
who initiate organizations or projects and then, once established, move to their next
challenge. Other key actors shift from a position in a civil society organization to a position
in a governmental agency or an international organization, or from an activist to an academic
position. Others, due to the grant-based nature of funding for such projects, have to
constantly look for emerging opportunities in other organizations. Frequently I met women
who take temporary contracts funded by international agencies, while volunteering their time
and limited funds to advance non-funded local initiatives.

**The Organizations**\(^{52}\)

Like other locations in Latin America, and globally, NGOization (Alvarez 1999, 2009) is a strong trend in Guatemala. Civil society organizations were always part of
Guatemala’s social sphere, but the post-conflict political opening and the neoliberal policies
motivated the creation of many more. NGOization, by nature, brings together local civil

\(^{51}\) During my fieldwork I met and collaborated with younger (minor) activists, but I did not interview any of them.

\(^{52}\) In Spanish the word organization (as well as the terms alliance, coalition, network) is feminine; this feminine aspect is unfortunately lost in the English discussion.
society actors, state agents, and international players. While my original intention was to study the civil society sector, I soon realized that the field is intertwined and organized around flows of people, funds, and ideas (Alvarez 1999, Appadurai 1996, Merry 2006). Consequently, I expanded my research and also looked at state agencies representing the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and international (mostly United Nations related) organizations. However, for the purpose of this research project, I specifically look at these organizations in relation to the ways in which they respond to and influence the work of women’s organizations.

All the organizations discussed here are located in the capital city, although some of the organizations had branches in different provinces, some in the rural areas. The more veteran organizations have been active in the field since the 1980’s, while others are relatively new, and new organizations continue to emerge. Many identify as “feminist organizations,” while others are uncomfortable with the term “feminist” and use “women’s organization” instead. At the same time, many of the latter’s employees are self-identified feminists. Some organizations, often the feminist ones, incorporate men, and hold gender inclusive youth programs.

Violence against woman is a wide, complex concept, and the actors—individuals and organizations—incorporated in the campaign have diverse views in regards to what it entails, which inevitably influence the modes of action they employ. Beyond denouncing physical

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53 For a list of the organizations and their main focus see appendix 2.
54 For further discussion about the veteran organization see chapter 2. The governmental agencies were created as part of the state’s attempt to respond to international pressures in relation to women’s human rights in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. For a further discussion on the process, see chapter 2.
55 The division between ‘feminist’ and ‘feminine’ organizations is not unique to Guatemala, though the patriarchal nature of the Guatemalan society further influences the rejection of the term, as feminism is often associated with lesbian and communist (in this context, both are used as derogatory terms). For a further discussion about the differences between feminist and women’s movement (and the connections between them) see Marx Ferree (2006: 6-10).
and sexual violence, they condemn violence at home and in the workplace. Some organizations focus on reproductive rights, others on HIV or sexual rights. Some focus on education for citizenship and democracy and others on labour and land rights (including land ownership and mining). Indigenous and rural women’s experiences of exclusion, discrimination and inequality are denounced as violence, as are limited access to education and health services. While most organizations focus on contemporary violence against women, several work with survivors of state-sponsored sexual violence during the Internal Armed Conflict, working towards breaking women’s silence and cracking state impunity. Some of the veteran organizations emphasize a legacy of struggle, and almost all include some references to Indigenous culture.

Most organizations use varied modes of action and extend diverse forms of assistance to the publics they work with. While they may emphasize different issues, almost all are involved to some extent in political advocacy in relation to the eradication of violence against women, promoting both public awareness and legal changes. Much of this advocacy is practiced through public outreach events (theme-based forums and conferences, book/document launch/readings), and public political acts (festivals, memorial services, street rallies/actions). Most organizations offer gender and women’s right training, focusing on different topics (from citizenship rights to reproductive rights) aimed at different audiences (from youth, women, and community leaders in urban and rural communities to state actors like police and judges). Several investigate and present research documents on violence against women. Some are monitoring the application of new laws and the ways in which popular media represent the situation of violence. Several organizations are deeply involved

56 Many of the activists are themselves trained in these workshops, programs or “schools,” often organized or delivered by an organization different than theirs.
in proposing and promoting new legislation in favour of women’s rights, and others project all these efforts through different modes of media such as newspapers, radio and TV programs, and different electronic media. Many of the organizations also extend legal, psychological, and social support for survivors of violence and the families of victims and survivors of violence.

Most organizations are incorporated in at least one—and usually more than one—network, alliance, or coalition of organizations. Some of these collaborations are theme-based, like the eradication of violence against women. Others focus on an event that the participating organizations collaborate in organizing, promoting, and/or attending. A few collaborations are created around particular project, bringing together organizations with different capacities, for instance political advocacy, gender training and psychological support. Several are rooted in the movement’s early stages, although their members change; various are created as temporary and others are relatively new. Power relations between veteran and emerging organizations, as well as ideological and methodological differences can wreck what, on paper, seems to be a promising and successful collaboration.

The civil society organizations’ collaborations with international human and women's rights organizations and state agencies vary. First, on the human level, employees of both state agencies and international organizations are frequently Guatemalan women, associated with the campaign to eradicate violence against women. Many of them, thus, participate in political acts like the marches—some state agencies participate as a group, under their own

57 For instance, Hilda Morales Trujillo former director of CONAPREVI (the National Coordinating Agency for the Prevention and Eradication of Interfamilial Violence and Violence against Women), currently in the MP (Public Ministry), was a founding member of the civil society women’s organizations Mujeres Vamos Adelante, and CICAM. Similarly, Dr. Lili Caravantes and Sonia Escobedo, former presidents of SEPREM (the presidential women secretariat), were members of Sector de Mujeres, a civil society women’s alliance.
flag; others join as individuals. Similarly, actors of all groups often participate in public outreach theme based discussions and forums (as presenters and/or audience).

On a practical level, state agencies mostly promote and lobby for policies in favour of women’s rights, while the international organizations usually provide financial support for projects and politically accompany public initiatives that local women's groups organize and promote.\(^{58}\) The grant-based nature of international funds is often short term, making it complicated to guarantee a long-term project, and set these collaborations as temporary. Some projects are state-supported, but the state, like international funders, is not always a dependable source of support. Fixed, set funds are not always fully allocated, political transitions often result in shifts in priorities, and various sources of state support are rejected by some of the organizations.\(^{59}\)

Another important aspect of collaboration is the ideological influence of the international campaign to eradicate violence against women and women’s human rights discourse on the local discourse. International women’s human rights conventions and statements are used as foundational texts, as training tools, as well an apparatus for making political claims. International commemorative dates such as March 8 and November 25 are the main dates the activity calendar is organized around. The grant-based nature of this collaboration further influences local discourse, as applicants are required to use human rights discourse. In order to be funded, a local project needs to be justified and presented through terminology, objectives, and general agendas set by the granting foundation. Local

\(^{58}\) For elaborate analyses of relevant inter/national organizations see Cabrera 2009, and Partida 2008.

\(^{59}\) Being political agents, some individuals and organizations disdain support linked to right-wing (state) political actors. Some feel that by granting this support, right-wing agents simply attempt to gain political capital. Accepting support or collaborating with such sectors can mark the difference between feminist and women’s organizations.
projects thus either translate local needs into the transnational vocabulary, or cater to causes prioritized internationally in order to sustain the organization.

Academic research, local and transnational, is an additional aspect of influence, and at times, collaboration. There are several local academic units that work closely with the campaign, such as the masters program in gender and feminism studies at the Latin American Faculty for Social Science (FLASCO) and the Women’s Institute at San Carlos University (USAC). Many of the activists received their advanced degrees in these institutions, under the supervision of faculty who are also incorporated in the movement. In addition to academic training, much relevant research takes place by established gender scholars. Similar to the governmental units, employees of the academic units often participate in public outreach activities and political acts, as individuals or under their own flag.

Transnational academic research, mostly, but not only, North American, is quite common in Guatemala.\(^{60}\) The constant presence of scholars creates a savvy field; many of its inhabitants, incorporated in diverse socio-political projects, are accustomed to communicating with scholars and other foreigners. Some research projects, such as the one conducted by educational psychologist Lykes M. Brinton and gender studies scholar Alison Crosby (2009, 2011, 2013) with a specific organization, is experienced as a welcome collaboration. Yet many actors in the field have a sense of excess contact and at time a sense of abuse and reluctance to participate in research projects.

I opened this chapter stating that I wish to describe a process of relationship building. So far I introduced the people I worked with, and positioned them in time and space. While I am not the focus of this research project, it is important, I believe, to position myself in this relationship.

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\(^{60}\) Regional scholars, like Mexico based historian Ana Lorena Carrillo, are often considered local.
And … The Uninvited Girl

My graduate methodological training began with the postmodern crisis of representation, most notably, James Clifford and George Marcus' *Writing Culture* (1986) and Marcus and Michael Fischer’s *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986). The recognition that “ethnographic truths are [thus] inherently partial” (Clifford 1986:6) was the lens through which I learned to understand ethnography. The legacy of imperialist attitudes that continues to “exemplify and reinforce Western domination” (Marcus and Fischer 1986:1) made me painfully aware of the power relations inherited in the endeavor of representing others.

Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon’s *Women Writing Culture* (1995), was the next evident step. Focusing on “the legacy of women’s anthropological writing and on the dilemmas women anthropologist encounter as writers” (Behar 1995:2) they challenged and further developed the premise of *Writing Culture*. Bringing forward the voices of feminist authors of diverse cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds they established a feminist, multi-voiced, decolonized discourse that is not afraid “to offer a vision of a different anthropology” (Behar 1995:2).

Behar opens the volume by discussing the position of the-woman-who-writes-culture. Reflecting on a self-portrait pencil drawing by Yolanda Fundora, Behar states:

The woman who is turning others into the object of her gaze is herself already an object of the gaze. Woman, the original other, is always being looked at and looked over….The eyes on a woman’s back are also her own eyes. They are everything she has seen in her travels and in her return home (Behar 1995:2).

Following Behar, in this subsection, I turn the observing eye to myself or—if you may—join the others looking at me.
Unlike Behar, I chose to gaze at the women-in-preparation-to-write-culture, i.e. a woman in the process of gathering materials in the field. Like Fundora’s, figure 1 is a group self-portrait (1995:2). The picture was taken during my follow-up visit in the fall of 2011. It features a group of women affiliated with the organization Tierra Viva, who spent the morning decorating the pickup truck they are now seated on, in preparation for the November 25 march. A minute after the picture was taken (by Alitza Navas), the pickup truck, with several more activists, took off and headed toward the march’s starting point, the Human Rights Plaza in front of the Supreme Court of Justice.

At first glance, I look like the women I accompany, and on a regular day in the city (less so in the rural areas), I easily passed as a *chapina* (a Guatemalan woman). Here, I’m also dressed like them and doing the same thing that they are doing, which adds to the sense of resemblance. 61

Yet, I am not a *chapina* like them. At the same time, unlike many other scholars in the field, I am not an obvious “other,” namely, I’m not a *gringa*. According to Abigail Adams, *gringos* are “Americans from the United States when they live in Latin America.” (1997:610). In Guatemala, she explains, the term is used to describe foreigners with a North

61 This is a Tierra Viva truck and I’m wearing a RedNoVi T-shirt, representing not only my position as an activist, but also my position in the movement, as a member of a network, not a particular organization.
European physical appearance, and embodies the legacy of North/South power dichotomy (1997:611-613). The term *gringa* is not simply the feminine form of *gringo* but a reflection of the unstable intersection of the North/South power dichotomy with gender hierarchies (1997: 613). This disruption of the Guatemalan gender hierarchy is experienced as an anomaly, and at times as a threat (Adams 1997). Following Adams, Diane Nelson illustrates the ways in which this power dichotomy is experienced by young solidarity activists from the US; their light-skinned phenotype and “eagle passport” allowing them the privilege of safe movement and freedom of speech locals are denied (1999:52). At the same time, she demonstrates how this marked privileged is undermined when a *gringa* is attacked (1999:65-66).

*Gringa*, thus, is marked by phenotype, assumes a place of origin, but mostly indicates power relations. “I’m not a *gringa*” refers not only to my physical appearance and place of origin, but also to my complex position within and outside the North/South power dichotomy. Obviously, I was never entitled to the privileges accompanying the above mentioned phenotype and passport, nor did I wish to be associated with or make amends for the legacy of the US intervention in Guatemala. Indeed, I came from Canada, another wealthy North American country, with its own complex relations with Guatemala. On the one hand, its international development fund supports many important projects; on the other hand, in the past years Canadian mining companies in Guatemala have been a central site of struggle. Maya women activists often described both interventions as rape; the US was associated with the rape of women during the Internal Armed Conflict and Canada with rape of the land, women’s vitality.\(^6\)

Having my research supported by a Canadian university,

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\(^6\) The topic is vastly addressed by activists, journalists and scholars; for example see Nolin and Stephens (2010), also see documentaries: *Defensora* (Schmidt, Rachel 2013, USA/Guatemala/ Canada 39 min), *Sikapaka*
linked me, of course, to the violent resource extraction taking place in Guatemala. Yet, being a non-Canadian, I was not condemned for it, as my ability to change this reality is limited.

Coming from North America, while not North American, meant, for me, that my presence in the field was relatively free of gringa sense of entitlement and guilt. Yet being viewed as “an Israeli woman (from Canada),” had its own complexities. The legacy of Israeli intervention during the Internal Armed Conflict was mentioned in a few conversations, but the women I worked with were generally more concerned with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict than with the Israeli support of the US intervention in Guatemala.\(^6^3\) My record as a left-wing woman political activist in Israel helped establish a bridge of trust, and together with my experiences as a women’s rights activist awarded me the title compañera.\(^6^4\)

Being “freed of entitlement” further meant that I did not have the privileges of the relatively protected North American upbringing. I am the granddaughter of an underground activist who was tortured in a Syrian jail and hunted as a terrorist by the British Army; who, without an acquired profession, raised a family in the most notorious barrio in Israel; the daughter of a refugee who spent his teens moving between a series of refugee camps; not to mention the granddaughter of two women who struggled to sustain their families in states of extreme/poverty. My family history of political activism, forced displacement, which intersect with poverty, and the scars they generate, is thus more easily relatable to the people I worked with in Guatemala than my North American friends’ histories.

\(^{63}\) Not a lot was written about the topic of Israeli involvement in the Internal Armed Conflict. It remains unclear how much of the military advisory was delivered by independent professionals vs. state initiative. For more information see Rubenberg (1986). Interestingly, beyond comments such as “in that building sat your countrymen and trained intelligence investigators,” I also heard nostalgic stories about socialist labor union training in Israel organized and sponsored by the Histadrut (the Israeli labor union).

\(^{64}\) The word compañera has many meanings such as female companion, friend, and co-worker. In this context it meant “a sister in struggle.”
Beyond my family’s legacy, growing up in Israel meant living in the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, marked by tides of violence. One such intensified period of violence was the *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, a time when every public space could abruptly turn into a death trap. Living in Jerusalem during that time period did not only mean witnessing everyday violence, but also the ways in which such violence restructures and redesigns how people live their everyday lives. This experience equipped me—mentally and practically—to live in a state of ongoing violence in Guatemala. Moreover, it was an essential tool for me in understanding how people around me made sense of the reality in which we lived.

Growing up Jewish in Israel also meant being raised as part of a majority group and entitled, even when on the “wrong side of the political map,” to be nurtured, respected and protected. Namely, I grew up knowing I have the right—and duty—to critique my government. Unfortunately, this fundamental experience of my freedoms and rights as a woman-being was not always shared by my Guatemalan *compañeras*.\(^{65}\) In the field, though, being Jewish provoked much more interest than I anticipated.\(^{66}\) Many of the women I talked to were raised Catholic and were now extremely critical of the church—especially in relation to women’s rights. Others were devout Catholics who struggled with those same issues. For both groups, my theological opinion on these subjects was of interest. For the evangelical (*Cristianas*) women, being Jewish (from Israel) meant I was part of “the chosen people,” a terminology I was, and still am, uncomfortable with; yet I was not sure how to address it without hurting their feelings.

\(^{65}\) Distributing political manifestations against a right-wing government at the age of 14 with a group of peers, is an experience I shared with Yolanda Aguilar (and others). My weekly activism was labelled a ‘contribution to the community.’ Hers got her arrested, tortured, gang raped, and blinded for a short time (Chinchilla 1998:351-385).

\(^{66}\) As a non-observant, I never manifested this part of my identity; yet being Israeli tagged me as Jewish. (Even people with strong opinions on the Israeli Palestinian conflict never considered the possibility that “Israeli” can also be Muslim or Christian, let alone “Palestinian.”)
While I was honored with the term *compañera*, I was often viewed as a young woman needing to be taken care of. That I was away from my family in Israel was a constant concern; my repeated answer—I live with (local and North American) friends—never eased. I was often given rides to the bus, particularly when I stated it was not needed; whenever possible, my meals were paid for me; and I was generously hosted in activists’ homes when I ended up spending the night in the Capital. I was not married and was not a mother, thus for many of the women activist I worked with, my professional credentials and my actual age did not matter: I was not viewed as a mature woman.67

When I wasn’t called *compañera* I was called “a student,” a term that at times seemed a bit inappropriate, considering my level of education was higher than most of the women in the field. At first I wondered if I should address the fact that I’m not an undergraduate student, but hold a master’s degree, in order to be taken more seriously. As the time passed, I realized that I liked to be identified that way, since it framed our relationship the way I envisioned it. I was a student because I was there to study. I studied their work as a scholar, and I learned from them as an activist and a *woman being*. Calling me “a student” allowed the women I worked with to teach me like they’d never do had I insisted on positioning myself as an established scholar.

Beyond my complex position within and outside the North/South power dichotomy, it is important noting my dual position as a scholar and an activist. It was clear that I am a scholar, and that I was in Guatemala to study the movement and write about it. Yet, it was just as clear that I am committed, ideologically and practically to women’s rights. This dual position opened more doors for me, such as “back stage” data; yet, it came with the unspoken

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67 Through my fieldwork I had a (North American) partner, but there was a unanimous agreement (on a question I never asked) that I should not marry him before I graduate and secure myself a job.
commitment that I use this data carefully to promote and assist in their struggle. Going back to Clifford (1986), such commitment brings up the question of partiality. Diane Nelson explains this position as a “methodology of fludarity,” i.e., “a practice and analytics that combine solidarity—being partial to, as in on one side of, the people I work with—with an acknowledgment of how partial, how incomplete, my knowledge and politics have to be” (1999:32). Similarly, my research project, from its first steps and motivations through its different continuing stages, is a relational, deeply partial, project, both in the sense of incomplete and extremely subjective (Nelson 1999).

While my work was based in Guatemala City, I set my “ethnographic tent” (Clifford 1997:20) in a “nearby village:” Antigua Guatemala. Living in the capital meant living in a very violent reality that could cause physical and psychological vulnerability that I hoped to minimize (Passaro 1997:147). Yet while violence is not as prevailing and as lethal in Antigua, it is present, common, and an important factor that shapes everyday’s reality.68 Further, travelling to the city meant taking at least four buses a day. With buses being a central site of violence, some of my friends claimed that this practice is just as dangerous as living in the city (not to mention the hassle of leaving as early as 6am to make it to my morning meetings at 8:00am).69

Naturally, the fact I “camped” in Antigua impacted my fieldwork in various ways. First, it added another layer of movement to my research project. During my four-or more-hours of daily commute I left the transnational, relatively well-off, community in Antigua, in the company of local (mostly male) lower middle class and labourers, on my way to engage

68 Out of the seven times I was physically attacked in Guatemala, five took place in Antigua. Three of them were sexual assaults, the other four attempted robberies. Sexual harassment was a common practice in the street, but I was never physically attacked or harassed on the bus.
69 In the later stages of my research I spent more nights in the city, mostly staying with friends.
with local women social activists and government officials. Seated, pressed, between two men on the dangerously curvy road to the capital, I engaged in conversations with people I’d never had the opportunity to meet elsewhere, whose sociopolitical opinions where very different than the ones I was usually exposed to. It was also time for preparation (on my way to the capital) and reflection (on my way to Antigua), precious time I’m not sure I would have given myself otherwise. My daily commute, like my research, was a journey between the transnational and the local, between general society and women’s groups. This commute marked my daily entrance to and exit from the field, and helped me, particularly when I became further involved with the campaign, to maintain some distance and perspective.

Living in Antigua also meant that at times, “the field” came to visit me. While in Antigua, I spent my days in the Spanish Center for Education and Collaboration, a cultural center hosting a library, art exhibits, film series, and various cultural events, together with diverse training initiatives. As such, when events related to the campaign took place in Antigua, they were usually held there, allowing me to be the proud and generous host of my friends from the capital. It was yet another reminder of the flows this campaign relies on.

These flows were also essential in the process of reflecting on and analyzing the reality I observed and participated in. Beyond my bus conversations with locals, coming home to Antigua included recounting my daily experiences to the people I shared accommodation with, as well as friends, both locals and transnational, all outsiders to the campaign. Namely, on a daily base, I had to contextualize every experience and thought I had in the capital, and explain its importance and relevance in the greater framework of this

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70 Antigua is relatively close to the capital but the morning traffic, together with unpredictable nature of city buses makes this 50 minutes ride much longer.
71 For instance, a man in his 70s, on the way back to Antigua fervently advocated that I, being “a pretty young woman,” should spare myself these long stressful bus rides. His suggestion was that I’ll get married and allow my partner to support me while I “do nothing.”
campaign. While I wasn’t always keen to deliver in-depth daily reports, my weekend conversations with family and friends familiar with the Guatemalan settings were usually an elaborated “field report,” as my weekly “stories” became an initial analysis in progress of my research.

“Reporting” in three different languages, Hebrew, English, and Spanish, was another key experience in understanding my own “stories.” As my involvement in the field grew deeper, it became more complicated to “report” in English. Hebrew, my native language, like Spanish, allows for a more community-oriented discourse that at times was hard to express in English. Beyond the sense of being in relation, both Hebrew and Spanish convey a strong sense of gender, while English time and again strips the discourse of its gender aspects. I soon learned to look at my linguistic frustrations as an invitation to explore the less evident local (cultural) aspect of the campaign. Therefore, while I view my fieldwork as a process of relationship building, I believe that my analysis was just as relation-dependent. I will now turn to discuss the modes in which I engaged in this relationship.

Methods
Unlike many other scholars (Goldstein 2033:27-28, Nelson 1999:31-32), I did not have key contacts to facilitate my entrance to the field. Although I conducted preliminary fieldwork in 2008, my entry to the field in 2009 was difficult and slow. The people I met in 2008 were no longer in the positions they held in the previous summer and only two were still active in the campaign, and in a relatively high profile position. One of them, Hilda Morales Trujillo, a legal scholar (and a candidate for Supreme Court), poet, a founder of several Civil Society organizations, Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience, who

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72 For example, in a common sentence such as: “In our alliance all the member organizations are feminist,” every word but “in” and “are” is gendered (feminine).
held several governmental and international positions, remained a source of inspiration and support through and after my fieldwork. While participating in public events she introduced me to relevant actors, yet these were mostly governmental functions and functionaries and I was too new to the field to actively participate in these conversations. Most of my attempted communication at that point was electronic—approaching activists whose names I received from my initial contacts or found on organizations’ elaborated websites—which was not very successful. I also used these websites as windows to the field, learning about their views regarding the reality of everyday violence, their ongoing activities and public events.

Thinking back on my basic anthropology training, I often thought about Geertz’s “ten days or so” (1973:413) of being completely ignored by the Balinese villagers that he and his wife came to study in 1958. As the “ten days” turned into ten weeks—and more—I kept trusting that, like Geertz, my persistent physical presence in different public events would open a path for my fieldwork. Trying to figure my way into the field, I developed my understanding of the place, its politics, and the ways in which people communicate with each other. I participated in cultural events and volunteered in various small scale projects. While my future contacts were not very responsive, my physical presence did not go completely unnoticed. My liminal appearance—somewhere between local and foreign—as well as the ways in which I moved—unaccompanied, by foot—provoked much uninvited reactions, mainly men’s comments directed at my body. This combination of lack and excess responses to my presence created a rather frustrating everyday reality.

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73 For instance the inauguration of the new protocol of care for victims of sexual abuse, an event sponsored by CONAPREVI held on November 20. At that point of time there were too many gaps in my knowledge to understand the power dynamics between these actors and their different interests in promoting the new protocol. Hence, these conversations never developed to the point in which I felt comfortable asking for an interview.

74 Months later, people I worked with reported that they were not able to find materials I sent; apparently, the email address I was using was often channeled directly to people’s spam folder, and probably influenced the minimal responses I received for my introductory emails.
While frustrating, this experience was helpful in grounding me in the field. I began thinking about my body as a tool through which I can better understand the reality of being a young woman in this space, an experience that I have learned to view as rather violent. Documenting the comments made towards my body as well as my responses helped me have a better sense of Guatemalan urban society. Further, situating this constant harassment in a cultural context helped me be less emotionally impacted by it. Naturally, bodies are marked not only by gender, but by complex intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, age, body able-ness, and so on. These markers, combined with the locations and times of day that these bodies are present and move in social spaces, provoke different responses. However, while the responses vary, some experiences are shared—women’s bodies in the public/private sphere are objectified and subjected to diverse forms of discipline that reify, maintain, and reproduce masculine supremacy.

Placing my embodied experience as a woman in Guatemala prior to my positions as a woman scholar from North America or a woman activist from Israel was essential, I believe, for my future communication with the women activists I engaged. It has also been healthy and valuable to negotiate those other positions in and outside the field. In November 24, the night before the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, I participated for the first time in the annual memorial ceremony, the vigilia that takes place at the Constitutional Plaza in front of the National Palace. It was the first time I participated in an event organized by a civil society alliance; in this case the coordinadora 25 de noviembre, a committee assembled every year of representatives of member-organizations, in order to organize the events commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. It was a stormy night that dramatically reduced the number of participants.
As the rain calmed, the organizers waited for more people to join. While waiting for the event to start, I had a short conversation with Hilda about the next day’s march. Due to an injury, she did not intend to participate, but introduced me to “nuestra defensora,” Ana-Gladys Ollas, head of women’s protectorate unit at the Guatemalan office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights (PDH).

Hilda explained to Ana-Gladys that I would like “to help” the next day, and asked if she would be there to facilitate. I immediately confirmed that I would love “to help,” and asked what that would entail. “Just be there,” they both answered. And Hilda elaborated: “just being there with us is great help.” Another person in the crowd actually mattered, as was soon emphasized through a practice I was introduced to that night. A name of an organization was called, and all incorporated activists responded “presente” (present, here). Being there, “just being,” was meaningful. It was a political statement that entailed sociopolitical implications. Being present was something I was able to do simply by being a person, a woman-being. The 2009 vigilia was my first presente.

Waiting for the event to start, another international student and I played with a group of young kids, children of some of the women activists. Once the event was over I engaged in a conversation with one of the kids’ mother, who was part of the organizing committee, and she invited me to come and “help” the next morning in preparation for the next day’s march. This “help” entailed arriving at the office of one of the member organizations, Tierra

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75 At that specific political time, being identified as part of crowd did not put participants in physical danger, but many of these activists carried the scars of political oppression in previous years and struggles. In interviews many activists mentioned that being seen as part of this crowd limited women-activists’ employability, especially in regards to public positions such as supreme judge or university faculty.

76 Many activists find it important for their children to participate and witness the different activities. While teens are often incorporated in various youth groups, the younger children usually accompany their mothers (and at times, fathers) or being entertained by other activists. At the same time, their presence also attests to their mothers’—often single—inability to find or pay for alternative arrangements.
Viva at 6am, and take part in decorating two big trucks with messages denouncing violence against women.

When I arrived, the next day, I did not work with the woman who invited me to join the night before, but with the Tierra Viva representative to the coordinadora, Maria Ixmucané Solórzano. When we finished decorating the coordinadora’s trucks, we had breakfast in the office. As I commented on the T-shirts the Tierra Viva activists wore, Ixmucané was happy to give me one that I wore through the march. At the end of the march, I approached her again, explained—for the first time that day—that I was there as an anthropologist, and asked for an interview, which we conducted a few weeks later.

That same day, towards the end of the march, I participated in a political act meant to condemn sexual violence during the internal armed conflict—stamping my hands in paint on a huge cloth hanging at the entrance to the Plaza Mayor. Having done that (while wearing the Tierra Viva T-shirt) I engaged in a conversation with an activist who invited me to a public testimonial event the following day. The next day I learned that she, Amandine Fulchiron, was the main organizer of the event, and member of the organization actoras de cambio. Later on that day, after I assisted Amandin coordinating the participants to the next activity she agreed to sit with me for a formal interview.

My hands that “helped” to decorate the coordinadora’s trucks and were later stamped on a huge cloth in solidarity with military rape survivors and my physical presence in those three events facilitated my way into the field.

My interviews with Maria and Amandine in January were instrumental for my fieldwork. Once interviewed, they put me in contact with other women activists in their

77 Beyond the public testimonies, the event (Nov 26 2009) included a visit in the museum exhibit sobrevivi estoy aquí y estoy viva, performances by a theater group, a dance group, and a musical group la banda Centroamericana Feminista led by artist and activist Sandra Moran. For more about the event, see chapter 6.
organizations and beyond. Once I became a bit more familiar with these two organizations and the organizations they collaborated with, I began to simply walk into offices, introduce myself to the receptionist, and ask to talk to relevant people. This strategy worked better when the receptionist had seen me before, even if we were not formally introduced; in cases where I was a complete stranger, they did not always open the door. These interviews were also instrumental as the women I talked to informed me of other relevant events where I met and was introduced to more relevant people. As time passed, my physical presence in the field was noticed, observed, and generated curiosity and interest in ways that my previous direct communication did not accomplish. After a certain time-period of general participation I was approached by actors in the field who wondered what my position in the field was; this also opened the way for further communication and collaborations.

My following work was a combination of participatory observation, informal conversations, and collecting tangible and electronic materials produced by local organizations.

**Participatory Observation:** The common term for this ethnographic practice is participant observation, emphasizing that the observer is a participant. Here I choose to use participatory observation in order to emphasize the participatory nature of my work, distinguishing the initial period of my fieldwork, in which I observed public events as a participant, i.e., “participant observation” and the later time period in which I observed

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78 For example, in “Mujeres transformando el mundo” conversation with the receptionist took place through a closed door, and I was not allowed in. Several months later, I approached the director, Lucia Moran, in a public forum, and scheduled an interview. When I arrived, she opened the interview by apologizing and explaining that they were threatened and terrorized by different groups, so although I had “proper” documentation (University forms with description of my research, business card) in my first visit, the receptionist was too afraid to open the door for me. However, when I approached her in person in that event, she already knew of me and saw me before, so she was more confident to invite me to come.

79 Once I was cornered in Antigua’s Spanish Center for Education and Collaboration’s bathroom during a film screening by an activist inquiring who I am, who am I working with, and where did I get my shoes. She is still a close friend.
events I was invited to participate in. For example, the first time I participated in the November 24 *vigilia* (2009) I observed the event seated in the audience. I audio recorded speakers, took pictures from afar, careful not to interrupt the speakers or activity. When invited, I joined the rest of the audience in lighting a sequence of candles, forming the emblem of the network for the elimination of violence against women (RedNoVi) and the number of women who were killed violently that year. The following year, I helped set up the stage, was in charge of creating the candles’ sequence, took pictures for the organizers, including close-ups and posed group pictures, and helped clear the stage and load the truck.

This was partly due to the fact that in the fall of 2010 I was invited to be part of the coordinadora 25 de noviembre, the committee that organizes the events commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Attending the general meetings and participating in a subcommittee became a key experience that extended my understanding of the field. Prior to this point, I was, like many of the local activist, less exposed to the complex political circumstances, manoeuvring, and negotiations through which women’s rights and antiviolence advocacy come to be. Once “inside,” I gained a far better, first hand, understanding of the broader context in which the events I observed and actively participated in took place.

These diverse levels of participation broadened the scope of my interviews in several ways. Obviously, it helped me reach out to more actors in the field, quantity-wise. But there were several “qualitative” advantages as well. For instance, once activists knew me (or of me) trust became less of an issue; more personal, at times extremely painful, experiences
were shared, together with controversial comments about other actors in the field. Further, I was able to ask about activities and actions in which I participated in and had my own views of. These experiences informed my questions (such as “how did you feel singing on the same stage women gave public testimony about state-sponsored rape, an hour earlier?”) allowed for a conversation, not only “a report.”

**Interviews:** In my time in the field—and while away, through the internet—I engaged in countless conversations with actors in the field. Some non-formal conversations took place in public events, others in a random meeting on the street or a bus, while getting a ride somewhere, over lunch, or in social events. These less-formal or non-formal exchanges were highly valuable for my understanding of the social situation I studied and its complexities. In this process, I had the honor and privilege to form friendships with people who have been generous in helping to explain those complexities. These conversations, being part of everyday practice, where not audio recorded, yet I did incorporate some of them in my notes. Some actors made a point about talking to me “off record,” elaborating on certain issues only after the recorder was turned off, or commenting on a specific issue on our next, occasional meeting.

My formal conversations, or “interviews,” were conducted in Spanish and all translations of spoken and written words are mine unless otherwise noted. Considering the work overload and hectic reality in which activists operate, it often took a while to schedule time to meet, and even when scheduled, interviews were cancelled in the last minute or

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80 For instance, after entertaining an activist’s child through a public event, I learned that he was conceived in a gang rape. In an interview with his mother, six months later, we both knew that I knew of her ordeal. While she spared me the gory details, she often mentioned events before and after “it happened.” While she was not interested in talking about “it,” mentioning “it,” while I never asked about it, was, I believe, an expression of familiarity and trust.

81 Here I refer to an event I earlier mentioned, organized by Actoras de cambio (see FN 77).
stopped in the middle, when a more pressing issue emerged. A few activists generously
offered to meet with me before the beginning of their workday, and with others I was never
able to set a time for an interview. Five of the interviews were not individual, and involved
two to seven participants.\textsuperscript{82}

The informed consent process included a question regarding the usage of the
interviewee’s name.\textsuperscript{83} None of my interviewees chose to be described under a pseudonym,
but I decided to use pseudonyms or not mention the names of people who specifically
indicated that they went through a form of abuse.\textsuperscript{84} Some of these stories are known within
this small community and omitting the names does not considerably conceal people’s
identity, yet it does maintain some privacy in relation to general society. However, by
making this decision on their behalf I feel that I may impede their agency to decide what is in
their best interest, and in my future writing I may use their names. Yet, as we cannot always

\textsuperscript{82} The first, with Colectivo Nazareth, included seven members of the colectivo. The second, at the UNICEF
included three employees and a volunteer of the organization, the third, included two activists representing
Mujeres en Resistencia, the fourth, included two members of Convergencia, and the last one included two
employees of SEPREM.

\textsuperscript{83} All formal interviews included informed consent in which interviewees had at least one day to review a
written description of my study, my intentions, and contact information of my supervisor in Vancouver. At the
majority of cases interviewees did not pay much attention to this procedure. However, there were two cases in
which the legal approach alarmed the interviewees; yet we were able to come up with a different approach that
eased the process. In the first case, the collective interview in UNICEF, the participants asked that each one of
us will get a copy of the form signed by the five of us (I always left a copy with my interviewees, but in this
case they asked for a signed one). In another interview at a governmental agency the interviewee was happy to
be interviewed without signing the form. She claimed she does not have the legal authority to sign such a
document. It was resolved as the head of the agency passed by the room where the interview was held, and
entered in order to greet me. She was happy to sign the form and relieve the employee of organizational
liability. Once she signed, the employee added her signature. In another case I interviewed a woman whose
level of literacy was not sufficient to fully understand the text, thus we had a similar, oral consent oral consent
procedure.

\textsuperscript{84} All quoted conversations, unless otherwise indicated, were recorded in formal interviews with activists, in
such cases; I use the activist’s first name (as was used in the interview). When reporting a text delivered in a
different format (publication, public speech, poem) I use the activists’ last name. For a list of dates when
interviews took place see appendix 3.
control the consequences of our actions, and considering the violent nature of the environment in which this research takes place, at this point I choose to be overly cautious.\footnote{Experiencing an overtly violent response to the publication of my MA thesis might have made me more cautious and protective towards my interviewees than needed. For me, this is just another illustration of the ways in which our personal experiences influence our research and our decisions as scholars.}

A more pressing ethical issue, communicated by several actors, was a sense of abuse by scholars who “come and go as they please and give nothing back to the field, not even a translated version of their work.” It was an important reminder of the different ways in which research ethics is perceived. Although I had to leave the field several times (for professional and personal reasons), the fact that I returned at the time I stated, that I maintained contact while being away, and did my best to be accountable and diligently participate in important events and meetings, was helpful in establishing a greater sense of trust and interest in collaboration. I often shared my own experiences, methods, and materials from similar workshops I had delivered and political activities I had organized and participated in, in the past. Also, as I mentioned before, I brought my body to the field, doing simple manual work, such as loading equipment on or decorating a truck, taking pictures of behalf of an event organizer, leading speakers to the stage, accompanying threatened speakers (“human shield”) in events, and simply adding my body to the crowd gathered in public events – an embodied demonstration of my ethical and political commitments.

Interviews were mostly conducted in offices, but also in coffee shops (one coffee shop in particular became my “city office”), in cars, and in people's homes. Sometimes an interview was a beginning of a conversation, other times I was very familiar with the person by the time we sat for a formal interview. The length of time I spent in the field and the different relations I developed with activists allowed me to have multiple conversations with...
people at different points of my fieldwork and share my initial analysis and thoughts with them. With some I maintained electronic contact after leaving the field.

Interviews varied depending on the organization the actor was involved with and her position in it, or in the movement in general. Following a description of the process that motivated the research I opened this chapter with, I asked for basic information about the organization’s structure, aims, and activities (I later found a helpful survey of organizational structure and activities written by Spanish sociologist Luisa Cabrera in 2009). Once the aims, structure, and position of an organization were discussed, I asked, what, given infinite power, would she do to make world better for Guatemalan women. A follow up question was how that world would look. These two broad questions were meant to address the difficulties in their everyday reality in an alternative—hopefully empowering—mode.

Following a discussion about an alternative, utopian, reality, I asked about the actions and activities taking place in order to make this reality more possible. The rest of the interview focused on actions and activities, initiations and collaborations. I asked them to elaborate on specific concepts, such as feminism and femicide, and the ways in which they impact their work. Issues such as the relation between past and current violence, past and current activism, transnational movement, and legislation were often an important part of the conversation. I made a point ending the interview by asking about the movement’s, their organizations’ and their personal accomplishments, achievements, and triumphs. Overall, I meant these interviews to be empowering moments. Not in the sense that I was empowering them, but by focusing on their actions and not on the violent experiences in their lives, I
hoped that these formal conversations with the outsider I am, will reaffirm their position as actors of change.\footnote{This strategy meant that unless activists chose to tell me about experiences of violence that influenced their lives, which many of them did, I did not always have a way to learn about them.}

**Material analysis:** In most of the interviews and public events I, like other participants, was handed published materials produced by the hosting organization/s. These materials range between one page of event-related flyers or political proclamation handouts, small publications (research, reports, information about the organization, information about a certain topic, legislation, and organization newsletters), actual books, and other materials such as T-Shirts, bags, and other accessories carrying the organizations’ logo, motto, and often the sponsoring agency. At times materials produced by a governmental agency or another civil society NGO, were distributed by another organization, often a member organization of the same alliance or network.\footnote{Governmental agencies such as CONAPREVI, SEPREM, OJ had greater budgets to produce promotional and educational materials for their own needs, but they were able to also share them with women’s organizations.} Other materials I collected include similar materials posted on different websites, news articles, radio program broadcasts, and pictures I took in different events.

I use these publications as support and affirmation of ideas, agendas, and strategies expressed in the interviews, but also to expand on issues I chose not to discuss in the interviews, such as violence, and issues I was less aware of, such as different perceptions in regards to ethical conduct.\footnote{For instance, most ethical protocols I am familiar with (academic, medical, police) mandate the anonymity of survivors. In contrast, the organizations I worked with often celebrated survivors identity and their pictures appear on publications’ front covers.} Several images are frequently part of these materials, allowing me to explore alternative ways in which discourses are communicated to both participants and general society. The rich materialization of ideas, i.e. the material presentation of
political agendas, calls for an analysis of this process, within the particular circumstances of transnational and local social movement.

As my analysis is directly related to the relationships I developed in the field I would like to offer an additional viewpoint of these relationships.

The Observed Participant: Fly’s-Eye View(s)

“How describe your research fantasy,” was my first graduate as

signment. Bearing in mind that an anthropologist is not “a fly on the wall,” observing and reporting from the position of an objective, unseen, outsider; the research fantasy I described was to be the fly on my own shoulder observing my presence in the field. As a true fantasy, it didn’t come true, yet, unexpectedly, I was extended some additional perspective on my presence in the field from what I will call, fly’s-eye view.

(Desde) La Vista de Una Mosca

As I discussed earlier, the 2009 Vigilia was an important fieldwork moment for me. I observed the event seated in the audience, audio recorded speakers, took pictures and participated in candle lighting. The next day I participated for the first time in the annual November 25 march, walking in a big crowd of activists wearing an activist’s T-shirt, collecting materials and meeting people. Later that day I returned to Antigua, and found the family I lived with waiting for me with the newspaper. It was a copy of Prensa Libre, the most prestigious newspaper in Guatemala, the same newspaper I saw a few times that day sold in streets corners and on Tierra Viva’s bulletin board. The cover page featured a picture from the act of candle lighting at the vigilia, explaining that it was women’s organizations’

89 (From) a (she) Fly’s-eye view.
90 While it was the first time I physically attended, I was strangely familiar with the event, as it was featured in the documentary Killers’ Paradise (Portenier, Giselle, 2007, Canada/Guatemala, 83 min). This familiarity added a layer of interest to my participation.
homage for violence’s victims in Guatemala, and I was impressed that that little act actually was presented as nationally meaningful. I thanked them for getting me a copy of the newspaper and started telling them about the events, but they were excited about something else: Me. I was in the photo.

Third on the right, kneeling and not looking at the camera; I did not recognize myself in that same picture I saw several times that day. But my Guatemalan friends did. And they were very proud. Raul, the head of the household, said: "you are the first person I know who did not die and still made it to the front page of the Prensa!" Intrigued, and a bit annoyed, I assumed that it takes a local to set apart "me," the foreigner anthropologist, from "them", the local activists. Yet, Raul did not exclude me from the crowd. On the contrary, he saw me as a person whose probability to experience violence is similar to any other person in his general social circle.

This early stage of my research was a frustrating time for me; feeling, figuratively and literally, “out of the picture,” I didn’t even consider looking for myself in the picture. My Guatemalan hosts, on the other hand, knew I had participated in that event and for them it was enough to consider me “part of the picture;” thus, they looked for me in the picture. Interestingly, while I was seeking the approval of local campaign participants, two non-
participant local agents, the family I lived with and the local media positioned me (figuratively and literally) in the picture. The local media reassured the family I lived with that I was “part of the picture;” and by celebrating that picture, they reassured me of my place in the field.

This double placement marked, metaphorically and practically, the moment in which I entered the field. Symbolically, it was a moment when I, the woman who came to turn others into the object of her gaze became herself, an object of the gaze (Behar 1995:2). To be a participant, I needed to be observed, recorded, and posted. Put differently, participatory observation in public acts includes being observed.

**Fly.com**

A year later, my place in the field was very different. During the fall of 2010, I was part of the coordinadora 25 de noviembre. Working closely with representatives of the member organizations, I interacted and formed friendships with activists representing groups I originally did not consider part of the Campaign for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, such as domestic women workers, and women HIV positive. While I did not directly work on issues of HIV/AIDS, I was later invited to participate in a special event organized for World AIDS Day, December 1 (part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign). It was a radical public action, to which only 50 activists were invited to participate, and the activity's content was kept secret until the last minute. Dressed as witches we gathered at the Constitutional Plaza, located between the National Palace and the Metropolitan Cathedral,
and staged acts of witchcraft sorcery, defying the government's neglect of both women HIV positive and the general public.\textsuperscript{91}

It was quite an exceptional activity that drew a lot of attention in the street, from both general public and media. As we were leaving the plaza, a photographer walked with us, and constantly took pictures. He did not stop to ask for our permission, or even to inquire what was it that we were doing. At some point, I got a bit annoyed, raised my broom, and pretended to push him away. He took another picture and moved on. A few days later I received an email from a friend in Vancouver asking if I had participated in a World AIDS Day activity in Guatemala City. To my surprise, that final “click,” made it to the BBC World "photos of the week," as well as several other websites.\textsuperscript{92}

What first struck me about the photo was that the photographer captured the anthropologist instead of “the tribe”: a fact I found hilarious. I looked like them. I did what they did. I am them! But at the same time, this photo shows how different I am.

It was not coincidental that I was the one to get annoyed. As an anthropologist I am trained to engage with people and ask for their permission. But this was

\textsuperscript{91} For a further discussion about the symbolism of the witch see chapter 3, a further discussion about the activity in chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{92} This is when I learned that the photo was taken by Reuters’ photographer Daniel LeClair, who I unsuccessfully attempted to contact several times.
not a professional matter, I was not an anthropologist protecting her “tribe,” it was about me as an observed participant. Coming from Canada, I was not used to being an object of a gaze, let alone recorded and posted, without my permission. Further, considering my Israeli formation as a respect-worthy woman-being, it was not accidental that I was the one to act upon her annoyance.

While the photo was celebrated in the field, it was an important reminder for me, at a point in time when I was closer than ever to “going native,” that I was an outsider. It took one picture to capture the differences—I looked like them, I did what they did, and lived in similar circumstances, yet, I was inherently different. I was constituted elsewhere, with the right and expectation to be a woman-actor, unlike my compañeras who had to teach themselves and constantly struggle for the right to be actors. More than any other experience in the field, this picture taught me the meaning of feminist solidarity; one that, following Lorde (1984) and Mohanty (2003), is founded on knowledge and critical awareness of difference rather than on essentialist identity.

Looking at the face of a non-Guatemalan woman, captured by a non-Guatemalan man, posted on the worldwide web as a representation of a Guatemalan women's action for World AIDS Day, funded by international organizations, highlighted how transnational this campaign is. Namely, having my face at the forefront was a good reminder that I’m merely one of many other external agents involved with this campaign. It was further humbling to recognize the pace and extent of journalists’ readership. Indeed, the caption: “Activists dressed as witches leave a demonstration on World AIDS Day in Guatemala City December 1, 2010” did not portray an in-depth description of the event. At the same time, unlike a

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93 I never operated under the assumption that being an outsider guarantees my safety; a notion that grew stronger when one of my closest friend, an international activist, was brutally raped. Namely, I believe that the main difference was not the passport I hold, but the circumstances in which I was brought up.
thorough scholarly work, it was posted in close proximity to the event, and circulated much more widely than an academic work. Circulating, “flying,” on the web, this picture drew attention to the local campaign and was used as tangible evidence for (and then by) the international funders, and a world-wide affirmation for the women organizers and participants. Can my work be as impactful?

“La Aquella Famosa” (foto, no mosca)\textsuperscript{94}

In November 2011, after ten months as a student in Vancouver, I returned to Guatemala to participate in the events around November 25 and 16 Days of Activism. In contrast to 2009, when I made my first steps into the field, and 2010, when I was part of the organizing committee, this time I was a welcomed visitor. As a visitor, I helped set up the traditional \textit{vigilia} on the evening of November 24, and helped decorate the march-tracks in two different locations early morning on November 25.\textsuperscript{95} Wearing my blue RedNoVi T-shirt, I spent the march walking through the marching crowd, taking photos and meeting friends and acquaintances.

At a certain point we stopped for a short activity by the Constitutional Court. While there, a few of the women-leaders lined up in a row, and invited me to join them. It was a great moment for me, I felt very proud to be invited and to be part of this row, to be acknowledged as part of the happening, even as part of the representing faces of this campaign.

Following the activity, until the procession made it to its final destination, the National Palace, this human-row led the march. It was a very exciting place to be. Situated

\textsuperscript{94} “That famous one” (picture, not fly). The name Sonia Acabal (RedNoVi), and others gave the picture described in this subsection.

\textsuperscript{95} Unlike previous years, the coordinadora’s truck was not prepared for the march at the same location as the Tierra Viva one. I therefore began the morning helping with the coordinadora’s truck and then made it to the last stages of preparing Tierra Viva’s truck, with whom I got a ride to the starting point (see figure 1).
directly behind the policeman who opened the way for the march to go through, I was able to feel the city's pulse a step before we were interrupting its rhythm, before the policeman paused it for us. As he parted the ocean of traffic, I was part of the first row of people to walk on the dry land. Directly behind us walked Sandra Moran, a well-known activist, holding a big drum; her drumming and singing was transmitted powerfully through a sound system located on the leading truck, pumping the air with additional energy. The leading truck itself had a strong presence of a mighty giant, followed by a sea of activists advocating the cause through their T-shirts, bags, flags, demonstration plaques and other accessories.

On the one hand, I felt honored and empowered taking part in this human-row. On the other, I was eager to document, to capture this moment. It was a powerful moment in which I felt the conflict between being an activist and a scholar: I wanted to be in that human-row and at the same time I wanted to take a photo of it. I wished to simultaneously observe and be observed, record and be recorded. At that moment, I was able to find a simple way to deal with my own conflict: I handed my camera to one of the news-photographers surrounding us, and asked him to take a few photos for me. It allowed me to participate and record at the same time; to simultaneously be an activist and an anthropologist.

The next morning, my landlady left an article clip from the Prensa Libre with a photo from the march on my door. Unlike the photo taken with my camera (interestingly, by the same photographer) in which several activists and myself are smiling and posing for the picture, in the Prensa Libre's picture I am the only one looking at the photographer. Further, while joining my arms with two activists, I'm holding my camera in my hands, and carrying my audio-recorder in my front pocket. This picture, thus, captured well my complex position in the field: on the one hand, a women's rights activist, on the other, an anthropologist who
studies that movement. The photo reflects my momentary unease with this complex position, and how trivial and insignificant was this complexity for the people who joined hands with me. Looking at the picture not only confirmed that it is physically possible to be both, but also that the women I worked with accepted me as both. This time, the local photographer, with whom I had chatted for a while, knew that I was a foreign anthropologist, a fact that did not seem to keep him from using the picture. Like the women I worked with, he was aware of the extent to which foreign ideas, individuals, and currency affected Guatemalan social activism.

Unlike other pictures, this image was published several times, granting it the codename “that famous one.” That particular moment was also featured in another Guatemalan newspaper, Nuestra Diario, in which the picture gave a better sense of the marching crowd behind the leading human-row. Yet that same picture appeared again, three weeks later, the day I returned to Vancouver, in the newspaper's magazine. A different angle of the photo appeared about two months later, accompanying an article about the new president's policy changing. Links to those articles were sent to me by local activists, celebrating my continuous (virtual) presence in the field.

Figure 4: March, November 25, 2011.
All the above mentioned pictures were pointed to me by others: foreigners and non/participant locals. Beyond their anecdotal aspect, I tried to use them to gain a better understanding of my place in the field.\footnote{An unexpected revelation was that my dear friend Carolina Alvarez (Tierra Viva) appears in all three pictures, including the 2009 one, taken before we met.} I, of course, was not the only one to notice these pictures, and they were mentioned mostly after I left the field.\footnote{The second picture was taken several days before I finished the official part of my fieldwork. The third picture was taken during a relatively short visit. It is not surprising, thus, that they were not discussed too much while I was in the field.} In long distance communications around events taking place after I left, women often commented something along the lines of “we were thinking about you today… that had you been here, you’d probably end up in the paper again …” While these were jests, made by the women I was closer with, I tried to use these pictures to discuss my position in the field with women activists I was less close with.

In an interview with Norma Herrera (UNAMG) a few days after the last picture was taken, I asked how she felt about my presence in that picture. I wasn’t sure that a direct question was the right way to go about it, but decided to give it a try. Norma explained that Guatemalans are used to foreigners and foreign interventions in every sphere of life. “Participation such as yours,” she continued, “the one that gets you to the front page, is the type we are happy about.” “Naturally,” she said, “we would have liked to see more locals participating, but when foreigners come to support us, they are not taking locals’ place but encouraging locals’ participation.” Similar commentaries were offered by other activists in more casual conversations, but I assume the situation is more complex, or that not everyone shares this sentiment. However, these commentaries highlight the objective state of constant foreign intervention together with activists’ self-view as actors who can support or reject,
approve or condemn non-local actors, and not only be supported or rejected, approved or condemned by them.

When activists sent me links to articles in which “that famous picture” appeared I assumed that the act of sending them to me was beyond the anecdotal, but demonstrated a sense of endorsement of my participation. I thanked them and asked, still directly, but from a safe distance, how do they feel about it. Walda Barrios Klee’s, a former guerrilla, 2007 candidate for vice presidency (URNG), a current activist (UNAMG) and a social science and gender professor (FLASCO, USAC), response was heart warming and enlightening. “I’m happy that you are in the picture… I believe you were involved in the right way. You put on the shirt. “Put on the shirt,” is a metaphor for getting involved. …”

Indeed, I put on the shirt, and became involved in this complex, transnational, exciting, painful and hopeful campaign. Hence, my analysis in the following chapters is directly related to the relationships I developed in the field and my personal position within its networks of people, power dynamics, and politics. As this research project is subjective and partial, my purpose in this chapter is to provide a detailed representation of the time periods and spaces this campaign operating within, the actors operate within these time periods and spaces, and therefore, of the relationships and embodied experiences that constitute my analysis.

In the next chapters I step back and bring the campaign and its participants back to the center. In order to maintain my multilayered position I discuss in this chapter through the account, I alternate the pronouns I’m using in my description, shifting between they/we, their/ our.
Chapter 2: From Left to Rights

It was 12:30 pm, and a great crowd of activists—women, men, youth, children, Indigenous, Non-Indigenous, and foreigners—gathered in the Constitutional Plaza, one of the two large Plazas that compose the Plaza Mayor, Guatemala City’s hectic center. Framed by the neoclassical buildings of the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura (National Palace of Culture), the Metropolitan Cathedral, the Plaza de las Armas, meant for military displays, and the historical shopping arcade, Portal del Comercio, the Plaza brings together the great powers of Guatemalan society: the government, the church, the army, and commerce.98 A decorative fountain and a pole holding a huge national flag in the Plaza’s center mark it as the country’s leading space for civil and political gatherings.

In the middle of this urban political setting, using the flag pole as its center, a square was marked by scattered grass. Resembling a Mayan altar, the temporary plaza was decorated with flower petals, flower arrangements, candles, and burning scents. Small lilac figures of butterflies leaned on eight-flower vases that marked the square’s angles and sides. Four big archival pictures of women participating in past demonstrations leaned on the flag pole. The improvised plaza was framed by four lines of inward facing activists, their backs facing the neoclassical buildings. Many activists wore a variety of traje, a regional Indigenous dress, their particular colors and patterns mapping the range of rural localities.

98 In addition to its political and civil centrality, it is also considered the city’s geographic center, as across the street, right at the entrance to the National Place, there’s a marker indicating “Kilometer 0”, from which all roads into Guatemala lead out of (see figure 11). The second Plaza in Plaza Mayor is called Parque Centenario, and commemorates the proclamation of Central American independence that took place in the Plaza in 1821. For further discussion on the role of the Main Plaza Central American cities as a legacy of the Spanish Empire in the Americas see Setha Low (1996) and Miles Richardson (1982).
they come from. A giant effigy of an Indigenous woman added a twist to this sight, as the non-traditional color of the effigy’s *traje*, lilac, the color of the Suffragette movement, the women’s liberation movement, and the feminist movement, marked the transnational feminist discourse as her locality of origin. This notion was further emphasized as that same color was echoed in many of the signs and flags held around her.

While some participants wore *traje*, the majority wore a variety of custom-made slogan T-shirts and other personalized accessories, such as bags, hats, bandanas, masks, balloons, aprons, bracelets, umbrellas, banners, flags, and even elaborate butterfly costumes. The slogans read:

“Violence against women is a crime, as well as femicide.” “That’s it! No more violence against women.” “I’m a feminist and I say no more sexual violence against children, youth, girls, and women!” “Our voices will never be silenced again.” “I defend human rights because I work to eradicate violence against women and girls.” “No more violence at home, in the street, at work.” “I say, we say, everybody says: I’m a citizen. I fight for women’s citizenship, from my territory: body and land.” “Never again! JUSTICE for women in Guatemala.” “I’m a woman! I’m a citizen! I’m important! I’m happy!” “Women. Different looks Different feelings Different desires Different pleasures Equal rights.” “Women fighting and participating to be free. We demand that our rights will be respected, and a country without violence.” “For me, for us, and for the others: CONAPREVI” “15 years of creating history.”

Several women held large titled portraits of well-known local protagonists who lost their lives in different stages of the prolonged struggle for social justice: Alaída Foppa * Irma

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99 *Traje* is worn mostly by Maya women, but in some areas also by men. It is a marker of gender, ethnicity and a specific community of origin. In contemporary Guatemala, the hand-made, colorful *traje* reflects many of the ongoing social tensions. It is folklorized by the state to promote tourism, yet provokes racism and discrimination. Activists wearing *traje* in the city often do so as a political act that asserts their cultural right for self-determination. For further discussion see Nelson 1999 and Velásquez Nimatuj 2011.

100 Processional giants, figures of several meters carried by a person, are a popular tradition in many local celebrations in Latin America, originating in midlevel Europe. The most common is that the figures represent archetypes or popular locally relevant historical figures.

101 The color purple was adopted in the struggle for suffrage rights in the US and later used following the Montreal Massacre. A suggested explanation is that purple is the color that the cervix turns when a woman is about to give birth. As giving birth is an ultimate marker of being a woman, as well as equates with pain and suffering, the color purple stands for women’s suffering.

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Figure 5: Isabella Cruz sets a square within the square while other activists are entering Plaza Mayor, marching along the Metropolitan Cathedral on their way to the National Palace.

Figure 6: A square within the square: in the center, archival pictures of past demonstrations, in the background the fountain and Portal del Comercio.
Figure 7: Archival pictures of past demonstrations (left), a giant effigy of Indigenous woman (right), and Archival pictures of local protagonists, the National Palace in the background (below).
Flaquer * Mama Maquin * Maria Chinchilla * Mayra Gutierrez * Rogelia Cruz * Yolanda Urizar. The portraits, while asserting a strong connection with past local social struggles and protagonists, also invite in one of the most influential (women’s) human rights’ campaign in the 20th century: the Argentinian Mothers of Plaza del Mayo. Unlike the Madres, who (silently) marched weekly carrying the portraits of their missing loved ones on their bodies, these portraits were pinned to long wood poles, and raised high above the heads of the women who held them, high above the heads of the women and men looking at them. Some of the portraits were grouped together, others a bit further, mixed with other banners and flags stating:

“We appropriate and recover Our Territory: Body and Land.” “We are looking for justice for women. We did not forget and will not be silenced.” “Impunity and discrimination are also violence: There are many ways to kill a woman.” “Lack of access to sexual and reproductive health is also violence against women.” “No violence against women.” “Women have the right to live without violence, without torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.” “We demand budget and political will in order to comply with the Law Against Femicide and other Forms of Violence Against Women.” “We recovered our voice and break the silence.” “For the life of Indigenous women: no more mining.” “Women are done waiting. We Stop Violence Against Women and HIV Now.” “For the life of women, no more impunity, we demand justice!” “Exclusion is also violence, no more inequality. We demand inclusive rural development that involves women.” “50 years of breaking the silence. Mirabal sisters: symbols of fighting violence against women.”

This gathering marked the end of the long, eventful morning of November 25, 2010, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The date was chosen by Latin American feminist activists in 1981 as a tribute to the Mirabal sisters, three political activists who were killed on that day in 1960 for their opposition to the Dominican dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. The day thus emphasizes the connection between violence against women perpetrated by the state and by private actors (Friedman 2009:360). The

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102 For further information see Agustin 1987, Taylor 1997.
103 The 2010 march was, in fact the 50th anniversary for their assassination.
sisters’ code name, *Las mariposas* (the butterflies), became a central symbol for Latin American feminists, and is often marked on activist’s regalia and publications. In 1999 November 25 was officially designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The day’s activity started at 6:00 am, when the coordinadora 25 de noviembre, a coordinating committee composed of representatives from different local women’s organizations, gathered by the entrance to Tierra Viva’s office to decorate the coordinadora’s truck that would later lead the march. Activists affiliated with women’s organizations in the capital got together in their particular venues to decorate the vehicles they would use in the march (trucks, pickups, vans, cars) and gathered the materials they would distribute while activists from the rural areas began traveling to the city.

The annual march planned by the coordinadora 25 de noviembre, began several hours later, with a grand gathering at the Human Rights Plaza in front of the Supreme Court of Justice. Following a short political performance denouncing the role of the Judicial Branch in the situation of violence against women, the *voceras* (the coordinadora’s spokeswomen) announced the order in which the organizations would march and the march began. Each organization marched as a group, with their own banners, T-shirts, whistles, balloons, and other accessories, stating their visions and demands. Many were accompanied by vehicles

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104 While the march as a whole was organized by the coordinadora, several acts were organized by specific organizations, reflecting their particular realm of activism. For instance, the closing gathering and the improvised plaza discussed above is organized annually by Sector Mujer, and attended by all participants.

105 Like the previous year, I took part in putting together the truck. This time, I participated as a member of the coordinadora. During the rally I mostly took pictures for the organizing committee and helped coordinating one of the street performances I discuss later. Hence, as I mentioned earlier, the following description draws on both my insider perspective, gained in months of involvement in the logistic and thematic organization of the rally as well as on a perspective of an outside observer, a photographer, hence my use of “they (we)” that emphasizes this dual position.

106 See more about the decorated trucks in chapter 4.

107 See more about the political performances in chapter 6.
decorated with the same messages. The trucks also carried sound systems through which vocal messages, such as the coordinadora's *comunicado de la prensa* (a press release), were transmitted.

The *comunicado*, a well-articulated statement, included the organizations’ joint vision of the situation of violence against women in the country and its implications.\(^{108}\) It strongly rejects different forms of violence against women and the social ideologies they derive from—machismo, discrimination, lesbophobia, racism—and demands a change in the state’s structure and the social collective memory. The second half of the *comunicado* includes a long, detailed list of the coordinadora's demands of the different state institutions, agencies, and branches, as well as the media and the general public.

Each time the *comunicado* was read, it was concluded with a few rounds of participatory yells: the announcers called out (not always in coordination with other announcers): *por la vida de las mujeres* (for the life of women), and the marching crowd answered: *ni una muerte más!* (not even one more death)\(^ {109}\) Sometimes instead of reading the joint *comunicado*, the announcers read their own manifestos, or simply played music. Some groups danced and sang while marching, along groups of professional street performers playing drums, wearing makeup and carnival-like costumes that kept the rally lively and cheerful.

Over the next few hours, this huge, colorful, vigorous stream flooded the streets of Guatemala City, stopping and replacing the usual currents of traffic on these streets, with a human mass. Marching on the road, they (we) left the sidewalks to street vendors,\(^{108}\) See appendix 4.\(^ {109}\) There are a few versions of the call and response and this one is the most common.
shopkeepers and other curious passers-by. The messages, carried through a pulsing stream of symbols, were directed both inwards, to the cells that composed this plasmid flow, as well as outwards, to the media and the occasional spectators, to whom educational materials were constantly distributed. Following a short stop for a second political performance by the Guatemalan Congress, denouncing the role of the legislative branch in the situation of violence against women, they (we) continued to their (our) final destination: the National Palace. After a final political act at the entrance to the National Palace, denouncing the role of the executive branch in the situation of violence against women, they (we) crossed the street and re-gathered.

Their (our) backs facing the monumental buildings, representing the government, the church, the army, and the people, they (we) formed the improvised plaza I discussed above, at the center of the national political and civic center: the Constitutional Plaza. For the first time that day they faced themselves: activists and employees of a variety of women’s organizations in Guatemala accompanied by their allies and family members. Situated on an improvised Mayan Alter, accompanied by a giant effigy of Indigenous woman and portraits of local protagonists, the moment powerfully portrayed a sense of locality. While portraying a strong sense of continuum of local legacies of social struggle, the improvised plaza also drew on regional legacies of women’s human rights struggles: the Argentinian

110 While the government, the church and the people had a strong presence in the Plaza, the army (and the police) were absent from the scene. Randomly passing by the Palace on other occasions in which rallies took place I learned that on the opposite side of the building, hidden from the participants, a police force was set, fully geared to forcefully suppress any potential unrest. I can only assume that a similar force was placed there each time I was part of a rally at the front of the palace.

111 The usage of Mayan symbols to represent the Guatemalan nation is frequently contested and rejected by Maya activists, claiming that this appropriation is a cynical (folklorized, touristic, economic) use of the cultures the state have been trying to erase for centuries. To my understanding, in this campaign, the inclusion of Mayan symbols was meant to facilitate the participation of Maya women in the campaign; however, it can be still seen as part of the same practice.
mothers’ (and grandmothers) of Plaza de Mayo and the Dominican Mirabal (butterfly) sisters. Incorporating these protagonists and their practices into the local struggle to end violence against women, highlights the centrality of (Latin American) women in human rights related struggles as well as validate and strengthen the local struggle.

While the setting manifested locality (mostly through Mayan images), the signs carried by activists, and the “activist regalia” I described earlier, embodied transnational women’s human rights ideology and terminology. For instance, violence against woman was denounced as discrimination and violation of their right to live life without violence. Further, they denounce these violations, but also assert a citizen’s position and make demands of the state. This embodied commitment of human rights in general and to (diverse) local struggles in particular, was further illustrated through the giant Maya woman who was shrouded in lilac, marking a strong connection with the transnational women’s movement.

Facing themselves, the messages they carried throughout the city, sharing experiences with colleagues and friends, it was a festive, joyful, and noisy moment that was suddenly silenced by a cry: “Compañeras.” “Com-pan-yeras.” All eyes, including some representatives of the media, turned to the woman standing in the center of the improvised plaza. Having gained the crowd’s attention, artist and activist Sandra Morán, one of the founding members of Sector Mujer, wearing a T-shirt featuring a butterfly captioned: “I’m free!” continued:

“Let us (make) present our compañera Yolanda Uritzar!” and the crowd answered: “Presente! Presente en la lucha!” (Present! Present in the Struggle!) She continued to summon, one by one, the other local protagonists whose portrait were carried by the activists, and then moved to (make) present “all the compañeras who were
kidnapped, assassinated, and tortured during the time of the war, and the so called time of peace,” and the crowd responded: “Presente! Presente en la lucha!”

“The struggle against violence,” she continued, “the struggle against impunity, is permanent. But we are luchadoras (women-fighters). We are (the) women of (the) movement. We are women present. (“Presente en la lucha!” the crowd responded.) Impunity, racism, discrimination, secure the continuation of violence in the present. But we are here. Present and ready to fight it. … This is why we would like to close our march today with photos of our compañeras who marched for years, with historical photos, of historic marches, of students, peasants, Indigenous women, and syndicalists. Today we are part of this history. Today it is us. Yesterday it was our grandmothers and our mothers. Today it is us, and tomorrow it’ll be our daughters and our sons. The struggle continues, compañeras, the struggle continues. And we are present. (“Presente en la lucha!” responded the crowd) Thank you compañeras, thank you. We continue forward, because we are part of a movement, because we come together. Each one is doing something in her community, home, organization. And all of us together, are doing our share.” To conclude, she called: por la vida de las mujeres (for the life of women), and crowd answered: ni una muerte más! (not even one more death!)

Presenting local protagonists in the improvised plaza, particularly in such a militant fashion, Morán emphasized the women’s (movement’s) legacy of social struggle spanning back to the Internal Armed Conflict. Namely, she highlighted the day’s premise: connecting violence against women perpetrated by non/state actors, and by doing that, politicizing all forms of violence against women. Bringing together aspects of racism and discrimination, she reflected an intersectional view of violence; a sense that is further emphasized as she mentioned the ways in which individual/organizational contributions to the struggle come together to a joint agenda. Contrary to impunity and state weakness, she portrayed the women’s movement as an on-going, potent entity, deeply rooted in the past, contemporary present, with a future trajectory. It is a movement in a continuous struggle.

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112 Morán is using “present” (Originally hacemos presente) in relation to display, but also in a temporal sense-bringing something from the past into the present. The practice of presente is common in other Latin American struggles, and is used mostly to summon individuals who are no longer among the living. It does only call for their corporeal presence, but to the legacies they left behind: intellectual, organizational, and so on. Interestingly, in Guatemala this practice is also used in relation to individuals and organizations that attend the event, which goes beyond bringing back the dead – I feel that it communicates that being alive and in the street is an act of challenge that also speaks to the legacy of the guerilla.
Figure 8: Sandra Moran’s closing speech.

The National Palace (left) and the Metropolitan Cathedral (right) in the background. Moran’s T-shirt (below) reads: “I’m free!”
1. Supreme Court of Justice and the Human Rights Plaza.
2. The Guatemalan Congress.
3. The Metropolitan Cathedral.
4. The National Palace.
5. The Constitutional Plaza (East side of Plaza Mayor).
6. Centenario Park (West side of Plaza Mayor).
7. Portal del Comercio.

Schedule:
6:00am-Tierra Viva’s office.
8:00am-Leave TV (after breakfast).
8:30am-Human Right Plaza (meet & greet).
9:00am-Human Right Plaza (set up).
9:30am-Human Right Plaza (first performance).
10:00am-Moving (Ninth Ave.).
11:00am-Congresses (set up= second performance).
11:30am-Moving (Ninth Ave.).
12:00pm-National Palace (set up+ third performance).
12:30pm-constitutional Plaza (closing gathering).
1:00pm-Youth-run activity.

Figure 9: March Route and Schedule
This closing gathering of the march offers a panoramic view of the ways in which women’s organizations involved in the campaign to stop violence against women portray their struggle. Joining together legacies of local and regional social struggles, Indigenous imagery and transnational human rights terminology, women activists publically gather and assume a citizen status to make political demands of the Guatemalan state and society.

Following this portrayal of the movement, in this chapter I explore the ways in which this movement came to be, i.e. the process I earlier termed: From left to rights. I begin by exploring the legacies of violence Guatemalan women were subjected to; their destructive and reproductive nature. I then claim that these forms of violence had a productive nature, and highlight the ways in which they generate the feminist and women’s movement in Guatemala. Finally, I explore how state agents and women’s organizations negotiate the adoption and implementation of these, now international norms. I claim that as women assume a rights-worthy subjectivity, they are better positioned to generate the implementation of legislation, policies, and institutions in favor of women’s rights, i.e. an alteration of the public sphere.

_Guatemalans' State(s) of Violence: An Introduction to Violence and Struggles_

“Feminism is a pacifist ideology,” said Dr. Ana Silvia Monzón, a leading Guatemalan feminist scholar and activist. For me, it was an unexpected statement. On the one hand, I could not but agree, on the other, while not invoking violence, feminism, especially in Guatemala, is closely related to (women’s experiences of) violence. Essentially, the women’s movement in Guatemala was created in response to particular socio-cultural structures of power and local meaning of gender that legitimate, justify, and even motivate violence against women.
In a culture of patriarchy and deep inequalities, Guatemalan women, especially poor and Indigenous, occupy an inferior position in society and suffer gender-related discrimination and exclusion. In a society where the majority of the population is Indigenous and poor, the majority of women are subjected to a triple oppression (Nelson 1999:67). This political devaluation, on both individual and societal levels, is structurally reproduced through social norms and legislation, and further maintained through violence exercised against women (Svendsen 2007:9-13). This violence targets women’s personhood, dignity, and sense of worth and value. Lacking the socio-political means to resist, women become more susceptible to different forms of violence, and violence against individual women and women as a social group, becomes further naturalized and invisible.

This form of naturalization of violence against women was constructed over more than five centuries; its origins trace back to colonization, when a new (mixed-)race was created through the rape of Indigenous women, who were later oppressed socially and economically by the colonial order. The Guatemalan independent state (1821) granted political rights to literate, propertied, men of European descent. The 1945 constitution extended citizenship to all men but only to literate women. The 1965 constitution extended suffrage rights to illiterate women, yet their vote was still optional and public until the 1985 constitution established universal citizenship (UNDP 2006:11). Article 4 of the 1985

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113 The structure of power we witness today relies on political and legal mechanisms developed since the Spanish conquest. Some pillars of this structure were probably in place in pre-conquests society, and facilitated its dominancy through colonial and independence periods. However, its current justifications rely directly on colonial policies and division of power.

114 Historically Guatemala had the lowest rates of literacy in Latin America, when women, especially Indigenous, were specifically deprived of education. Hence, the 1945 constitution failed to grant political status to most Guatemalan women.

115 For a short time, following the promulgation of a (second) Federation of Central America (between June 1921 and January 1922) women (literate married/widowed women above 21 years and unmarried propertied women older than 25 years with a primary education) were allowed to vote. These conditions limited women
constitution established equality between wo/men, yet different laws, policies and practices maintained women’s inferior legal, political and socioeconomic status.\textsuperscript{116}

For instance, until 1998, the Guatemalan Civil Code reinforced stereotypical gender roles and legally codified inequality in the marital relationship.\textsuperscript{117} Such legislation maintained women’s economic inferiority and limited access to education, which further prevented them from challenging their socio-political inferior position within the Guatemalan society.\textsuperscript{118} Many Guatemalans are unaware that these changes were made, and some discriminatory provisions in relation to marriage and divorce, as well as inheritance, property, and labor, especially in the rural areas, are still in force.\textsuperscript{119} Women’s devalued voters to a minority, and defined women suffrages as ‘voluntarily’ (for men it was obligatory). As the republic dispersed soon thereafter, the right stayed “on paper” (Monzón 2011).\textsuperscript{116}

Guatemala’s legal system is Civil-Law based; with the constitution at the apex of the legal system. Political changes in the course of the 20th century led to the promulgation of several constitutions. The constitution in effect today was promulgated in 1985, with the transition to civil government.\textsuperscript{117} The Code provided: (1) the husband had the duty to protect and support his wife, while she had the right and duty to care for and raise minor children and oversee domestic tasks; (2) the husband could legally object to his wife working outside the home; (3) the husband alone was the legal representative of the married couple, as well as the sole administrator of the household financial resources and the family’s assets; and (4) the father was the sole legal representative of his children and the administrator of their assets even when parents had joint custody (Musalo et al. 2010:192).

Women’s poverty (general and extreme) is higher than men’s within all categories: urban women are poorer than urban men, rural women are poorer than rural, and a similar pattern is kept with Non/Indigenous wo/men (INE 2008:17-20). An important indicator in relation to women’s poverty is their high percentage in informal occupation sector, usually indicating unskilled labor. In 2004 78\% of Indigenous women (vs. 76\% men) and 71\% Non-Indigenous women (vs. 60\% men) were occupied in the informal sector. Interestingly, while in the Indigenous sector this trend was decreased (in 1998 91\% of Indigenous women and 83\% of Indigenous men were employed in the informal sector), it was increased in the non-Indigenous sector (in 1998 61\% of women and 55\% of men were employed in the informal sector) (UNDP 2006:30). Additionally, in a society in which much of the economy still revolves around agriculture, in 2005 women have access to 16\% of the land while men enjoy access to the remaining 84\% (INE 2011). In regards to women’s education, the latest census (INE 2002 cited in INE 2011) indicates that women make 63.12\% of the county’s illiterates (while men make 36.88\%), out of which 32.02\% are Maya women (Maya men 17.85\%), 30.69\% are Ladina women (18.76\% Ladino men), with similar pattern among Garifuna, Xinca and others (INE 2011:24).

According to Carmen Lopez de Caseres (Convergencia) and Alitza Naves (Tierra Viva), especially in the rural areas, man are still considered the legal owners of the family’s land, husbands are paid their wives’ wages, families do not invest in girls’ education or extend them inheritance as the benefiter will be the husband.\textsuperscript{119}
status impact greatly their access to health services, which together with lack of sexual education and lack of access to family planning methods, results in high mortality levels.120

The Guatemalan Criminal Code further reproduced women’s devaluation and vulnerability. Until 2005 it allowed a man to escape prosecution for rape if he married the survivor, even in cases of girls as young as twelve. Until 2009, acts of sexual violence were considered “private crimes” permitting the perpetrator to be pardoned upon the women's agreement; marital rape was not criminalized. Although officially changed, many of these provisions remain in practice.121 Furthermore, the Criminal Code (Article 176) still criminalizes sexual intercourse with a minor only if the girl is proven to be “honest.”122

Moreover, women, as a group, experience an additional level of socio-political violence when state legislation enforces religious and cultural norms through which women’s bodies are servile, disciplined, and controlled.123 Article 3 of the 1985 constitution, “Right of Life,” establishes that the state guarantees and protects all human lives since its conception, as well as integrity and security of the person. Namely, before the state guarantees equality between wo/men in Article 4, it legally denies (all) women control over their own bodies. While women’s location within Guatemalan society shapes different life experiences, such legislation emphasizes the inferior and oppressed position of women as social category. This naturalized gender inequality reflects and reproduces a lack of respect for women in general, as well as for the value of a woman's life.

120 For instance, according to UNFPA (2013), maternal mortality in Guatemala rates fourth in Latin America, 99% of it, preventable. According to INE (2011) the majority (71%) are ingenious women, with minimal education (48% with no education, 40% with primary school education).
122 Until the reform in the 2009 Criminal Code, women had to prove their “honesty” to denounce rape.
123 The colonial legacy of Hispanic and Roman Catholic institutions, together with the neoliberal economic powers and the Pentecostal Church continue to exert their power. Both churches continuously meddle with issues pertaining to women; opposing the Platform for Equal Rights for Women presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995 and they have has continued to try to dismantle the gains made in the fields of reproductive rights, civil liberties, and education (Taylor and Costantino 2003:6, 22).
Deep-rooted lack of respect and value for women’s life is blatantly manifested in times of generalized violence. In Guatemala such a display presented itself during the Internal Armed Conflict that Guatemala endured between 1960 and 1996. At the peak of the conflict (1978-1982), the conservative military regime targeted rural, traditional, mostly Indigenous communities, in which women’s place was typically limited to the private sphere. While the majority of casualties were men, the military also exercised widespread sexual violence as a war strategy, mostly directed towards rural Maya women. Violence against women, including sexual violence, was a strategy of the war. Namely, the Guatemalan Army trained its members in the use of sexual violence against women, including acts of mass public rapes, gang rapes in detention centers, mutilation of female sexual organs, and publicly exposing mutilated female bodies or those with signs of rape (CEH 2000, ECAP–UNAMG 2009, Nolin & Shankar 2000, REMHI 1999). Urban ladina women were also subjected to sexual violence, mostly as part of “interrogations” (Chinchilla 1998). Although there were various evaluations of the dimensions of killing that took place, the extent of sexual violence is still buried under layers of shame, self-blame, and fear.

In addition to the traumatic experience of sexual violence, women survivors were often widowed, and had to learn new skills to support their families. Furthermore, many women had to step into the political sphere to fill the void of missing men in representing their communities. Women worked in the family’s milpa, but were less involved with community-level politics. As the conflict intensified more women got involved, in various capacities, with political life, from Catholic based organizations and peasant unions to the Guerilla (Carrillo and Chinchilla 2010:140-141).

In Fear as a way of life, Linda Green, who closely worked with women who survived this time of war, mentions rape as part of strategy of violence a few times, but not as part of her ethnography. In a personal conversation she explained that people chose not to talk about rape with her, and while “there were signs,” she respected their decision. According to Green, some of the women chose to keep the events unspoken in order to protect themselves from being stigmatized by the community and ostracize by their families. Further, she indicated that in a society that does not criminalize marital rape, with high incest rate, there is a high probability that some of these women were not even aware to the fact that rape is a crime (Personal communication, June 2013). It is also important to recognize that while sexual abuse is devastating, many of these women had additional, more urgent concerns, such as loss of loved ones and source of income. The immediate need to physically maintain oneself and her dependents led many women to suppress these experiences of violence.
their community and in their search for missing relatives, mostly husbands and children. As part of their efforts they formed several civil organizations such as CONAVIGUA, the National Coordinator of Guatemalan Widows, and GAM, Group for Mutual Support, a mixed gender group made up of relatives of the disappeared, with significant women leadership and membership. Like in other Latin American right-wing dictatorships, these women, previously unfamiliar with the political sphere, were able to organize in order to claim missing family members.\footnote{Women who stepped forward and became vocal in searching for their missing relatives were themselves targeted by the state. For example: Maria del Rosario Godoy, the founder of GAM was assassinated in 1985.}

While some communities were able to stay in their villages, other communities were forced out of their villages. Some sought refuge in the mountains, creating the Comunidades de Población en Resistencia (CPR, communities of population in resistance), others were forced into exile, mostly to Mexico. The majority ended up in refugee camps, where they received assistance from UN agencies. Many of these agencies offered women’s economic empowerment and leadership programs. Consequently, women developed varied economic initiatives, helped to support their families, and gained a more influential position in their households and communities. They also started their own organizations, such as Mamá Maquín,\footnote{The organization name commemorates Mama Maquin (Adelina Caal), a Maya-Q’eqchi women murdered in 1978 for her organizing work in relation to land rights (see Grandin 2004:133, Sanford 2001:20-22).} Madre Tierra (Mother Earth), and Ixmucané (the Mayan grandmother goddess) that informed their demands for women’s empowerment and greater equality, including the radical demand for peasant women’s right to land ownership (Blue 2005, Hernández in Carrillo and Chinchilla 2010:145, Manz 1987).\footnote{While Indigenous women had strong support in refugee camps, upon returning to Guatemala in 1993 and in the years to follow they encountered more conservative and hostile environment, often rejected by local male leaders with a much less progressive mind-set compared to what they got used to (Blue 2005, Carrillo and Chinchilla 2010:150-151).}
In the urban area women’s participation in political life started earlier, yet they mostly participated as individuals rather than as a collective (Monzón 2001), and lacked an explicit gender consciousness (Carillo and Chinchilla 2010:140). During the months preceding the 1944 revolution, women delivered messages, distributed flyers, organized and participated in rallies. In one such demonstration, Maria Chinchilla, a well-known teacher, was assassinated (Monzón 2011:151). Some of Chinchilla’s compañeras were involved in the nationalist struggles during 1944-54, and had to exile following the 1954 CIA-backed coup. Their legacy, claims Monzón (2011:159), continued to inspire new generations of women who years later took up their ancestors’ legacy.

Inspiration, though, was not enough to undermine the local socially constructed gender roles. Yet, times of political and economic crises, like the Guatemalan Internal Armed Conflict, facilitated (mostly urban, educated) women’s participation in left-oriented social justice movements. By the mid-1980s, many Guatemalan women were active in a wide variety of mixed gender organizations, responding to political and economic conditions, all of which subordinated gender concerns to class or ethnicity (Berger 2006:20, 22, 27). Students like Rogelia Cruz, writers like Alaída Foppa, journalists like Irma Flaquer, lawyers like Yolanda Urizar, who became involved in students’ and labor unions or publically

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129 According to Monzón women’s participation in the anticolonial struggle of the late 18th and early 19th centuries and in the Liberal-Conservative conflict in the early part of the 20th century (2001:5-8). Both Monzón (2001:16-19) and Chinchilla (1998) recover some of the neglected history of women’s participation in the 1944 overthrow of Ubico and in building a new democratic society during the ten years of spring (1944-54).

130 Chinchilla is commemorated through Guatemala’s teacher’s day, June 25, the date she was killed (see Ramirez Rodriguez 2009), as well as the Instituto de la Mujer María Chinchilla (Maria Chinchilla Women’s Institute). Tragically, its director, and union leader, Dinora Pérez, was assassinated in 1991. Her death led to founding Red NoVi (the network for no violence against women).

131 Feminists ideas and struggles were seen by many in the left movement as a “secondary conflict,” one that will be resolved when the revolution was achieved, and a common critique was that dedicating time to “women’s issues” is detracting from the “real conflict”(Chinchilla 1998:7-8).
express their critique, were soon disappeared and silenced.\textsuperscript{132} Women activists suffered similar political abuses to those inflicted on men, yet most of them experienced a particular form of abuse based on their gender (Bunch 1995:12), and others were targeted as women related to specific men.\textsuperscript{133}

As some of these—mostly, but not exclusively—urban middle class women political activists were directly targeted by the state, some of their compañeras fled the country. While in exile in neighboring countries, like Mexico and Costa Rica, as well as throughout Latin America, Europe, and North America, they became involved with left wing circles where they were introduced to feminist thought and activism.\textsuperscript{134} One such influence was the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist \textit{Encuentros}, especially the one in Taxco, Mexico (1987) that played a fundamental role in their feminist awakening.\textsuperscript{135} The feminist agenda, they

\textsuperscript{132} Rogelia Cruz, Guatemalan left wing activist and former beauty pageant, was kidnapped in 1967 and found dead in 1968. Alaida Foppa, a well-known writer was kidnapped and disappeared in 1980 (see Salinas 2002). Irma Flaquer a psychologist and reporter known for her vicious critiques against the Guatemalan government; was kidnapped and disappeared in 1980 (see \textit{Proyecto impunidad}). Yolanda Urizar, a well-known layer who worked for the National Workers’ Union, was kidnapped and disappeared in 1983, while crossing the border back to Guatemala after years of exile. Her husband and son were killed in a mysterious car accident a few years earlier and her daughter was arrested, tortured and exiled (see Anderson 1988:44). The pattern was maintained in what Morán termed “so-called-times-of peace:” Mayra Gutierrez, University lecturer and women’s rights activist disappeared in 2000 (see Amnesty international).

\textsuperscript{133} For instance, student activist Rogelia Cruz, was mostly targeted as the girlfriend of Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) leader “Nayito” (Wilkinson 2004:227-228). Her tortured, mutilated, gang-raped body was found naked under a bridge. Cruz is commemorated as the emblem of la Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas (UNAMG), and by name through the women’s students’ movement “Rogelia Cruz,” Colectivo Rogelia Cruz, Plaza Rogelia Cruz in the national university, and so on.

\textsuperscript{134} In interviews I conducted, Guatemalan activists explain that Mexico and Costa Rica which did not struggle with an internal conflict like other Central American states, were able to develop feminist aspect as part of their social critique. In a paper delivered in May 2012, Montserrat Sagot, a leading Costa Rican scholar claimed that Costarican feminism relies on Guatemalan feminists. In a follow up personal conversation she explained that it was Guatemalan women’s participation in the generalized struggle that inspired feminist activism and scholarship in Costa Rica (personal communication, May 2012).

\textsuperscript{135} The first Latin America and Caribbean Feminist \textit{Encuentro} took place (Bogota, 1981) while many Guatemalan women were literally struggling for their lives and those of their families and communities. Carillo & Chinchilla (2010:144) claim that only six years later, at the fourth \textit{Encuentro} in Taxco, Mexico, Guatemalan delegation was able to participate in a hemispheric feminist gathering in a significant way. In a personal communication (May 2013), Norma Chinchilla, a North American scholar, who participated in the fourth \textit{encuentro}, explained that this was a founding moment for the Guatemalan Feminist movement, as it fundamentally impacted individual women’s consciousness, and motivate the foundation of veteran feminist organizations such as Tierra Viva and GGM.
explain, helped them critique the mixed gender left-wing organized struggle they were part of. Consequently, whilst the conflict-related violence reshaped the course of these women’s lives, the different experiences opened paths for women’s greater political participation that continued and thrived through the peace negotiation period.

The Peace negotiation process took place between 1985, marked by the return of civil government and the promulgation of a new constitution, and 1996, marked by the signing of the Peace Accords and general elections. The negotiations enabled the return of many exiled activists, who upon returning brought feminist ideology, a wealth of organizing experience, access to international funding and support and many other lessons gained from working in unions, political parties, and revolutionary groups. The returning women were essential in the creation of the first Guatemalan feminist groups such as Grupo Gualtemateco de Mujeres (GGM) (1988), which pioneered programs of psychological support and initiating anti violence activities; Tierra Viva (1988), which focused of demands for sexual and reproductive rights, ending violence, and political advocacy; and La Red de No Violencia Contra La Mujer (Red NoVi, Network for No Violence Against Women) (1991), which focused on political advocacy, urging the state generate laws, public policies, and social services needed to reduce violence. Many of them took an active part in the peace and reconciliation process, adding new angles to the negotiations. For instance, the first (out of

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136 Established in 1991, after the assassination of union leader, political activist, and director of the Instituto de la Mujer María Chinchilla (María Chinchilla Women’s Institute), Dinora Pérez. It incorporates 13 local women’s organizations and also serves to link Guatemalan activists to other regional and international networks that work to develop public consciousness about and organize resistance to violence against women. (Also see Cabrera 2009:135-139).
two) Guatemalan truth and reconciliation report (REHMI, 1999) was the first report of this kind to include a specific chapter about women's situations during the war.\textsuperscript{137}

The peace negotiation period presented a shift in the political map. Four decades of state oppression had worn the traditional social movement, while the Peace Process enabled and even called for greater political participation. This openness was embraced by two new political actors: Indigenous and women’s right movements.\textsuperscript{138} Individuals of both groups, who previously participated in a generalized social struggle, used the Peace Accords to frame questions of identity politics and demanded (full) political inclusion using human rights discourse.

One such process was the creation of Sector Mujer (women’s sector) in 1994 to represent women in the peace negotiation between the government and the URNG. The newly adopted ideology of inclusive political participation generated the need to create a forum through which different sectors of civil society could support the Peace Accords. This new forum, the Assembly of Civil Society (ASC), was composed of almost all sectors of civil society including workers, peasants, students, businesspeople, indigenous people, and was originally based on the assumption that women’s needs and demands would be included as part of the other social groups’. However, as women began to emerge as political actors, a coalition of women’s organization struggled for women to be included as one of the founding sectors of the ASC.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} De la violencia a la afirmación de las mujeres (Vol 1, chap 5). Was written by the returning exile Yolanda Aguilar (together with Pilar Yoldi and Claudia Estrada), the daughter of Yolanda Uritzar mentioned above, and a leading figure in the movement (see Stoltz Chinchilla 1998:351-386).


\textsuperscript{139} A collaboration between Convergencia Cívica Política de Mujeres (Women’s Civic Political Convergence), GGM, Tierra Viva, Coordinadora por el desarrollo integral de la mujer, familiares de detenidos y desaparecidos de Guatemala, and Coincidence de Mujeres.
The coalition formed Sector de Mujer, which included twenty two women’s organizations, some working exclusively with women and others interested in promoting women’s issues within mixed-gender organizations, and five independent women. Sector initially represented well the diversity of Guatemalan society: Indigenous women, ladinas, middle class, working class, religious, academic, feminists and non-feminists. The collaboration among these diverse groups of women who lacked mutual trust, a common agenda, or experience in working together was not easy. However, they were able to articulate and make joint demands and add some of them into the final agreement.

Simultaneously, Sector insisted that the negotiators recognize women not only as wives and mothers, or wartime widows, displaced and victims of sexual violence, but also as workers, peasants, heads of families, Indigenous persons and citizens. The negotiators’ attempts to address and recognize ethnic diversity were not always successful and at times resulted in further disempowering of Indigenous women (Berger 2006: 44-5). However, Sector’s work put gender identity politics on the map for many in Guatemala for the first time and secured a place for gender in the final peace accords signed in December 1996 (Berger 2006:34-35). Overall, including women as a sector with specific interests and direct representation was a milestone in the history of women and democracy in Guatemala and in Peace Accords in the world (Carrillo and Chinchilla 2010:147).

Further, as returning exile and feminist activist Yolanda Aguilar explains, the peace process suggested the end of the conflict and the improving economic situation allow

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140 Initially including a separate women’s voice in the peace negotiation was question within and outside the ASC. From left to right it was deemed foreign; the right questioned the relevancy of the movement to “Guatemalan culture,” and the left argued that gender issues might divide the left at a critical historical moment (Berger 2006:35).
struggling for more than basic survival. These conditions encouraged local and returning activists to start advancing not only ideas of human rights, but also women’s rights. The new discourse invited questions about the social struggle they formally participated in, their limited access to high ranks, and sexual abuses by the revolutionary movement’s leaders. Such disillusionment, together with a new growing sense of political subjectivity, motivated activists to shift their efforts to addressing women-specific issues.

A prominent example of such transition has been presented by Norma Cruz, a former activist of the Guatemalan Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and probably the most recognized Guatemalan women’s rights activist. In our conversation (June 2010), as well as in many media interviews Norma Cruz explained that she joined the guerilla “to demand a better life for the society of the time.” She spent several years as a political exile in Nicaragua, and upon returning worked with internally displaced refugees. In 1999 she discovered that her second husband, Arnoldo Noriega, the former commander of The Guatemalan Revolutionary Union, sexually abused her daughter. In that moment, Norma explained, considering Guatemala’s patriarchal culture, she understood it was time to address a new struggle. From her own living room, with a group of friends, Cruz started the organization Fundación Sobrevivientes (Survivors’ Foundation) to fight impunity and help survivors of sexual and domestic violence as well as family members of murdered women. In the new neoliberal era and its requirement for minimization of social services, as well as rising levels of violence, a growing need for such civil society organizations soon became apparent.

141 Personal communication, May 2010.
142 Arnoldo Noriega was convicted for sexual abuse, spent four years in jail, and later became a political assistant for the President.
While the Peace Accords represented the need for national reconciliation and the hope for a better, peaceful future for Guatemalan society,\textsuperscript{143} this period of “peace” has been heavily marked by rising levels of general violence. Once again, the lack of respect and value for women’s life has been blatantly manifested in times of growing generalized violence. Although violence against both men and women in Guatemala has increased since the beginning of the millennium, the murders of women are distinct for their rapid increase as well as for their misogynistic nature.\textsuperscript{144} Graphically abused, often mutilated women's bodies are frequently found in public spaces; some also display derogatory and sexual messages inscribed – sometimes even scarred – on these women’s intimate parts. As the crimes are rarely investigated, it is hard to determine the individual circumstances in which these acts of violence were committed. However, most scholars and activists working on the topic emphasize the Internal Armed Conflict as a historical key component, together with gangs and organized crime activity, and social cleansing.\textsuperscript{145}

These public displays of violence send a clear message that the streets or any other public place are not a safe space for women, and keep Guatemalan women, their family members, and the general public in a state of alert and terror (Trujillo Morales 2010:132). These demonstrations of terror encourage women to minimize their public participation, insinuating that the so-called “traditional” gender roles of submissive femininity will protect

\textsuperscript{143} The peace accords made sweeping social, economic and political promises. At the same time neoconservative technocrats and international financial institutions were also actively involved in shaping the peace process, and their interests generally won over demands for truly substantial democratic and social justice reforms (Robinson 2000, 2003:113).


\textsuperscript{145} See CalDH (2005), Morales-Trujillo (2010), Musalo et al. (2010), Sanford (2008).
them in both the public and private spheres. In the interviews I conducted, a common theme was the notion that simply walking in the streets puts one in great, immediate danger.\textsuperscript{146} This is not to say that Guatemalan women do not walk in the street—nor that the private sphere is a safe space—but they don't do so confidently, or leisurely, as fear always accompanies them. Consequently, Guatemalan women of various social statuses and ethnic identities find ways to minimize their presence in what they consider a non-safe space.

The state’s response to this destructive situation of violence has been limited, and in general does not establish a notion that the state rejects this violence or values women's participation in public and political life, nor that it views women as valuable, full, rights-worthy citizens (Musalo et al. 2010). Although new legislation in favor of women's rights was passed and new mechanisms meant to facilitate these rights were established, most murder cases are not brought to justice, and murdered women themselves are frequently depicted, both by general society and the justice system, as responsible for their own deaths.\textsuperscript{147}

As I demonstrated in this section, views regarding women’s inferior place and value in Guatemalan society have shaped policies that reproduced and maintained women’s discrimination and exclusion, particularly affecting poor and Indigenous women. The devaluation of women’s lives has been further demonstrated in different waves of violence the country endured, as women became susceptible not only to political and structural

\textsuperscript{146} See more about the street as a site of danger and contestation in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{147} In 2010, out of the registered 15,373 official complaints concerning violence against women, only 218 ended with a sentence, i.e. 1.42\% were resolved (Tierra Viva 2011). In relation to murder cases (nation-wide, in relation to killings of both wo/men), less than two percent of these cases have been brought to justice (Musalo et al. 2010:2).
violence, but also to additional particular experiences of physical, sexual, domestic and political violence.

At the same time, various layers of violence experienced by women, while a reflection of Guatemalan women’s devalued political status, opened ways for women’s greater political participation and the creation of women as a political identity. Violence, for instance, forced many rural and Indigenous women, suddenly refugees and/or heads of households, to expand their economic and political participation, taking a greater role in economic support and political representation of their families and communities. Exiled activists were introduced to and adopted feminist ideology and practices to critique both the social movement they were part of, and the social situation they lived in. The high levels of conflict-time violence led to international pressures that resulted in policy shifts in regards to political participation which led to the creation of Sector de Mujer and the passing of new legislation in favor of women’s rights.

In the post conflict era, the reality of widespread violence, and its gendered dimension, rearticulate women’s struggle for social justice, in relation to women's rights. The supportive relationships with transnational networks Guatemalan women derived from and relied on during the conflict and the peace process, were further developed in the post conflict period and helped to articulate the struggles to end contemporary violence against women in relation to the transnational and regional women's rights movement.

In the next section, following Friedman (2009) I look at the ways in which newly established feminist ideas, now part of international human rights discourse—as discussed in the introduction—are adopted into the national legislation in Guatemala, and the ways in
which this newly formed political entity—women’s organizations—negotiate the implementation of these policies.

**Women in Action, State (in)Actions**

Women’s ascribed position within Guatemalan society has been the central cause for the violence they endure and an apparatus for the raise of the feminist movement. These views and norms (socio-cultural and legal), challenged during the Internal Armed Conflict, were further undermined during the Guatemalan national restructuring project (starting the mid-1980s). The process heavily depended on international support and required the Guatemalan administration to establish a sense of legitimacy amongst possible donors and supporters worldwide. That time period correlated with the main impetus of the age of women’s rights discourse; hence the international and regional community began to embrace gender concerns, and public and private donors directly pressured to include women’s issues and initiatives of governmental agendas. Pressured by the international community, the necessities of the neoliberal economy and women’s groups, the Guatemalan administration assumed a public agenda of gender equity and began to rethink public policy and institutionally address women’s rights (Berger 2006:42-43).

In an attempt to demonstrate its commitment to women’s rights, Guatemala signed and ratified several Women’s Human Rights related conventions, such as CEDAW and the Convention of Belém do Pará. Signing and ratifying these conventions meant Guatemala was now officially committed to incorporate these norms into the national legislation and to create institutions, mechanisms and legislation to promote, develop, and protect women's rights in the country. The Peace Accords of 1996 included a few sections in which the state undertakes to promote and guarantee women's rights and political participation in accordance
with international legislation in favor of women’s rights.\textsuperscript{148} International pressures helped to pass further legislation in favor of women’s rights in the Guatemalan legal system. These shifts in attitudes towards women and their primary conversion into state-policies began a new era of relationships between Guatemalan women and the state.

Paradoxically, access to foreign aid was not dependent only on establishing legitimacy in relation to human rights, but also in adhering to neoliberal policies that encouraged states to minimize social services. Hence the state was expected to demonstrate its commitment to human (and women’s) rights, while minimizing social services. Internationally funded (and often trained) NGOs were able to step in and provide needed services for women—running a domestic violence shelter, providing legal services, forming women’s cooperatives, providing health care, doing literacy education and capacity training. The movement soon expanded, and became more professionalized. By the mid-1990s, the state came to depend on their services (Berger 2006: 32-33). The contradictory demands of the neoliberal order were temporarily resolved, as the state was able to extend more services by “contracting” internationally funded and trained women organizations.

Many women activists believe, however, that the NGOization increased fragmentation, duplication, and competition for scarce recourses, resulting in a lack of long term, coherent goals.\textsuperscript{149} According to Carrillo and Chinchilla, many of the critics believe that increasing NGOization weakened the most political aspects of the feminist movement in favor of institutionalization of the movement (2010:148-149). Another important critique

\textsuperscript{148} See The Accord on Socio-Economic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation (May 1996), and The Accord on Strengthening of Civilian Power and the Role of The Armed Forces (September 1996).

\textsuperscript{149} For instance, Hilda Morales Trujillo compared the situation to a group of individuals traveling to the same location in separated cars, instead of racting a microbus, both spending excessive funds and missing the opportunity to exchange ideas (Personal communication, May 2010). Giovana Lemos (GGM), on the other hand, claimed that the abundance of organizations is needed in order to meet women’s growing needs. It is not the movement that duplicates efforts, she claimed, but the government, that created competing state institutions (personal communication, June 2010).
voiced by many activists was that such institutionalization relieved the state from its commitment to its citizens.\textsuperscript{150} At the same time, their actions were multilayered and were not limited to serving the state but to advancing their own agendas through the state. Like many other movements described by Sonia Alvarez (2009:177-178) even at the height of the boom, they maintained their feminist roots, continued to produce and disseminate feminist knowledge, and overall sustained their “movement work.”

Internal debate aside, the growing dependency on women’s organizations together with the political opening I discussed earlier, motivated the movement’s growth, encouraged women to participate in the political process, and opened a path for the expansion of the gender debate. An important development, claim Carrillo and Chinchilla, was that for the first time, the Guatemalan women’s movement, particularly its feminist current, no longer had a majority of members from the ladina mestiza or urban population or the upper and middle classes, as Indigenous women began to participate and create their own feminist organizations (2010:148-149).

Headed by Red NoVi and supported by international pressures, women’s groups lobbied the state to comply with its commitment to the Convention of Belém do Pará; mainly for a law that would criminalize all-forms-of-violence-against-women.\textsuperscript{151} The limited support they gathered within the Congress, was not sufficient to pass such a law, and instead, the Ley Para Prevenir, Sancionar y Erradicar La Violencia Intrafamiliar (the Law to Prevent, Sanction, and Eradicate Interfamilial Violence—The VIF Law) was passed in 1996.

\textsuperscript{150} A common critique voiced by activists affiliated with GGM, MPA, MuJER, RedNoVi, Sector Mujer, Tierra Viva.

\textsuperscript{151} As the premise of Belém do Pará is to end “all-forms-of-violence-against-women” I use this format through the text to emphasize the idea’s origin.
In the introduction to the new law, the legislators indicated that the law’s objective is to comply with 1) the state’s commitment to gender equality, 2) the ratification of CEDAW and the Convention of Belém do Pará, 3) the state’s recognition of domestic violence as a social problem derived from unequal gender relations, and 4) the state’s commitment to protect the family. Considering all the above, explained the legislators, there was a need to set legislative means that will diminish, and eventually eliminate, the socially harmful interfamilial violence, and contribute to the creation of families based on equality and respect. Hence, while stating a commitment to women’s human rights, the congress emphasized the need to protect the basic unit of the Guatemalan society: the (patriarchal heteronormative) family.

The law, then, goes to define interfamilial violence as a human rights violation, allows victims to denounce domestic abuse, and request security measures, such as ordering the accused aggressor to leave the common residence immediately, and have his/her weapons decommissioned. However, the law is confined to monitoring an abusive situation after it has already happened and does not extend to preventing the abuse or punishing the perpetrator. It is a gender-neutral law, and in the rare occasion that women are mentioned, they are listed with minors, elderly, and disabled people (Articles 2 and 13). The non-gendered language of the law underplays the gender aspect of violence in the family unit and does not take into account violence outside the family. Also, judges often condition sanctions with “reconciliation” or “mediation.” Namely, instead of ordering the accused aggressor to leave the common residence immediately, judges pressure women to “reconcile” with a

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152 The law does not address women specifically, and as such, it is used by abusive men to (falsely) denounce their (abused) partners (Giovana Lemus, Personal communication, June 2010)
violent, often armed, spouse, “for the good of the family.” By doing that, the justice system, privileges the patriarchal family unit over women’s right to life free from violence.

Moreover, the VIF law is a “special law;” one that stands on its own rather than amending the existing Civil or Criminal Codes. This status creates confusion in relation to how the law should be applied in situations where its provisions conflict with other laws.\(^{153}\)

Overall, then, the VIF law, like similar legislation in Latin America passed at that time period, does not address “all-forms-of-violence-against-women,” nor criminalize violence against women. Hence, it does not challenge gender hierarchies—in some ways it re-inscribes them—that the state itself recognizes as the root of such violence and does not fulfill the state’s commitment to the Convention of Belém do Pará (Friedman 2009: 363-4, 368).\(^{154}\)

Not satisfied with this law, Red NoVi continued to struggle to advance a more substantial reform in women's rights. The network organized conferences, marches, and protests around the International Day for the elimination of Violence Against Women, such as the one I open this chapter with. They insisted on the term “Violence Against Women,” and explained that violence is embedded in unequal power relations. While critiquing the law, Red NoVi and its members attempted to maximize its potential as a socio-legal instrument. They publicized the law, giving it a popular feminist interpretation (Berger 2006:48-49), and instructed, assisted, and encouraged women to use it to protect themselves from Interfamilial violence. Supported by international pressures, and growing numbers of

\(^{153}\) For instance, the security measures are often dismissed by Judges as non-constitutional, as they conflict with the right to carry weapons and property rights (Interview with Hilda Morales-Trujillo). For further discussion about the implications of the “special law” status see Musalo et al. (2010:194-5).

\(^{154}\) According to Elizabeth Friedman, this was a common practice in the first stages of applications all over Latin America. For national legislation to reflect the norms set by the convention, she explains, two requirements need to be met: a serious commitment to eradicating all forms of violence against women and that violence against women constitute a crime (2009:363).
Guatemalan citizens, they pressured the government to create an administrative body to oversee the implementation of the VIF law, and pass new legislation that would criminalize all-forms-of-violence-against-women.\textsuperscript{155}

On the institutionalization front, the government first responded with the formation of Secretaría Presidencial de la Mujer or SEPREM (the Presidential Women’s Secretariat) in 2000, designed to coordinate policies for women's advancement and promote compliance with Guatemala's domestic and international obligations regarding women's rights. This initiative, claims Berger (2006:55-57), was initially not supported by the women’s movement, which did not take part of its creation and questioned its dependency on the president. While its first director, Dr. Lili Caravantes, brought many feminist activists on board, others claimed that her position as a state bureaucrat was inevitably in conflict with her role as a women’s advocate.\textsuperscript{156} Overall, SEPREM was a new public space meant to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between the women’s movement and the government as well as (international) funding for women’s public programs. Its creation as a state initiative was, in itself, an important statement in support of women’s rights. At the same time, like other Guatemala governmental agencies, it was weakened by the volatility of Guatemalan politics and its dependency on international funding.\textsuperscript{157}

A year later, Red NoVi’s public advocacy generated an amendment to the VIF law, creating the Coordinadora Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia Intrafamiliar y en contra la Mujer (National Coordinator for the Prevention and Eradication of Interfamilial

\textsuperscript{155} For instance, the 2004 UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Yakin Ertürk, visited Guatemala to investigate the situation of women in the country and produced a report outlining her finding and specific recommendation Guatemalan state and the international community (Ertürk 2005).

\textsuperscript{156} Dr. Caravantes worked for many years with the Pan-American Health Organization and was nominated by Sector de Mujer, the only organization that did not boycott the process.

\textsuperscript{157} The director of such state institutions is appointed every four years by the newly elected president. Institutional policies and agendas promoted under one president will not necessarily be supported by the new president/director.
Violence and Violence against Women, CONAPREVI). Composed of representatives from the government and women’s organizations, CONAPREVI’s mandate was closer to the spirit of the Convention of Belém do Pará. RedNoVi saw it as a mechanism to recover the original feminist spirit of the law, by emphasizing violence in relation to gender power relations. Overall, CONAPREVI coordinates the work of all governmental agencies involved with interfamilial violence and violence against women; it creates public policies to reduce violence, trains government officials, provides legal assistance to survivors, and establishes a national information system on violence against women. While CONAPREVI, a new state-sponsored public space, plays an important role in (en)gendering and socializing the law, like SEPREM—and other state organizations, such as the Protectorate of Indigenous Women (Defensoria de la Mujer Indigena, DEMI, created 2001)—it is politically dependent, not sufficiently funded, and often relies on foreign support.

At the turn of the century, the women’s movement had additional partial success advancing three more laws. A loose coalition of members of Red NoVi and other organizations advocated for three years in order to pass the Ley de Dignificación y Promoción Integral de la Mujer (Law for Integral Women's Promotion and Dignity) (1999). The law addresses women directly and corresponds with the Guatemalan constitution and international legislation (CEDAW, the Convention of Belém do Pará, Beijing Platform for

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158 CONAPREVI also developed the Plan Nacional de Prevención y Erradicación de la Violencia Intrafamiliar y contra las Mujeres PLANOV 2004-2014 (National Plan for the Prevention of Violence within the Family). This ten-year plan establishes lines of actions for addressing violence within the family and against women, including research and statistical analyses of violence against women; prevention activities such as educational campaigns; providing, legal, psychological, and medical services to victims of violence; and strengthening of institutions that work in the area of gender-based violence prevention. Also see [http://ggm.org.gt/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/PLANOV2004-2014..pdf](http://ggm.org.gt/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/PLANOV2004-2014..pdf)

159 While the institute’s official budget is limited, the state never extend the full amount, which make it even more difficult to manage ongoing projects, or initiate new ones (Interview with former head of CONAPREVI, Hilda Morales-Trujillo).
Action). It denounces economic, political, and social discrimination against women as well as condemns private and public expressions of violence against women. It requires the state to act in favor of women’s participation in economic and political life and make sure that families, communities, and larger society provide women the opportunity to study and work. According to Berger, while the law calls for reordering of gender relations, it also continues to position the nuclear family as the nation’s core unit and starting point for gender construction, hence narrows the discussion about gender construction and the prospect of equality (2006:51).

Another important aspect of the law is positioning women’s interests in relation to the nation’s development project. Namely, the state facilitates women’s equal access to education, employment, and credit in order for them to become (neo)citizens. This notion was further addressed through the 2001 Ley de Desarrollo Social (Social Development Law). The law relies on basic rights mentioned in the Constitution (life, equality, protection of the family, education, health, work, social assistance), commitment to social development, and in relation to ratified international human rights legislation. Its main intention is to bring women into the state’s national economic development project. The law revisits some of the key points addressed in the VIF and Promotion laws with a developmental emphasis. The family is still presented as society’s basic unit, but the definition of family is extended to include

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160 For instance, the law amended articles 113,114 of the 1963 Civil Code according to which 1) husbands decided if their wives will have the right to work outside the household, 2) granted this work did not harm the interest and care of their children.
nonmarried (partners) and single parent households, which better represents the Guatemalan family and allows a wider conceptualization of gender relations.\textsuperscript{161}

In fact, the law was passed over heavy protest of the Catholic Church and other conservative forces who objected to the recognition of non-married couples and single-headed households as families, the supported use of family planning methods, and the mandated sex education in schools. As the law highlighted many of the issues the women’s movement advocated for, they naturally supported the law. For the state, claims Berger (2006:53), the law was an apparatus meant to generate development through population control and integrating women into the labor force in new ways. The law was used by women’s organizations to highlight the empowering notion of reproductive health and family planning, and opened the way for the 2005 Ley de Acceso Universal y Equitativo de Servicios de Planificación Familiar (Law for Universal and Equal Access to Family Planning Methods). It was also used to promote women’s political participation in state development policies, yet some critics wondered if women’s needs would influence development policies or be instead reinterpreted through development.\textsuperscript{162}

These new legal and public spaces extended both new mechanisms to advance Guatemalan women’s status and a sense of accomplishment and reassurance that social change is feasible. However, the legislation did not address all-forms-of-violence-against-women or condemn it as crime, and the supporting organizations were not sufficiently funded or politically independent, hence the state still did not meet the requirement set by Belém do

\textsuperscript{161} For instance, the law now allows single mothers, whose children were not recognized by their biological fathers, to pass their children both of their last names, thus avoiding the social stigma attached to non-recognized children.
\textsuperscript{162} Women’s participation in state development policies took place mostly through involvement in the Consejos de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural (councils on Urban and Rural Development) commissioned by the law.
Pará. A group of legal specialists believed that a broader transformation was needed, and developed a proposal for a general reform of the Criminal Code (Morales-Trujillo et al 2002). While they aimed to redress the spirit of the women’s right discourse into the national legislation, they also grappled with the fundamental question of defining “women” for the purpose of the law. Should all Guatemalan women, Indigenous and ladinas, be treated the same? Can equity and diversity be simultaneously addressed? And how to avoid positioning all women as victims?\footnote{Berger notes that the Acuerdo Sobre Identidad y Derechos de Los Pueblos Indígenas (Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Communities) “recognizes the special vulnerability and defenselessness of the Indigenous women.” Hence while it advances ideas of multiculturalism, it labels Indigenous women as “vulnerable” and “defenseless,” and thus they are perceived as passive and immobile (2006:45). As I mentioned earlier, the “neutral” VIF law mentions women in relation to socially disempowered individuals, which continues the earlier pattern of portraying women as vulnerable and dependent.}

In order to address these concerns and redress the feminist spirit of the newly adopted policies, local women’s organizations began to explore a range of advocacy tactics and popular strategies. In 2001, in accordance with activists all over Latin America, large numbers of Guatemalan women, together with growing numbers of men, joined the continent-wide campaign against systematic gender violence, and demanded justice, under the slogan “Por la Vida de las Mujeres, Ni una Muerte Más” (Prieto-Carrón et al 2007:34).\footnote{The campaign was motivated by regional women’s organizations, frustrated with their states’ inactions in relation to women-killing (Prieto-Carrón et al 2007:34).} Guatemalan women’s groups networked with Latin American women’s-rights activists, and advanced new concept(s) derived from ongoing theoretical discussions within the
movement.\textsuperscript{165} Using the concept \textit{femi(ni)cide} helped to communicate the extent of the problem outside the country, and mobilize external pressures on the state.\textsuperscript{166}

As the movement became more involved and invested in the international and regional campaigns, the value of women’s human rights discourse became more apparent, and was soon adopted, at least officially, as a new gospel. As such, it called for self-transformation, a creation of new perspective of the world, assuming a new moral code and a vision of one’s place in this world, forming communities, and eventually practicing and teaching. Namely, a holistic agenda was created to socially implement the women’s human rights ideology. While many of the women affiliated with the women’s movement were introduced to the women’s rights discourse in its early stages (and some participated in its development) it took a few years for them to actually practice it. Like other doctrines adopted in the area, though, it is practiced with a level of “syncretism.”

The activity year was organized around a new liturgical calendar. Like the Roman Catholic calendar, organized around saints’ days, the activity year features special, “commemorative” and “emblematic” days, weaving together international commemorative days, Guatemalan national days (Independence Day, Revolution Day), Christian dates (\textit{semana santa, navidad}), as well as the Mayan days (Tzolkin). The commemoration of the more prominent international dates—International Women’s Day and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women—is stretched over a period of time. March is

\textsuperscript{165} The regional and national discussions on femicide led to the creation of some new related concepts, discussed at length by Fregoso and Bejarano (2010), and specifically in relation to Guatemala by Godoy-Paiz (2012), Morales-Trujillo (2010), and Musalo et al. (2010). Once the law against femicide was passed (2008) the term gained additional meaning based on its legal definition.

\textsuperscript{166} Interview with Evelyn Morales, May 2010.
celebrated as women’s month, and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is followed by 16 Days of Activism.\textsuperscript{167}

The year’s perceptions vary somewhat between the different groups, reflecting and marking the ideological divisions between them (just like they vary between different churches). Issues such as citizenship, sexuality, reproductive rights, land rights, and ethnicity are prioritized differently by women’s groups—“holy-days” for some groups may go unnoticed (or even rejected) by other groups though the participants and the audience of these events are often members of other organizations, who participate to express their solidarity with other individuals and organizations.\textsuperscript{168}

The new perception(s) of the year calls for the creation of new scripts and rituals meant to popularize the symbolic content of these days. CEDAW, The Convention of Belém do Pará, The Vienna Declaration, Cairo’s and Beijing’s Platforms of action all became ritual texts to be read and used as theological themes for preaching. Commemorative rituals included marches, political performances, music festivals, memorial ceremonies, public debates, art exhibits, all of which using language and symbols pertaining the international dates they commemorate. The different visions and practices lead, at times, to conflict and

\textsuperscript{167} The resemblance of these two seasons to the Christian Lent and Advent is further emphasized by their placement on the calendar.

\textsuperscript{168} May 28, Día de Acción Mundial a Favor de la Salud de las Mujeres (International Day of Action for Women's Health) and September 8, Día de la Ciudadanía de las Mujeres, (Woman) Citizen Day, are endorsed by most organizations. More selectively celebrated are days addressing homophobia and lesbophobia (May 17 Día Internacional contra la homofobia y lesbofobia), sexual workers (June 5 Día internacional de las trabajadoras sexuales), sexist education (June 21 Día de la educación no sexista), midwives (July 13 Día especial de las comadronas), the Indigenous woman (Sep 5 Día internacional de la mujer indígena), abortion (September 28 Día de la despenalización del aborto), HIV/AIDS (December 1 Día Mundial de la Lucha contra el Sida).
competition amongst women’s organization and between women’s organization and the better funded governmental agencies and international organizations.\textsuperscript{169}

In order to minimize conflict and maximize their political power as a group, the movement creates organizing committees, such as the coordinadora 25 de noviembre mentioned above. The coordinadora’s endeavor to politicize one strong experience that, as Crenshaw claims, has proved valuable in changing state policies and societal views in relation to violence against women (1991:1241). At the same time, they do not negate the fact that women’s life experience, including experiences of violence, vary in accordance to their various axes of identity. For example, the coordinadora 25 de noviembre organizes three large scale public events: Festival for Women’s Life (on the Sunday before the 25), Vigilia—a memorial ceremony for the women who died that year (on the night of the 24), and the march on the 25.\textsuperscript{170} Additional events, commemorating specific experiences of violence, such as the sexual violence endured by Indigenous women during the Internal Armed Conflict, or HIV/AIDS are organized by women’s organization through the 16 Days of Activism. New rituals and practices emerge every activity year, some complement, others in conflict with, the now established practices, some become a tradition, and others are not repeated.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{169} Such crucial moment took place in November 2009, when the Sistema de las Naciones Unidas (SNU, The United Nations System) organized a commemorative concert at the same location and date the traditional march takes place; resulting in frustration and resentment on the side of women’s groups, who felt it was an act of violence and oppression (Elvira Tierra Viva, January 2010, personal communication). The following year, representatives of SNU made various efforts to reconcile and collaborate with the coordinadora, yet were treated with careful suspicion. The state agencies regularly organize parallel events to the ones organized by the coordinadora, but those are mostly (though not always) oriented to a different audience.\textsuperscript{170} Again, the emphasis on the night of the 24 and the day of the 25 is interesting in relation to Christian traditions.\textsuperscript{171} A yearly youth information festival is organized by CICAM in the different departments; Festival Regional por la Memoria (regional festival for memory) is organized by actoras de cambio, in a different department each year. On the other hand, cinema en la calle (street cinema), organized (once) in 2010 by actoras de cambio, took place in parallel to other events, reflected the divisions within the movement between the newer, more radical organizations and the more established veteran organizations.
The above mentioned public events were complemented and by-products of other social initiatives, introduced by women’s groups in an effort to include a wider range of women’s experiences of violence and strength. The first feminist radio program *voces de mujeres* (women’s voices) was founded in 1993. Aiming to “celebrate life, recover memory, and make history,” (as stated on their facebook page) a collective of women of different professions, identities, and life experiences struggled to maintain an alternative communication space, one that celebrates women’s lives and contribution to society. The first monthly feminist newspaper, *La Cuerda*, was founded in 1998, offering “a feminist look at reality.” With contributions of women from different ethnic groups, exploring praxis and theory, ethics and body, *La Cuerda* emphasizes the connection between the creation of feminist political subjectivity and the strengthening of democracy in post conflict Guatemala.172

As women’s political subjectivity became more vocal and noticeable, reinforced by regional and international actors, the movement endeavors to channel this growing support into a further adjustments of the Guatemalan legal framework. A collaborative effort of women’s organizations and state agencies yielded a new proposal for an “outline law” that will criminalize all-forms-of-violence-against-women (Ley Marco). The political atmosphere was now different than in 1996. The pressure to have more women in electoral politics began to bear fruits in the elections of 2007 and more women than ever (some of whom were Indigenous) were elected to Congress.173 Moreover, the newly elected President, Álvaro

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172 These efforts were further strengthen by (gender) capacity training of urban and rural women and youth.
173 1999:10%, 2003:9%, 2007:13%, 2012:12%. The 2007 election was further marked as exceptional as the feminist Walda Barrios was selected candidate for vice president for the URNG-MAIZ Party.
Colon, representing the new political left, and more so, the First Lady, Sandra Torres, sought to support initiatives promoting women’s rights.\textsuperscript{174}

While Ley Marco was not approved, it did attract the attention of the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, that initiated a process in which a new proposal that included many of the provisions suggested in Ley Marco. The proposal developed at the end of this long, joint process was approved by the Guatemalan Congress, and the Ley Contra el Femicidio y Otras Formas de Violencia Contra La Mujer (The Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence against Women – the Femicide Law) was passed on April 9, 2008.\textsuperscript{175}

The approved version is seen as a great symbolic victory for the women’s groups who for 14 years advocated for state legislation that complies with the convention of Belém do Pará. Unlike previous attempts, the new law finally criminalized violence against women. Further, by addressing various forms of violence against women (physical, emotional, sexual and economic), the law alters women’s place in society. The vowed shift in gender norms, state accountability for women’s lives and integrity, as well as women’s organizations’ place in implementing the law, necessitates reordering of gender relations and the social order.\textsuperscript{176}

As such, the law invokes societal and judicial oppositions. Its “special law” status, i.e., the

\textsuperscript{174} Friedman discuss similar political shifts towards the new political left in Latin America, represented by former presidents Michele Bachelet (Chile) and Luis Ignacio “Lula” de Silva (Brazil), as central to passing local legislation complying with the spirit of Belém do Pará (2009:367-366). Such political shift, though, was in itself part of the women’s movement political advocacy.

\textsuperscript{175} Many non/governmental actors participated in the process, each offer their own version for the evolution of the law. Here I suggest a version that I hope will be accepted by most of them.

\textsuperscript{176} Within the movement there is a great debate about the framing of the law around the term femicide, introduced in the later version of the law.
fact that it did not amend the existing Civil or Criminal Codes, allows its opponents to challenge its provisions that conflict with other laws and its mere existence.\footnote{For further discussion about the special law status, critiques and resistance to the law see Musalo et al. 2010:199-201.}

The legal reform that started with the VIF law was further developed in 2009, with the passing of Ley Contra La Violencia Sexual, Explotación y Trata de Personas (the Law against Sexual Violence, Exploitation, and Trafficking). The law further developed the criminalization of violence against women and sexual violence, and most importantly, amended the Criminal Code.\footnote{For instance, the Law Against Femicide, being gender specific, did not criminalize acts of rape committed against young boys or transsexual individuals. The 2009 changes in the Criminal Code criminalized rape of all genders.} While long anticipated, the amendments to the criminal code are seen by some as secondary to the normative impact of a specific law, i.e. the Femicide law. Disregarding rivalry within and beyond the movement, by the end of the first decade of the new millennium, women’s rights in Guatemala have never been as secured, yet, their right to live free of violence still seemed far of reach.\footnote{According to INACIF, 2009 was the most deadly year for Guatemalan women (see FN 142).}

**Back to (the) Present(e)**

About two and a half years after the law against femicide passed, I had the privilege, together with a man affiliated with Tierra Viva, to lead the November 25 march as it entered Plaza Mayor on its way to the National Palace. The leading truck behind us, we carried a sign by Red NoVi stating: “We demand funding and political commitment in order to comply with the Law Against Femicide and other Forms of Violence Against Women” and placed it at the entrance to the National Palace. This symbolic act of serving our demands to the executive branch was followed by dozens of other signs/demands.
At the time I did not pay much attention to the sign I was asked to carry, as the simple fact that I was invited to do so was a great privilege. Yet, as this sign was chosen to lead the march, is it important to look at it more closely. Its title: *Exigimos*, “we demand” asserts a strong sense of entitlement—true citizens’ entitlement to make demands of the state. The demands themselves point to the movement’s current struggle: urging the government to take the next step and work towards implementing the norms in favor of women’s rights Guatemala adopted. The demands are clear and practical—funding and political commitment. By making such demands, the movement points to the state’s superficial practice in complying with its inter/national commitments, ones that cannot be fully addressed without funding and political will.

Interestingly, the leading statement does not address the vague, hard to measure demand to end violence against women, but calls to fulfill the state’s commitment to the women’s movement, the Guatemalan nation, and the international community. By emphasizing the national Law Against Femicide, they assert their political position as citizens that have the right and obligation to make demands of the state. Occupying the nation’s political space and making demands of the state highlights the transition many of these activists went through, from revolutionaries into reformers, working with the state, rather than trying to undermine it. At the same time, manifesting the Law Against Femicide at the head of the campaign reflects the movement’s revolutionary potential, to not only revise women’s political position, but the Guatemalan social order.
Figure 10: Entering Plaza Mayor, the National Palace on the left (above), and the “We Demand” sign at the entrance of the Palace (below).
Figure 11: Gathering for the third political act at the entrance to the National Palace, by the metal plaque that marks kilometer 0, Guatemala’s geographic center. (The “We Demand” sign in the center).
Figure 12: Back to the improvised plaza: We demand!

In this chapter, following Sandra Morán, I presented the shift in Guatemalan women’s activism I termed from left to rights. By making present the ways in which various forms of violence experienced by women of diverse locations within Guatemalan society, I demonstrated violence’s destructive, reproductive, as well as productive potency. I then made present the ways in which the newly established women subjectivity, given the timely trans/national platform of neoliberal policies and women human rights ideology, rearticulate its demands for a better future using the potent women’s rights discourse. At the same time, I visited some of these discourses’ inherent tensions, such as collapsing categories of women and its portrayal of all women as victims or potential victims, and discussed different avenues through which women’s groups attempt to expand the discourse to include a wider range of women’s experiences of violence and strength.

The November 25 march is such a moment, when a coordinated, agreed, unified message—a call to the Guatemalan state to end the naturalized violence against women—is carried through the streets of Guatemala City, accompanied by additional, more particular messages—“different desires, different pleasures,” “no more mining”—put together by the participating and non-participating organizations representing women of diverse locations within the Guatemalan society. Further, their messages go beyond their experiences of violence, assert their position as civil agents, ones who make demands of the state, and understand themselves in relation to local and regional legacies of sociopolitical struggles.

The Exigimos sign, placed by the entrance to the National Palace, was later held together with dozens of others in the third political act that day, in which the demands carried through the city were brought to the executive branch. From there, like the other signs, as
well as the giant effigy of Indigenous woman representing local and transnational traditions, it was taken to the closing gathering at the improvised plaza. There, for the first time that day, women activists and their allies faced themselves and the space of (the) movement, the space of hope they embody. In the next chapter I discuss the transformations that take place in this space of movement and hope, ones that start with the self, while being supported by collective(s).
Chapter 3: Alcémonos / Let Us Rise Up

A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth glancing at. Oscar Wilde.

When activists paused on the day of their march, the space they created by stopping in their improvised plaza within a Plaza paradoxically enables us to see their movement, to observe the space created by the physical flow, from one location to another, of people, funds, ideas, and material objects produced when these flows come together. Their bodies shaped in a square, the space between them resonated with the range of individual and shared meanings shaped though their various social interactions, what I earlier termed “the space of (the) movement.”

The messages and slogans they carried reflected the variety of discourses shaping the campaign: the transnational women human rights discourse, legacies of regional activism, national concerns together with the movement accomplishments in promoting new political, public and juridical spaces in the past decades. The fact that some of the T-shirts and signs carried by activists featured the names and logos of the international organizations funding the production of these materials highlighted not only an ideological meeting point, but also the central role played by international actors—UN agencies, state donors—in financially enabling the ongoing activities in Guatemala. The human bodies carrying these messages—rural, urban, and even foreigner scholars and activists such as myself—further emphasized the transnational flows that constitute this movement.

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180 Women-activists often stated this list of new spaces as an accomplishment. By doing so, they refer to political and public in their narrow definition. The term political space refers to governmental/state spaces; and the term public space refers to and civil/social spaces.

181 For Instance: Actionaid, Christian Aid, Diakonia, ICW Global, Oxfam Canada, Union Europea, UN Women.
These messages, posted on the corporeal space of individuals’ bodies, and carried through a series of locations in the city, were envisioned, and often produced, in an additional location: the organizations’ offices. In these secure, women-based, and hyper-political spaces, activists work to translate relatively new transnational ideologies adopted into the national legislation in Guatemala, to fit their local realities. These materials are then moved through the city, distributed to non-participants, and so further extending the space of the movement. Space is a medium through which “social relations are made or broken” (Miller 2013:286), and so it is through spatial interactions that we can come to understand social relations (Hagerstrand 1970; Lefebvre 1974 [1991 translation]; Soja 1980; Giddens 1984). In this chapter I illustrate how the movements that this space embodies and generates transcend spaces. By doing so, I claim, they alter the nature of these spaces and the individual subjectivities articulated through them (Pratt 2004:136).

The endeavor to create a better reality for Guatemalan women requires a complex, multilayered approach. In its center lays a dual, dialectical transformation: transforming individual women’s subjectivities, turning them into women-beings, while transforming the spaces in which they live to allow and encourage these new subjectivities. These two processes are in constant dialogue with each other, yet for analytical purposes I choose to discuss them separately. In chapter 2, I examine the processes that facilitated the opening of new judicial, political, and public spaces, and in this chapter I focus on transforming social spaces, public and corporal, as a practice of self-transformation.

I open this chapter by introducing the idea of transformation and hope, as discussed in the literature and by Guatemalan activists. Next I discuss the social importance of public political spaces and the process in which one such space, the Constitutional Plaza, is
physically and symbolically transformed, from within. Following I discuss two images, the butterfly and the witch, used by women’s organizations and individual activists to imagine a better world and modes of self-transformation, ones that clarify their current and aspired locations within Guatemalan society. My last example concerns a more concrete, grounded call for such transformation, a poem titled: Alcémonos (Let us rise up).

All four examples demonstrate first, how activists’ self-transformation is both method and outcome of transforming spaces; as well transforming spaces is both method and outcome of activists’ self-transformation. Second, hope’s essential role in any act of transformation, as it allows people to dream and enact new and better ways of being in the world. Finally I discuss how the two discourses, women’s human rights language and utopian transformations, complement each other on pursuing better living realities for women in Guatemala.

As I claim in the introduction, women’s human rights discourse, a powerful apparatus that globally facilitated the advancement of women’s rights, is a unifying agenda that collapses categories of women and its emphasis on violence against women portrays all women as victims or potential victims. Going back to Yolanda Aguilar’s statement (opening this account) that it is time to find new ways to connect with this world, to disengage from the discourse of victims, and to recover happiness and hope, I choose to emphasize images that I claim represent such alternative modes to connect with oneself and the world. Further, the images I explore here illustrate the diversity (and similarities) of women’s experiences and needs, and position them as the protagonists of their own lives. Discussing these images through activists’ voices is a further exercise of disengaging from a unifying notion and illustrating individuals’ views beyond organizational affiliations.
Spaces of Transformation and Hope
The rigidity of social spaces is regularly naturalized and maintained through structural and symbolic violence, i.e., a process in which individuals absorb the hierarchal social structures in which they exist into their “mental structures,” and so come to blame themselves for their own suffering whilst the role of society remains hidden (Bourdieu et al, 2000). According to Anthony Giddens (1981), it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents that alternately reproduces or challenges established social structures. That is, while a social structure is composed of traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things, these can be changed when people, or “knowledgeable actors,” start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently. Challenge, though, often provokes additional modes of violence used to push individuals and groups back to what is perceived as “their natural place” within the sociopolitical order (Feldman 1991, Russell 2001, Sluka 2000, Taussig 1987). Terror, the fear that violence may occur, guarantees that social spaces are not trespassed (Taussig 1984). Terror, thus, is a contracting mechanism that limits movement and expansion.

By contrast, hope is the mechanism for imagining transformation (Muñoz 2009:9). Although the idea of hope can be easily dismissed by contemporary cultural analysis, others insist that the ability to dream, to reject the here and now and believe in the possibility of another reality, is integral to change (2009:1). According to Bloch, utopia is “expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become” (Bloch, cited in Beauchesne & Santos 2011: 5), and functions as an impulse that makes the concretization of ideals possible. Hope can—and will—be disappointed, Bloch insists, but such disappointment needs to be risked if certain impasses are to be resisted (Muñoz 2001:9).
Following Bloch, Muñoz makes a critical distinction between abstract and concrete utopias: Abstract utopias are valued for their ability to “pose a critique function that fuels a critical and potentially transformative political imagination” (2009:3). While abstract utopias are untethered to any historical consciousness, concrete utopias are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential. Concrete utopias are the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who dreams alone for the many. Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope. Building on this, Muñoz suggests that activism is a “temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity” (2009:16), and that “through various social actions we can create, in the present…pictures of a new vision of the future, [and] thus facilitate gaining a new vista on the world” (2009:50).

In a reality in which envisioning change is an act of resistance, hope, I argue, is the key mechanism to explain the social transformation attempted by Guatemala’s women’s rights campaign. For this purpose, I suggest, “hope” should not be viewed as a noun, that is, as something to be possessed or given to another, but as a verb, something to be exercised and practiced. The women activists at the center of my research endeavor to transform from within the social structures that have shaped not only the ways in which they have learned to view themselves and world around them, but also their access to resources. Altering the spaces within which they operate is a great challenge, one that, just as in my previous discussion of human rights, can be illustrated by Lorde’s question, “Can the master’s tools … dismantle the master’s house?” How can women working within, and with the tools of, a conservative patriarchal order find the means to transform the social order around them? “Hope” begins to provide us with an answer.
Following Muñoz’s approach to hope as a critical methodology, I asked women activists to imagine a better world for women in Guatemala and what that would look like:

“If you had the power to change the reality for Guatemalan women, what would you change?” Ana Silvia Monzón (Voces de Mujeres /FLACSO) responded:

The logic is that everything needs to be changed, we need to change everything… For instance, take the Millennium Development Goals. You can’t talk about poverty without women’s status. You can’t talk or do anything about poverty, education, health, without considering the difference between men and women. It’s all related. We see that women are better in taking advantage of educational opportunities, but we don’t see a change in the economic or political spheres. So we need to change everything.

Soon I discovered that changing “everything” was a common view. Sonia Acabal (RedNoVi) stated:

A better world? That’s a big question Tal, that’s a big question. Lots of things. You have to change everything. We need to change the whole structure of this country. That the inequality between men and women will no longer exist. This way of thinking, feeling, that women should be dominated, has to be changed. So we have to change the whole system, only in a system that will look at women in a different way, as equals, not as submissive, we can change. But this is a big dream, Tal, very big.

In sum, it is generally agreed that improving women’s everyday reality, the premise of the campaign discussed in this doctoral thesis, requires a fundamental overhaul of the current Guatemalan social structure. But how, I asked, can this new reality, imagined by activists in their conversations and publications as what can only be described as a dream or utopia, ever be concretized? Here as well, the responses reflected a shared view: “Every
social change starts with a self-transformation, a change in our own bodies and minds, in the way we live our lives and raise our children” (Leonor Gonzalez, CICAM). This “self-transformation” was further elaborated by several activists:

The first thing is to change ourselves. I can’t help support someone when I’m struggling with aggression… it is hard to do, and doesn’t happen overnight, it’s a long process. It took me ten years. A very long process that the international community does not support—they only support short term projects. But I can’t convince another person about something I’m not convinced about myself. The most important thing is to undress ourselves from all these experiences, not to continue with it. (Marìa Isabel Grijalva, CODEFEM).

A real change will start with ourselves and in our family—where will I stand if my son will rape his partner? Prevention in your own family is the first step. (Evelyn Morales, Tierra Viva)

We need to start by comprehending that we have the right to have rights, and that the first right is to live life free of violence. (Sandra Morán, Sector Mujer).

We have to find new ways to connect with this world and this country; we have to disengage from this discourse of victims. We need to talk about violence, but not as victims, as political subjects and survivors. We need to recover happiness and hope. (Yolanda Aguilar, Centro Q’anil)

Self-transformation thus is a complex, multilayered, long process. It includes a radical shift in the way an activist understands herself and her place in the world (a subject of rights, political subject). Once she begins to understand her prospect in the world as a woman-being, she begins the long process of becoming one (disengaging from acts and discourses of victimization). A woman being promotes life free of violence for all women, by setting new standards in her own family and reaching out to other women. A woman being insists on her right to connect to the world through happiness and hope.

Central mechanisms employed to facilitate such transformation are generally known as procesos de formación (formation, or educational processes), and are often complemented and various miseries: A world where we can be found through diversity, a world where solidarity and justice are a constant, a world in which we enrich each other in different ways; A liberating and libertarian world.”
with *procesos de sanación* (healing processes). *Formar*, explains Nelson (1999:5), is the work of “creating activists,” of making or creating a new identification that activists learn to understand themselves through. Becoming informed (of one’s rights), is at the center of a formation process, and crucial for any further social or self-transformation.\(^{185}\) Healing processes are longer, often use alternative, corporal practices (art, dance, massage therapy) and are meant to create the supportive conditions for (informed) women to look for answers within their own bodies, intellect and spirituality. Interestingly, as indicated by Maria Isabel, while essential for a full transformation, it is harder to obtain funds for such procedures.\(^{186}\)

While self-transformation was usually the first step suggested by activists, others discussed the need to transform the public spaces in which they live to allow and encourage these new subjectivities. Looking beyond the self, and considering the movement’s great accomplishments in the past two decades, promoting the creation of new juridical and public spaces corresponding with women’s human rights, they point to state’s responsibility to guarantee the implementation of the new spaces. At the same time, they continue to transform social spaces, public and corporal, as a practice of self-transformation.

**Public Transformation**

As I explain above, transforming spaces is a method and outcome of transforming social relations (Giddens 1981:27). The complexity of such process derives from individuals’ need to escape their most fundamental and ingrained understandings of self and the world, and break down the structures of power maintaining those understandings. Abstract utopias thus greatly challenge established systems by proposing alternative possibilities. The shift to

\(^{185}\) See more about *procesos de formacion* in chapter 5.

\(^{186}\) This, as I indicated in chapter 1, is a core problem with relying on international funding, usually limited to short term projects, not prolong processes.
concrete utopias, is even more difficult, and relies, I claim, on a constant dialogue between the spaces (locations and corporal) in transformation. It is widely acknowledged that the articulation of identities and difference is performed through space (see, for example Pratt 2004:136). However, in order to better understand the process of identity articulation we need to bear in mind that these spaces are not fixed, but themselves are being transformed by social actors. Considering, then, that the transformation of space cannot occur without the prior transformation of the activists operating within it, I will open here with a discussion of the former, as one can argue that it is through transforming space that people articulate an altered identity (Pratt 2004).

Public space has different meanings in different societies and regions. Going back to the ancient Greek *polis* and the *agora*, public space (re)produced and (re)shaped political life. It was the site where civil participation took place, restricted to the privileged few possessing the rights of worthy citizens.\(^{187}\) Citizenship, in brief, was manifested through the public space (Smith and Low 2006:4), made political in its ability to manifest, maintain, naturalize, and legitimize hierarchies and the distribution of power. According to Habermas (2001: xi), the public sphere is the space between civil society and the state, and so represents an arena of social and political contest and struggle (Smith and Low 2006:12). On the one hand, the public sphere is inherently a political one, and so it is a space for the legitimization and the maintenance of power, which can be exclusionary. On the other, the public sphere is inherently a political one, and so it is where civil society and the state can meet and challenge one another. Together, this makes the public sphere a potential site for stasis and a potential site for change.

\(^{187}\) To the exclusion of women, slaves, and other “common” people.
Guatemalan women, in respect to their social location, experience different limitations in their full access to public spaces.\textsuperscript{188} As I discussed in chapter 2, Guatemalan women were granted full political participation rights only with the 1985 constitution, and until 1998 women’s ability to work outside of the household was legally subjected to their spouse’s approval.\textsuperscript{189} While most of the mechanisms formally limiting women’s access to public spaces were changed, many women’s access to the public sphere is \textit{de facto} limited. Factors such as ethnicity, locality, and sexual orientation impact women’s access to education and resources (land, inheritance), thus further limit certain women’s access to the public sphere. An Indigenous, rural woman for example, with a limited access to education is less likely to secure a position in a governmental agency in the Capital.

Further, in the Post-Conflict era, the public sphere is experienced as a violent space, and the bodies of wo/men become “spaces marked by violence” (Nelson 1999:36). However, the violent acts women experience are often gendered (Bunch 1995:12), and meant to discipline them through their body (Nadeau 1996:45). Women are often blamed for the violence enacted against them in public spaces, emphasising popular views that they stepped “out of their place.”\textsuperscript{190} As fear (of violence) is a powerful tool, such practices limit women’s participation in the public sphere. As individuals’ access to the public space is fundamental for their exercise of power in that space and ability to transform themselves (and the spaces they operate within). Such limited access, \textit{de facto or de jure}, reflects and reproduces social hierarchies in Guatemala.

\textsuperscript{188} By full public access I mean not only the freedom of movement, but the freedom to part take in the political, economic, cultural activities that take place in the public sphere.
\textsuperscript{189} In practice, especially in the rural areas, sometimes they still do.
\textsuperscript{190} It is important to recognize that many women (though not only women, and not all women) experience violence not only in the public sphere, but also in the safety of their domestic sphere (Bunch 1990:490).
Building on these understandings, and the fact that public space in urban society is semiotically encoded (Low 1996:861), I would like to return now to the space of the movement and the space it temporarily occupies and transforms—Plaza Constitutional—the very same space that the Guatemalan state designated for civil society. The Plaza was first laid out and designed in 1778, two years after the city was founded, and was the first public space available to its inhabitants. Today, more than two centuries and several earthquakes after the Plaza was first laid out, not much remains of the original buildings. Yet, the Plaza still embodies a mixture of architectural ideologies—Mesoamerican and European, Colonial and Independent—typical of Central American cities that place governing and economic activities at the center of political and public life (Low 1996, Markman 1966, Richardson 1982).

Today, the north side of the Plaza is occupied by Palacio Nacional de la Cultura, the former headquarters of the President of Guatemala, and an important governmental symbol. The neoclassical building represents the fourth attempt to build a National Palace in that location, finally realized in 1943 by the Liberal dictator General Jorge Ubico, as one of his development projects (Levenson 2011:28). On the adjacent east side of the plaza stands the main church of Guatemala City, the Catedral Metropolitana de la Ciudad de Guatemala (Metropolitan Cathedral), a neoclassical building finished in 1815 (its towers completed in 1911).

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191 Guatemala City was established by royal decree in 1776, after Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, the former colonial capital, was severely damaged by an earthquake in 1773. It was the fourth attempt to establish the Spanish colonial capital of Guatemala. The first capital, Villa de Santiago de Guatemala, was founded on July 25, 1524 and was located near Iximché, the Kaqchikel capital city. On November 22, 1527, after several Kaqchikel uprisings against the Spaniards, their former allies, the capital moved to a new site in the Valley of Almolonga. On September 11, 1541 the city was flooded when the lagoon in the crater of the Agua Volcano collapsed due to heavy rains and earthquakes, and was moved to the Panchoy Valley. The old site is now known as Ciudad Vieja, “the old city.” The new(er) city, Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, served as the capital of Spanish colony of Guatemala for more than 200 years. A series of earthquakes in 1717, 1773, and 1774, caused great damaged to the city and the Spanish crown ordered the removal of the capital to a safer location, in the Ermita Valley. Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción (Guatemala City) was founded on January 2, 1776. Santiago de los Caballeros is now known as La Antigua Guatemala (ancient Guatemala).
Opposite from the Palace is the historic shopping arcade, “Portal del Comercio,” built in 1877 as a gesture to European sensibilities and upscale tastes, establishing an area for the elite to stroll (Veliz & O’Neill 2011:91). The last side is occupied by a garden park, Parque Centenario, commemorating the proclamation of Central American independence from Spain, occurring in the plaza in 1821. The latest addition to the plaza came in 1996, when a huge national flag was installed in the center of the plaza, in the Plaza de las Armas, originally intended as a military parade ground.  

The Plaza, the seat of Guatemalan power, embodies layers of violence and transformation: starting with the fundamental layers of colonial maintenance of the conquest, and the catholic Christianization, continuing with the liberal oppression of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and state terror during the armed conflict. This notion of state violence continues with the post-war crimes of impunity and inaction, together with neoliberal economic violence. Additional forms of violence are embodied by the Roman Catholic Church; while it played a role in ending (documenting) state terror, together with the Evangelical Church, the catholic church is the leading force that maintains conservative structures, limits changes in the ways families are viewed, and rejects reproduction rights including sex education and access to family planning methods.

In the middle of this public space, framed by buildings representing legacies of power and violence and with the national flag post as its center, another plaza was marked by a square of scattered grass. Resembling a Mayan altar, the temporary plaza was decorated with

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192 While the Plaza was laid out in 1778 as the center of the colonial capital, the current buildings were all (except the cathedral) products of independent Guatemala, a fact symbolized through the Neoclassical architecture (Markman 1966:190).
193 During my fieldwork a new project, “The urban renewal project” took place and brought further changes. Street vendors, who have occupied the plaza continuously for more than 230 years (Geller 1995, Veliz & O’Neill 2011), establishing the plaza as a public civil space were relocated. Sixth Ave, the street crossing the plaza is now too narrow for big trucks (used in big rallies) to go through.
flower petals, flower arrangements, candles, and burning incense. Small lilac figures of butterflies leaned on eight-flower vases that marked the square’s angles and sides. Four big archival pictures of women participating in demonstrations leaned against the flag post. The improvised plaza was framed by four lines of inward facing activists, their backs turned toward the monumental buildings of the Constitutional Plaza, holding the banners, signs and flags they had carried through the city all morning. Three sides of the improvised square were formed by individuals holding banners, denouncing various modes of violence and making demands for justice, resources, and accountability from the state. The fourth and north side of the improvised square consisted of activists holding signs denouncing contemporary violent killing of women as femicide, with such statements as: “I was not killed because I have male friends; I was killed for being a woman.”

As I mentioned earlier, threaded among those signs were a few large portraits of well-known local protagonists who had lost their lives in different stages of the prolonged struggle for social justice.

The portraits, echoing the struggle of the Argentinian Madres de Plaza del Mayo, brought back to the present various violent practices directed by the Guatemalan state against individuals, to terrorize and suppress potential challenges to the social order. Open, collective attempts to challenge the established social order have been violently suppressed, resulting in the death of activists such as Maria Chinchilla (1944) and Mama Maquin (1978). Others, who publically critiqued that social order, like Alaída Foppa and Irma Flaquer, were kidnapped and disappeared (1980). A similar practice of kidnapping and disappearance was exercised towards individuals who, like Yolanda Urizar (1983), worked to defend organized

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194 These signs, displaying a variety of justifications provided in trial verdicts of women’s violent killings (for being a sexual worker, for being a gang member, and so on) were made for use that morning in a political performance in front of the Supreme Court, that I discuss in chapter 6.
workers or, like Mayra Gutierrez (2000), worked to organize activists. The terrorizing impact of such acts of disappearance was enhanced by the violence displayed on recovered bodies of activists, such as Rojelia Cruz, whose tortured, mutilated, gang-raped body was found naked under a bridge in 1968.

The north side of the square displayed the exercise and experience of lethal violence, past and present against women in Guatemala. While such acts of violence were meant to provoke fear and terror, to suppress potential challenges of the sociopolitical order, I claim, following Muñoz (2009:50) that in this improvised plaza experiences of violence are now being used to offer another reading of events, and to imagine an alternative vision of the future. As evidence, while the Madres used portraits of the missing to materialize the violence enacted against them and to claim political space (Taylor 1997), the Guatemalan portraits served a different purpose. As Morán explained in her closing speech, these compañeras were made present in the improvised plaza not only because they were kidnapped, assassinated, and tortured, but also to reconnect the current activists to generations of compañeras who have struggled for social justice in Guatemala.\(^{195}\) Present activists, she stated, continue the struggle for a better future in the present, and their children will carry on this fight in the future.\(^{196}\) The emphasis, thus, is on the continuous social struggle, trespassing rigid social spaces, transcending to a better future.

Similarly, the signs explaining contemporary violent killing of women as femicide reject juridical justifications for these deaths that place the blame on the women themselves. Instead, they offer an alternative explanation: these women were killed for being women, the

\(^{195}\) Discussed in chapter 2.
\(^{196}\) Compañeras who survived such practices of terror and oppression, like Yolanda Aguilar and Yolanda Colon were commemorated in the book Nuestras utopias: Mujeres guatemaltecas del siglo XX (Our Utopias: Guatemalan Women of the XX Century) (Chinchilla 1998).
victims of misogynist and machismo ideology. A new reading of these court cases, one that acquits (dead, individual) women and places blame on social ideologies and practices, means confronting the root of a problem instead of its symptoms. As such, it is the first step toward addressing such violence, i.e., offering a different reading of the past that allows imagining an alternative vision of the future. Further, these new reading marks the beginning of a social transition, one in which people publicly reject the authoritative voice of the judicial system, and offer an alternative. An act that echoes some of the statement forming the other three sides of the improvised square: “We recovered our voice,” “We demand justice.”

The human frame of the improvised plaza thus challenged narratives of violence and terror, replacing them with ones pertaining to struggle and an imagined alternative future. The square itself, with its Mayan ceremonial features—scattered grass, flower petals, flower arrangements, candles, and burning incense—offered a rebuke to this urban monumental seat of power. A Mayan altar in the City’s square was not only a reminder of the area’s Indigenous past, but also made present the ongoing presence of the Indigenous population in the city, as part of the nation, and as part of its future. By organizing this plaza around the national flag, however, Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists alike claimed their place within the nation, asserting their rights as Guatemalan citizens. This position was further asserted through their T-shirts, banners, and huge truck decorations, claiming “I’m a citizen. I fight for women’s citizenship, from my territory: body and land.” As a citizen, the sites of their struggles for citizenship, to be both body and land. Situated in a bodied-framed land, the activists sent a clear message rejecting the fundamental assumptions of power constituting Guatemalan citizenship, and presenting an alternative vision.
The space of the movement, thus, temporarily transformed, from within, a space that embodies Guatemalan political power. Based on new readings of past and present events the movement suggests a new understanding of citizenship, one that not only incorporates women, but also revises its basic principle to include women’s needs and agenda (body and land). Such spatial transformation is the outcome and manifestation of activists’ processes of self-transformation, which I discuss in the next section.

*Mujeres al Aire*197
A key image through which this new citizenship is imagined, and which appeared on activist regalia as well as in the plaza itself, is the butterfly. Explaining the symbolism of the improvised plaza which she helped to arrange within her role at Sector Mujer, Isabella clarified:

It’s a symbolic act that we create every March 8 and November 25. I’m in charge of creating it. I put flowers, flower petals that represent us, the women. I put candles to commemorate the life of women who died in violence, to remember that there is always violence. Even while we come together and march, a *compañera* just made it to the hospital or morgue. A lot of messages, too, all kind of messages. And the butterflies. The butterflies are for the Mirabal sisters that struggled to be free, free of violence.

Here, Isabella chose to emphasize four of the themes communicated by the symbolic imagery of the improvised plaza—women, as represented by flowers; the ongoing violence perpetrated against women, as represented by the commemorative candles; the voices of women, as represented by the display of signs and banners; and struggle, as represented by the Mirabal Sisters, known by their code name “butterflies,” who struggled to be free of violence. It is implied, thus, that for Isabella, the sisters are not part of the present reality in Guatemala. At the same time, they are kept in an important space in the square. While November 25 commemorates the Mirabal sisters’ assassination, passionate statements such

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197 Women in the Air, a women’s group that produces radio programs, started in 2002.
as “Their struggle to be free, free of violence,” demonstrate that it is the essence of the sisters’ life which is deeply meaningful for Guatemalan activists. The horrors of their experiences of violence (torture, assassination) are not discussed; instead, the emphasis is on their struggle or their legacy as active actors. The presence of the Mirabal sisters’ butterflies in the square, therefore, illustrates a practice through which the past is re-read in the present in the service of a better future (Muñoz 2009:16).

Understood in this way, it is perhaps not surprising that the butterfly image is pervasive within Guatemala’s women’s rights movement. Soon after I began engaging with Guatemalan women’s organizations, I started to notice butterflies everywhere: on T-shirts, bags, flyers, publications, banners, office decorations, rally props. Considering I have always loved butterflies, it took me a while to understand that in this context they were being used as a political symbol, and not as an aesthetic preference. My fascination with the image grew as I began to directly and systematically inquire about it, and the ways in which particular activists related to it. In a public speech delivered in the 2011 vigilia (November 24), Sandra Morán, a founding member of Sector Mujer, explained the butterfly’s meaning in Sector’s agenda:

In Sector we recognize three great symbols in the butterfly: One, our ability to transform ourselves, raise our wings and be free. Two, our ability to come together, like the Mirabal sisters, and fight against this violence, and like all around the world we come together to fight. And three, our ability to join others fighting militarism and authoritarianism in this country.

The first quality of the butterfly, according to Morán, is its self-transformation, the very same practice mentioned earlier as essential for every social revolution. The purpose of this transformation, according to Morán, is individual freedom. In addition, she mentions the Mirabal sisters and their struggle against violence in relation to the collaborative nature of
this struggle – that is, that individual freedoms are gained by working together, Guatemalan women joining with each other and with women around the world, just as the Mirabal sisters came together in their fight. Finally, Morán points to one other practice vital toward ending violence, which is the struggle against militarism and authoritarianism in Guatemala. No efforts toward self-transformation, no community of support, will ever be enough to protect women and achieve the better world they envision if Guatemala as a whole does not become a safer, more just place.

Notably, Sector is not the only organization to use butterfly imagery, nor is its meaning limited to an expression of institutional goals or a rallying point for demonstrations. Instead, the butterfly takes on personal meaning and resonance for each woman involved in this movement. On my first conversation with Ana Silvia Monzón (Voices de Mujeres/FLASCO), I asked about the butterfly-shaped earrings she was wearing: “Oh… my Koreans…” She responded, and shared the history of this specific pair, purchased in Korea.

When I clarified that I would like to know more about the symbol itself, she noted:

Butterflies signify transformation, transformation from cocoon to butterfly. … There are many explanations. Each person can give you their version, but for me, the one I like best, is the transformation to feminism. Shifting to a better position for women, that affects all realms of life, the personal, political, and academic.

Later, just before her taxi driver dropped me off at my bus stop,198 she added:

Another thing I like about butterflies is that while they look very fragile, they are also very impressive and the ones that migrate, they are unexpectedly strong.

Ana Silvia thus offers yet another explanation of this self-transformation signified by the butterfly, that of a freedom attained through the advancement of women in Guatemala.

While most activists with whom I discussed the image of butterflies mentioned

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198 The interview started later than planned, and Ana Silvia insisted I cannot take the city-bus, and arranged that her taxi driver will drop me off at the bus to Antigua before taking her home. Part of our conversation, thus, took place in the car, and I took notes of it later that night. As this section discusses the aspiration for freedom, such arrangement illustrates a reality that lacks freedom of movement.
transformation and/or freedom as important qualities, activists’ visions of “transformation” and “freedom,” and they ways in which they interrelated this, were, as indicated by Ana Silvia, quite diverse.

We [organized women] change from cocoon to butterfly, change the way we think, from enclosed, suppressed cocoon to butterfly, with new colors. Every time we come out, we have new colors. It’s also about being delicate – gentle, soft, even fragile, but not submissive. (Maria Isabel Grijalva CODEFEM)

Karin Ramos (Mujeres en Resistencia) stated,

Personally it does not represent me, but I think it has to do with transformation from cocoon to butterfly. First you were trapped, you did what you were told to do, and then when the cocoon breaks you are no longer tied down, you can be whatever you want to be, you can fly where ever you want. You are free.

And Sonia Acabal (RedNoVI) explained:

Now that I’m part of the movement, when I see a butterfly, it makes me think about the movement. About the specific organizations and what they shared with me about these images. Butterflies symbolize transformation, the sense that you can change – yourself and the world around you. It’s the metamorphosis, a total change, from something immature, contracted, and segregated to a beautiful, proud butterfly. And that we are not the same, we are different from each other. We have different ways of being. And liberty, of course.

For Maria Isabel, the process of metamorphosis includes a change in an individual’s way of thinking and their physical expression. Karin emphasizes how different these two modes of being are, and how intense that transition is. Sonia adds the recognition that people can change themselves as well as the world around them, a powerful realization in and of itself. Interestingly, for Sonia, the cocoon is not only a marker of oppression, but also immaturity. It is nature’s own process, then, that women should grow and mature, should become proud, beautiful, and independent butterflies.
LET US RISE UP

Just as individual women relate in their own ways to the symbolism of butterflies, so, too, do organizations employ and adapt the common image, to communicate their institutional messages.

Figure 13: A Flock of Butterflies.
Figure 14: MuJER’s Butterfly.

MuJER’s butterfly has a face of a woman in one of the wings. It is related to a woman that is a prisoner and wants to be free. In general, it is also related to the beauty of the butterfly, that is compared to the beauty of women, but mostly a political symbol related to the sister Mirabal and the freedom we should have as women. It’s a symbol against oppression and silencing. It’s like a wish or...like utopia, hope. (Flor de Maria Peña, MuJER)

In Tierra Viva,

We created a butterfly for our May 28 campaign, the Day for World Action for Women’s Health. We drew a butterfly with a women’s body, a naked woman. We
wanted to talk about the body, that women will learn to know their bodies and that through nature they will connect to their bodies and will learn to care for it. With proper food and exercise, therapy, relaxation. That we will know our bodies and how to cure them. We used the butterfly wings because it represents freedom. The freedom to go wherever you want, to make decisions, do what you want. The butterfly is freedom to know your body and make the best decisions for yourself. (Alitza Naves, Tierra Viva)

Both MuJER and Tierra Viva placed a woman (face and body) in the center of a butterfly, expressing hope for a transformation: for MuJER, the transformation to a liberated women; for Tierra viva, the transformation of a woman’s presence in the world, connected to and protective of her body. Important, too, in both individual and institutional uses of the butterfly, is the imaginative, wishful quality it evokes, associating freedom with dreams of flying.

Butterflies are freedom for the women in this country, which is what we are looking for. Freedom to be, to think, of expression. Infinite colors, flying to the horizon. (Yolanda Aguilar, Centro Q’anil)

The butterfly is happiness, freedom. It’s related to the Mirabal sisters who died for freedom. It’s about flying high. And the colors, many colors, because we are all so different.” (Evelyn Morales, Tierra Viva)

The butterfly is the need for freedom, to fly, to go up, to escape from oppression. (Olga Alicia Paz, ecap).

Butterflies… I’m not connecting, but in Guatemala.. not in Guatemala, in Sector, the butterfly symbolizes freedom, diversity—diversity of women diversity of sexual orientations—and dreams, all of your dreams (Rosa Gallardo, Mujeres en Resistencia)

The butterfly “makes present” the Mirabal Sisters’ political struggle to end Trujillo’s dictatorship, but it also allows individual interpretations, such as happiness, strength and beauty. Such interpretations emphasize an additional quality of freedom activists aspire for: the freedom to be diverse and think differently. Overall, the butterfly is an important symbol because it taps into, and inspires, women’s ability to dream, to envision, individually and
collectively, pictures of alternative, utopian, future. In the present time, tells us Sonia Acabal, for many of its members, the butterfly is the face of the movement, representing diversity of individuals coming together to concretize their dreams for a just society.

**We Are Witches**
A similar utopian agenda was carefully laid out by the organization Tierra Viva on their 21st anniversary, in 2009. The event, a public celebration to which many members of the movement were invited, was titled *Aquelarre* (Witches' Sabbath), a ritual meeting of witches. Upon arrival, each participant received a happy small colorful witch riding on a broom, to which a rolled, page-long statement was attached. The document, titled “*Somos Brujas*” (We are Witches), began with a short statement describing their attributions as women, equating themselves with witches: “We are independent women, wise women, free women, we are witches.” Following, the text surveyed the history of wise, healing women who passed their knowledge and skills from generation to generation. This knowledge and practice threatened the Catholic Church, and so caused them to be demonized as witches, hunted, and burnt.

In its rallying call to women today, however, this document triumphantly declared the failure of the Church to destroy their strength:

Recognizing these women and identifying with them, on our 21st year of work as Tierra Viva, (we) affirm that witches were not destroyed, they still exist and are: Feminists, healers, midwives, homeopaths, counsellors, therapists, teachers, artists,

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199 The Witches’ Sabbath has been reclaimed by contemporary feminists in order to emphasize the gathering of women and their power in a group. They are also used to subvert earlier images of Witches’ Sabbaths, which were said to have placed the devil in the center of the gathering in order to emphasize the predominance of the male hierarchy (Wills 1995:149) – a practice that is not reproduced.

200 I did not attend the 2009 Aquelarre as it took place before I began my fieldwork, the following analysis is based on descriptions of it from several of my research participants. A second Aquelarre I did attend was organized in 2010 by MPA and is discussed in chapters 1 and 6.

201 See appendix 4. A significant part of the text was reproduced and redistributed during the 2010 Aquelarre.
writers, women lawyers, women doctors, intermediate, philosophers, lesbians, mothers, whores, young and not so young and thousands more ...

We are witches: we are those that continue to create and spread magic in various spaces from our needs, aspirations, expectations and utopias, transforming into protagonists of our own lives.

The magic, the power, they claim, was not lost, and is continuously reproduced by a new generation of strong women. It is self-generated, self-directed, i.e. meant to facilitate their needs and utopias, yet, generously shared with others. Further, as witches, they are:

Transforming ourselves into protagonists of our own lives through the appropriation of our bodies and the exercise of our sexuality and eroticism until the creation of the free, equitable society to which we aspire.

The appropriation of their bodies, mentioned often as an urgent need when we discussed the butterflies, is asserted here as the key for their self-transformation one that will enable them to create the just, utopian society they are wishing for. Similar to butterflies, the image of these witches is used to refer back to the power of women to take control of their bodies, integral to their self-transformation and so their ability to create the just, utopian society of which they dream. Following, they identify feminism as the mechanism they will continue to practice and spread in order to advance this utopian world:

Where there is no violence, injustice, discrimination and various miseries; A world where we can be found through diversity, a world where solidarity and justice are a constant, a world in which we enrich each other in different ways; A liberating and libertarian world.

Their concluding sentence, “Witch to witch, we wish that the magic of creativity and collaboration will continue to accompany us,” not only asserts the positive power they attribute to witches and the strength they draw from coming together, but also incorporates participants from many other organizations as “witches.” Since the *Aquelarre* relied on a contemporary, global and Latin American, feminist tradition that reclaimed witches, many of
Figure 15: A Party of Witches.

Tierra Viva’s colorful witch (left), the 2009 Aquellare’s T-shirt (right), and witches in Convergencia’s office (below).
the event participants already identify with the feminist witch.\textsuperscript{202} For other participants being called a witch could have been considered an offensive imposition. Yet, as the event was meant to contest the demonization of witches, asserts women’s power as derives from knowledge, creativity and collaboration; such an inclusive sentence, inviting non-Tierra Viva activists to participate in creative collaborations, was experienced as empowering.

While I entered the field after the Tierra Viva’s \textit{Aquelarre}, I believe it had an important role in generating local identification with global feminist reclamations of the witch. The text, the happy little colourful broom-riding witch, and T-shirts produced for the event were present in offices and were presented to me when I asked activists from various women’s groups about the symbol. Further, the emerging key themes, most, but not all, discussed in the \textit{Aquelarre}’s statement, were not as varied as the ones that emerged when discussing the butterflies, which I believe has to do with the physical presence of an accessible text. All mentioned, with some variations, the knowledge and skills attributed to witches, yet they offered different connections to the present reality. Some offered rather essentialist views through which “all women” are related to the image, yet those very statements reflect diversity. This pattern also highlights that as illustrate below, the identification with the symbol of the witch, is more concrete and corporal than what was expressed in relation to the butterfly.

Digging for treasures in Tierra Viva’s storage room, Alitza Naves recalled.\textsuperscript{203}

When we started thinking about our 21 anniversary at Tierra Viva we looked for a provocative image that will make people think and chose the witch. You read our

\textsuperscript{202} For instance, see \textit{Reclaiming}, a US based movement who reclaim the practice of witchcraft (Salomonsen 2002). The Guatemalan women activists I worked with are not trying to reclaim the practice of witchcraft, only the social construction around it.

\textsuperscript{203} Alitza spent hours discussing (object) materials produced by Tierra Viva, many of these conversations (like the one mentioned above) were recorded. These conversations did not follow an interview structure of questions and answers, but were led by object materials Alitza showed me.
LET US RISE UP

statement … you know why. … because of all of the women who were burnt in the time of inquisition, everything that happened in Europe, that they killed women. Not because they were evil women with malicious intentions, but because they knew how to cure with traditional herbs. They knew how to deliver babies; they were familiar with women’s menstruation. … So they took them to the inquisition. … Here in Guatemala—especially in the Indigenous communities—there is a lot of traditional medicine with herbs, not something that you learn in medicine school. This is how the midwives are treating labor. So we translated the European image to the midwives experiences, concretize it in Guatemala. Also sometimes housewives, we do magic with money for it to be enough for the house needs.

In an interview, Evelyn Morales, also of Tierra Viva, added:

Witches are liberated, knowledgeable women that knew how to deal with problems and demanded rights. Healing women that the system terminated. Healers that knew and talked about sex and abortion and paid with their lives for challenging the system. In many ways we are like them, transgressors. We use it because witches, like us have a sixth sense. Because (as feminists) they call us witches anyway. We challenge the system, so we are witches.

Similar notion of suppressing transgression was expressed by Sonia Acabal (RedNoVi) and Rosa Gallardo (Mujeres en Resistencia).

Witches were knowledgeable women, scientists, healers. For us, the witch is a reminder of the system’s oppression of women, at the same time it’s a marker of rebellion against that system. In the past and now. (Sonia, RedNoVi)

The witch is clearly very feminist. All the history of witches in the US and the relation to the feminist movement... When you rebel against a system like the heteropatriarchal system they turn you to evil, prostitute, ugly, witch. (Rosa, Mujeres en Resistencia)

Walda Barrios Klee (UNAMG/FLACSO) related past and present lethal violence through a contemporary term:

The witch is part of the feminist imagery. It symbolizes that we are wise women, as were the witches who were killed for their knowledge, excluded from society and burnt for knowing, for accumulating knowledge. Also, the witches are the precedent of femicide.

María Isabel Grijalva (CODEFEM) situated knowledge as power women were denied through history, yet they still possess:
The witch is something that we feminist brought back, it is a rescue of our ancestors, grandmothers, great-grandmothers’ knowledge. Women who attended labor, gave advice, that healed. Wise women with incredible knowledge who posed a threat to the new system of chemical medicine supported by the church, so they started burning them. But we all have something of the witch, because of the knowledge, the wisdom we all learned from our grandmothers. They also did it here when they denied them the right to read and write, when they were marginalized, burning them from the inside. Not on the stake, but by discrimination. Actually, there was also horrific inquisition here. Women were hunted and burnt here as well.

Rosana Cifuentes (AGMM) expressed a more personal-professional connection to the image:

Witches? (Here, I have one here!) They are related to the feminist theory, the women who were persecuted, burnt, demonized. The same goes with feminist women who are demonized. This was during the inquisition, against knowledgeable women, what we want to bring back are the talents, the abilities. The perception capacity, the instinct, women’s emotional perception, which makes us different, gives us power, but also leads to demonization. Those wise, healing women have a lot to do with us (women) doctors. Sometimes we cure through our body, something it does not have to do with our scientific ability, but with the ability to listen, to be trusted with confidence. I have a great extra-sensory perception, great belief in my sixth sense; it works and helps me save lives. So this is how we work and it’s related to witches. It does not offend us when they think about us as such. All of my friends always send me jokes about witches. I love it. … We (in Guatemala) have a long tradition of hechiseras (sorceresses), the magic of natural, traditional healing in the Indigenous communities. We don’t have an image, so they took the European one, but it is related to them.”

Rosario Escobedo of Sector Mujer was the only one who did not discuss the legacy of women persecution; instead she simply shared her personal connection to the witch:

The witch is part of my identity. I like it. I think all of us women have something of the witch. We always invent something.

Karin Ramos (Mujeres en Resistencia), on the other hand, views her personal relation to the witch as directly related to its’ reclaiming.

204 In a poem she shared with me titled “Witch” she states: “Not because I guess the future, Not because I peruse disasters. Witch... Because I daily remember and take back the life philosophy and wisdom of my ancestors, the ancient wisdom of other women, witches as well.”

205 During the colonial period the Spanish Inquisition was present and active in Central America and women (of African, European, Indigenous and mixed decent) were prosecuted and executed as witches (see Few 2002, 2005). One of Antigua’s celebrated legends, la Tatuana, is a tale about a witch who escaped prison. (see recent reenactment).
It brings back the history of persecuting women, of burning them for thinking differently. Because they are lesbian, sex workers, or anything that is different, so they were burnt. For me it’s like all the women murdered and tortured today. Now when we take back the name, when we reclaim the witch, it’s no longer an offence. Before when they called me a witch it hurt me, now they call me witch and I love it. When you understand the process of demonization that these women went through, it doesn’t hurt anymore. Nowadays it’s not always witch; it can be lesbian, whore, but it’s the same.

A similar sense is expressed by Olga Paz (ecap):

The witch brings us back to the bad woman that comes out of the stereotype, so to adopt it is to say yes, we are witches. Accepted. Now go find something else to say to attack us.

Women’s knowledge and skills (healing, sexuality, and wisdom) are central to the activists’ view of the witch. Luz Mendez (UNAMG) summarized this notion: “We reclaim that women had power in a different time period, and were hunted and persecuted for it.” In the center of reclaiming the witch, then, is a process of reinterpreting the past, similar to the ones I discussed in relation to the butterfly, the Mirabal Sisters, and the Guatemala protagonists. Here, activists reclaim their ancestral power, violently, unjustly taken from them. Much emphasis is given to the different realms of knowledge and skills, to the power they possessed. Further, they challenge the basis on which this power was taken from them. In the process, they reject the negative attributions witches allegedly had, and by extension, the negative label attributed to strong women nowadays, such as lesbian, ugly, and whore. Hence, their new reading of the past portrays women—in past and present time—as powerful healers and as rebels, while conservative powers are portrayed as oppressively violent.

There are several ways in which activists relate this history to the present day. First, they tie it to the Guatemalan reality: Alitza and Rosanna relate the knowledge to contemporary traditional healing; Alitza emphasizes Indigenous midwifery, while Rosanna

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206 I call these labels negative only as they are used as derogatory terms.
also adds women-doctors. Evelyn, Sonia and Rosa related the current and previous experiences of women’s transgression. Walda brought together contemporary and past killing of women using the term femicide; while Maria Isabel discussed the connection to a different kind of violence against women: illiteracy. Second, they suggest several, somewhat essentialist explanations through which they personally relate to the image. For Evelyn and Rosanna, it is a sixth sense “women/doctors have,” Rosario claims that “us women” have the ability to invent things; Alitza believes that housewives do magic with money; and for Maria Isabel the magic lives in the ancestral knowledge “we all have.” Interestingly, these essentialist statements are quite diverse. Namely, while collapsing categories of women, they illustrate the complexity of the category.

As feminist symbols, witches also offer a more concrete and corporeal image, one grounded in the here and now, than does the butterfly, often representing more of an abstract potentiality. The witch is not something women wish to become but something they already are, and not necessarily by choice. While many activists celebrate the image and even state that they love and enjoy it, their relationship with the term, given its negative connotations in popular usage, is multilayered. Evelyn, for instance, stated: “they call us that way anyway,” and Karin indicated: “Before when they called me a witch it hurt me.” The transition, explain Karin and Olga, has to do with understanding the negative notion of the term as an oppression mechanism in the past and present. Once viewed as such, Karin explains, she enjoys it. The joy, then, is related to the new reading of the image, according to which, being called a witch relates one to generations of strong women, by the merit of one’s own strength.
Adopting/adapting a term is not a unique phenomenon, and can be viewed in relation to a practice Judith Butler termed “politics of re-signification” (1997), a political appropriation of derogatory terms. Discussing the term queer, Butler explores how a derogatory term can be re-worked in the cultural domain from one of defaming to one of celebration. More recently such a “strategy of opposition” (2007:38) has been employed in relation to the term slut (Ringrose & Renold 2012). Reclaiming the witch by Guatemalan women’s organizations (and globally), as I have illustrated above, is such an endeavor. While popularly still viewed negatively, reclaiming the term had a great impact on the activists I worked with. It is, I believe, a great example for a concrete transformative act, one that is done from within the system. By reclaiming the witch they convert a conservative, oppressive tool into a liberating mechanism, a term through which they claim and manifest a new positionality within the Guatemalan society. It is a collective act of self-transformation, i.e. all of the above reported self-transformations rely on collective identifications—women, women-doctors, housewives, transgressors—and a collective, public, material-based act of reclaim, the Aquelarre.

Self-transformation is fundamental for both the butterfly and the witch. The butterfly helps to articulate the need and aspiration for such transformation, breaking societal shackles, represented in the cocoon, and becoming a proud butterfly, free of violence, free to simply be whatever one wishes to be. The reclamation of the witch represents such practice. It demonstrates how a socially oppressive mechanism—a legacy of lethal persecution and marginalization of strong women—can be revoked; how a negative, hurtful, even terrorizing word, can be turn into positive, complimentary, celebrated word.
Activists’ self-transformation is both method and outcome of transforming spaces, while transforming spaces is both method and outcome of activists’ self-transformation. Any act of transformation depends on hope, as it allows people to dream and enact new and better ways of being in the world. Both the butterfly and the witch represent such acts of imagining, through which the activists draw connections to powerful women. The emphasis on flying, a movement in the air, echoes the struggle of the women they chose to identify with, women, who refused to resign to terror and withdraw into a cocoon, but chose to confront it with hope. Rereading the past, the activists I worked with are able, in the present, to envision and claim a better future for women in Guatemala.

Having “cracked” the social cocoon, within which they were separately imprisoned, they were able to come together and transform the public space, starting with its Guatemalan epitome, the Constitutional Plaza. Similar to their self-liberation, a social cocoon needed to be undermined, similar to the witch reclamation, they are not trying to fit in, but to celebrate the alternatives. While the witch, the images they chose to represent themselves through “relocates” from the oppressive marginalizing earthly ground to a safe, infinite space, the air, they are looking for more than a temporary unstable relief. The air is a place to imagine, to breathe, to grow, and return to transform the public space so that it will accommodate their needs. Similarly, the Constitutional Plaza was only temporarily challenged, yet they physically placed an alternative vision, one that by simply placing, they mark their own transformation and the possibility of a more durable change.

_Alcémonos/ Let Us Rise Up: A Grounded Utopia_

While the butterfly and the witch hold much significance for individuals and groups incorporated with the campaign, not all activists relate to them. Both Rosa Gallardo and Karin Ramos (Mujeres en Resistencia) stated that they do not relate to the image. Luz
Mendez (UNAMG) was also very straightforward about it, saying: “it (the butterfly) looks pretty, but it does not mean a lot for me.” A more elaborated discomfort was expressed by Hilda Morales Trujillo, a veteran legal scholar and activist, a founding member of women’s organizations, who held several women’s rights related governmental and international positions:

As far as I understand, the butterfly is related to the psyche, to the soul. And I think that it’s related to that when women who start to participate in women’s organizations, start to think about women as more sensitive, they strengthen the stereotype. The witch—oh, here, I got one too!—is related to being transgressors. All the women who knew natural medicine and were hunted in the middle ages. And this needs to be recovered to say that we are all witches. And some women take the stereotype further and talk about how we can change a diaper, clean the house, cook, and work on the computer, all at once, we can be in many places at once. I’m not a witch or a butterfly. I’m a woman with no stereotypes. A woman with the perception that I’m a human, and as such, all of us women have rights, same like the ones men have, and we need to be treated with respect and look at ourselves through dignity and self-esteem.

Rejecting what she views as stereotypic, Hilda envisions a new future through the position of woman-being, rightfully equal and well-grounded in society; a new future, in which women will be treated with respect, and look at themselves through dignity and self-esteem. Hilda’s vision, thus, is not very different from those articulated through butterflies and witches. There is a need for societal change—women should be treated with respect, and women’s self-transformation—learning to see oneself through dignity—is an essential part of it. Her vision for a better future is clearly laid out in one of her well cited poems: Alcémonos (Let us rise up).

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207 See text in appendix 4, and performed by Sandra Morán at Casa Artesana (2012) and in the Yo Me Uno concert (2011). In her 2011 performance Morán added a line directed to the men in the audience. “Men”, she called, “let us rise up. Because we are ready to build walls against violence, to make new rules, new rules so that neither you or your men sons continue the ancestral chain of punching and hitting, lets break the ancestral chain of punching and hitting.
Addressing “women,” Morales urges them to come together and rise up. Coming together, as a collective, women will be able to demonstrate that they constitute half of the world. It is implied, that through such a collective act they will be able to demonstrate that they are not a marginal group, and—as she stated in person—are worthy to the same rights as men, as human. It is also implies that such collective action will allow them to realize that they are indeed equal and worthy of the same rights as men. Coming together is the central means for social and self-transformation. As a collective they can demonstrate their readiness to end violence, she explains, to promote a new social order in which “our sons” will no longer be part of the legacy of violence. Leaving the public sphere where the collective was pronounced, she switches to focus on the family as a site of violence and transformation. In that new social order, Juanito, that we can understand as a generic son or an actual offspring will not learn how to use violence and thus will not harm their (generic or immediate) daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters.\footnote{Interestingly, Morales, who denounces the use of stereotypes equates all women with mothers.}

A new world, Morales asserts, is possible. It’s the women themselves who can come together to make this alternative world. The strength, she clarifies, comes from within, from acknowledging the power of women as a group. The first step for social change, she tells us, starts with self-transformation (understanding the category of women, and by extension, yourself, as rights-worthy), and continues by practice in one’s family. Through such social action in the present, we are reminded, women create a better future for “our” children, boys and girls and the next generations. Further, as women-beings, political subjects, women have the right and ability to change the social order and end the cycle of violence, they will stop waiting and end generations of violence themselves.
Morales’ poem demonstrates well the relation between self-transformed individuals and their ability to further transform social spaces. Her grounded call for action can be read as the least attainable utopia of them all. How will women come together and break legacies of violence? Some women indeed are fortunate enough to have the status, education and family support that enable them to live their lives as *women-beings*, for others, as Sonia Acabal once told me: “it’s a big dream.” Yet, “let us rise up” is part of the movement’s repertoire.

One of the most powerful performances of the poem that I experienced took place during the 2011 November 25 march. Marching in the first lines, heading a long tail of more than 10,000 activists, her drumming and singing transmitted through a sound system located on the leading track, Sandra Morán recited (with a few changes) Hilda Morales’ *Alcémonos*.

Women. Alcémonos. Let us rise up so that they will understand that it is not only one woman. That all of us together form half of the sky, we form half the world. And we are ready, ready to build walls against violence, to make new rules so that our sons will break the ancestral chain of punching and hitting... will break the ancestral chain of punching and hitting... so that they will not learn to kill. So that they will never learn to kill. So that they will not learn to kill the tenderness and dignity of our daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters. Women, Let us rise up. Let us rise up. Alcémonos!

Recited within the space of the movement, a crowd of 10,000 people, women, men, youth, children, Indigenous, Non-Indigenous, and foreigners, and beyond; a space that moves through and transforms the public space, *Alcémonos* materialized in front of me. Walking within the space of the movement, surrounded by women, their families and allies, who came together to demonstrate that united, they, indeed, form “half of the sky … half the world.” That they are ready to build—or even embody—walls against violence. Holding signs announcing new legislations and other state mechanisms they advocated for in the past decades, they demonstrated that new rules can be made to change social conventions.
Holding the hands with their sons and daughters, they came to break the ancestral chain of violence, to teach them that they are not to be victimizers or victims, but humans, equal political subjects.

For me, Sandra Morán reciting Hilda Morales’ _Alcémonos_ made Hilda—who no longer walks the marches—present, part of the event. It helped me better understand the practice of “making present” Morán talked about in her closing speech in 2010. I could better see how coming together includes not only those who are physically present, but also the voices, the ideas, the energy of those who—like Mama Maquin and Mayra Gutierrez—contributed to create the space of the movement. It also emphasized that coming together does not necessarily mean that activists have similar needs or are at full agreement with each other. Yet they recognize that as group, as “half of the sky” they are more likely to “fly,” and as “half the world,” they are more likely to break the ancestral chain of violence.

_The Right for Wings_

In this chapter I discuss transforming social spaces—public and corporal—as maps of and to Utopia. The individual and collective ability to imagine and present—articulate, display, and ground in present time—an alternative future, I illustrate, is fundamental for such transformation. Unlike women’s human rights discourse, often experienced as a unifying agenda that collapses categories of women and portrays all women as victims or potential victims, the images I discuss here allow women to portray themselves as the protagonists of their own particular, diverse lives. A further challenge/weakness of women’s human rights discourse is its failure to guarantee a full implementation of the newly adopted women’s rights legislation. The implementation process of women’s rights, or the transformation of governmental, civic, and juridical spaces, I illustrated in chapter 2, is enabled by “transformed” women-beings. The self-transformation process of women-activists
described here is fundamental for our understanding of the transformation of public space. The new public spaces—even by the virtue of their mere existence—are fundamental for the self-transformation process.

New governmental spaces like CONAPREVI and SEPREM helped to incorporate women’s needs and concerns in the national agenda, publically displaying that changes can be made, encouraging more women—and men—to risk hoping. New legislations such as the 2008 Law Against Femicide manifest that the state is accountable for women’s lives, contesting the societal devaluation of women, and, again publicly demonstrating that a better future is possible, if people will dare to come together and rise up. The new spaces have, of course, a more immediate impact as well—women can now choose to work outside the household and to some extent, plan the number of children they would like to have, if at all, allowing them greater control of their live prospects. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that their mere existence, encouraged individuals to dream. Going back to Giddens, we can say that the spatial transformation was not only an outcome of a long process, but a method to keep the (transformation) process going.

Ironically, as I have discussed in chapter 2, it was state-sponsored political violence and terror, meant to maintain individuals and collectives “in their place,” to fortify their social cocoons, that first “cracked” that very cocoon. Such violence forced women to become protagonists of their own lives in order to survive, as well as facilitate their engagement (through exile and aid projects) with feminism and women’s human rights discourse. Human ability to challenge structural and symbolic violence from within the system that imposes this violence is limited. It requires not only overcoming internalized oppressive social

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209 Following the 1998 reform of the Civil Code and following the 2005 Law for Universal and Equal Access to Family Planning Methods, respectively.
conventions, but also the structural—political and economic—mechanisms that limit their access power. The women’s human rights apparatus provides Guatemalan women-activist not only a new language to express their concerns, but a powerful political and economic mechanism.\(^{210}\)

On the one hand, the witch (reclamation) and the (sisters) butterfly derive from a transnational feminist and women human rights discourse. On the other, they inspire a localized discourse that generates hope and action. In chapters 2 and 3 I address these two fundamental discourses separately. In the next chapters I discuss the ways in which they complement each other in the daily practice of imagining, in the present, a better future.

The next chapter explores the endeavour to secure the right for history, a fundamental political practice for claiming ones’ rightful place in the world and more particularly, the nation. As Guatemalan women (and their experiences of violence) have been silenced for generations, the act of telling HERstories is a subversive act, and a transformative experience. The implementation, or practice, of this right, I claim, requires alternative ways of telling. I open the chapter with personal accounts of activists and then mirror them with collective, public, performative acts of telling, practices through which “the space of the movement” opens space for HERstories, thus transforms the public space.

\(^{210}\) Simply put, no “rights,” no butterflies. This point came close home while I was writing this chapter, as I learned that due to a recent failure to secure transnational funds and urgent need for budget cuts, a close friend and prominent dreamer was laid off of one of the more established organizations.
Chapter 4: Herstories of Violence

An important aspect for women as political subjects is to have history. It's a cliché, but if you don’t have history, you don’t have a future. Women (in Guatemala) were always active but it was not written in history. We (nowadays activists) are the product of their work, not seeing it as a continuum is a problem. So you have to invent it. Yes, really, you have to invent it and you invent it in the most positive way possible. And if you have evidence, much better. (Ana Silvia Monzón)

Herstory /ˈhɜːstəri/

Noun
History emphasizing the role of women or told from a woman's point of view; also, a piece of historical writing by or about women.

Etymology Punning alteration of history n. (fancifully reinterpreted as his story, implying that history has in the past been viewed predominantly from the male perspective), with his-replaced by her adj.

Story /ˈstɔəri/

Noun
A narrative, true or presumed to be true, relating to important events and celebrated persons of a more or less remote past; a historical relation or anecdote.
In generalized sense: Historical writing or records; history as a branch of knowledge, or as opposed to fiction.

Verb
To record historically; to relate the history of; in later use, to tell as a story, to tell the story of.

Violence /ˈvaɪəlnəns/

Noun
The deliberate exercise of physical force against a person, property, etc.; physically violent behaviour or treatment; (Law) the unlawful exercise of physical force, intimidation by the exhibition of such force.
A restriction on or alteration of natural action, behaviour, or inclination; an undue or enforced constraint.

(Oxford English Dictionary)
It was 6:00am, the morning of the 2010 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and I had just left the house in which I was staying, headed towards Tierra Viva’s office, the coordinadora 25 de noviembre’s meeting point. It was about half an hour of walk, and I was going to be late. I was staying in a relatively safe street down the road from Plaza Mayor, at the center of Zone One. However, the night before, at the end of the vigilia, taking place at the Plaza, my friend Carol did not allow me to walk these 10 minutes on my own. Instead, I was escorted by a group of 30 women who went in the same direction. Carol also made me promise that I wouldn’t walk on my own in the morning, but by 6:00am, I assumed, there would be other people in the street, so I wouldn’t be alone...

I rarely spent time in the city that early in the morning; it was quiet, the air was fresh, and a few people were in the middle of their morning run. It was so calm and felt—almost—safe. As I was walking up the hill, I remembered Ana Silvia’s response to my question “What would mark a better world when you walk in the street?”

That we can walk in the street. If you can walk in the street it means that it is safe, it signals a developed country. Here, walking in the street is a dream. We walk in the street with great fear. And we don’t have nice streets to walk in. If we can walk in the street we can go to school. It opens more options. Security means the right to life, liberty. That you can go wherever you want, that you are free. That’s the basics. Just walking in the streets would be a great change. (Ana Silvia Monzón)

The street might have looked safe, but I knew it wasn’t. It did not prevent me from walking, but I was alert, painfully aware of each and every movement of the people sharing the fresh morning air with me. I went where I wanted to go, but I was not free. Ana Silvia’s comment also meant to remind me that my question derives from a privileged place, coming from a developed country.  

While I am coming from a more privileged position, safety in developed countries—though to a lesser extent—is also limited, and excludes large socially marginalized populations. In Vancouver, where I’m writing...
was a method to evaluate the world out there, is in itself a desired reality for many people in Guatemala. Not only for the freedom to move, go where one desires, but also because of what such freedom reflects—the right to life—and allows—personal growth and development. Violence, Ana Silvia reminded me, went far beyond “The deliberate exercise of physical force.”

And so, it was November 25, 2010, a year after I had begun to actively engage with women’s organizations in Guatemala, and I no longer perceived violence that way. Violence, I began to believe, has more to do with its intended purpose—to restrict individuals and groups from challenging structures—than with the means used to achieve it. Violence, I learned, had to do with violating individual’s value as humans, denying them a sense of self-worth, and preventing them from meeting their full potential as humans. Echoing Menchú, “I did not learn it from a book, and I did not learn it alone” (1984:1), I learned it from the stories and doings of many Guatemalan women. It is their story, but at times, it is also part of mine.

Guatemalan women and their experiences of violence and struggle have been excluded from the social national imagination (Monzón 2001), thus they have been deprived of their right for history, a fundamental political practice for claiming ones’ rightful place in the world and more particularly, the nation. In this chapter I explore this endeavour of “people without history,” (Wolf 1982) the Guatemalan women’s movement, and their struggle to recover their stories and incorporate them within the national story.
Different social structures and circumstances led history as we know it to be mostly told and recorded by men, leaving women's lives, deeds, and participation in human affairs outside the canon (Miller and Swift 1976). During the 1970s and 1980s feminist critiqued the study of history as a male-dominated intellectual enterprise and suggested the neologism "Herstory," historical fiction from a woman's point of view, as a means of compensation (Looser 2000:1). In the past two decades women activists and scholars made great efforts to remember, re-create and invent Guatemalan women’s history. Books recording women’s participation in social struggles were complemented by feminist newspapers and radio and TV productions. By coming together and telling their stories, they break the chains of silence and free themselves of generations of internalized oppression. Further, by recovering their stories they claim space for their narratives and experiences in national history, thus reject the official canonic narrative, and at times, the social order. Considering the subversive nature of such an endeavour, it is sometimes more effective—and at times, safer—to share HERstories through alternative modes of expression, such as the ones I will discuss in this chapter.

I open the chapter with personal accounts of activists who tell me about their utopias. Theses personal visions of a better future represent the current realities in which they live, and reflect a lack of value of the social category “woman” and more so “Indigenous woman.” From personal stories, shared in person, I move to the collective act of decorating two trucks for the 2010 November 25 march, a creative collaboration in which activists build powerful anti-violence statements. Borrowing from Hilda Morales, I will call it “building walls against

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212 For books see Carrillo 2005, Chinchilla 1998, ECAP–UNAMG 2009, La Cuerda and SEPREM 2011, Méndez and Barrios-Klee 2010, Salinas 2002. Radio programs such as Voces de Mujeres, Hablan las Mujeres and radical productions such as Mujeres Haciendo Historia en la Lucha Contra La violencia (Colectivo Mujeres al Aire). TV programs such as Mujeres más alla de las fronteras, Mujeres Convocando (TV Maya).
HERSTORIES OF VIOLENCE

violence.” From the semi-intimate creative setting I take the reader to a crowded public space, where many other voices of women are publically shared, coming together to form a collective HERstory. Finally we move with the stories to the Capital’s streets as the activists are expanding the space of the movement, presenting alternative ways of being, and using it to demand space for themselves not only in the physical public space, but also in the collective national story.

Practicing Hope

Back on the street that November 25, 2010, I was crossing Zone One from North to South, passing by offices of different organizations where I had spent hours, locations where I participated in political actions and a few spots where I had to confront violence. The streets were quiet, the air was fresh, and it was a good time to reflect on what I had learned in the past year.

El valor de ser Mujer. The value of being a woman is the core of the problem. It is not valued to be a woman in this country. It is very dangerous to be born a woman in this country. The midwives tell us that when a girl is born, they are paid 50q or nothing. If a boy is born, they are paid 300-500q, and there is a party, the whole world celebrates, they make a chicken soup. The family comes to help take care of the boy and help the woman recover; with a girl, nothing. Sometimes the men will not come to pick her up from the hospital, others he will hit her. It’s her fault, although we know that it’s the man who determines the sex. So for me, what would mark a better world is if women understood themselves as citizens, with rights, with equality. We will see it when women will understand themselves not only as having obligations, but also as having rights. In a better world women would not ask a permission to come to a workshop. (Evelyn Morales, Tierra Viva)

Evelyn takes us directly to the heart of the problem—women’s lives are not valued in Guatemala, a notion internalized not only by men, but also by women. The key for changing the situation, she claims, is that women themselves will reject this notion.

In a better world, baby girl’s ears would not be pierced. You think I’m joking; no, seriously, ear-piercing. It’s the first moment when a decision about her body is taken
away from her, this is an act that constitutes her as “girl,” not only because she wears earrings now, but because it was done to her without asking her. Her femininity is ascribed on her body. It is also the first time her family penetrates her body, an act of violence done by your family. Later her hands are confined in socks—did you know that?—to make sure SHE will not harm herself. This is how she becomes a baby girl—her body is penetrated, scarred, and confined, for her own good. (Leonor Gonzalez CICAM)

Leonor’s utopia was maybe the most painful to hear. Adding to the notion that women are not valued, she offers a basic example to illustrate how not being valued translates into violence, and further how being deprived of agency becomes a women’s trait. Put differently, she illustrates how the social production of women, body and mind, is done through violence.

When I go on the bus and do not stand amongst dead women, I’ll know it’s a better world. Yes they stand on their feet, they take the bus to go to work, but you can see it in their eyes: they are dead from the inside. They are dead because they have no control over their bodies. Their own body is not theirs. They cannot make decisions about it, they are dead. (Ixmucané Solórzano, Tierra Viva)

Ixmucané further emphasized the notion of being deprived of control over ones’ body, this time, no longer as a child, whose life choices are often control by others, but as adult women.

What will mark this world? That men will get pregnant and that women will not be able to get pregnant until they are 30. Motherhood is a great responsibility. If men would be able to get pregnant, abortion would have been made legal thousands of years ago. They decide, they have the power. … Another compañera here suggests that in a better world men will have to pee while sitting... Why? They’ll have time to sit and think about what they’re doing; maybe they’ll create less damage, and, of course, will not be able to pee in the streets. You see, the problems are not only on the political level, but on the most everyday corporeal practices. Women are not the owners of their own bodies, they are always disciplined through it—if you’re a mother, they tell you you’re bad mother, if you’re not a mother they’ll tell you you’re a bad woman. Rape… almost everything has to do with the body. Until we’re not the
owner of our bodies and have access to economic recourses, nothing will change. (Mirna Espaderos, CICAM).

Reporting a similar lack of agency—but a lighter tone—Mirna clearly points the finger to the patriarchal order that oppresses women through controlling their bodies and limits their access to economic recourses. Namely, it is not only the lack of attributed value, but also the modes meant to maintain it that need to be changed.

How will it look like? No more impunity, no more violations of women’s rights, that all of the state organization will understand the problem of violence against women. That they will see us as valuable, equal, that this division (between men and women) will no longer exist, that this inequality will end. (Sonia Acabal, RedNoVi)

Sonia moves the discussion from cultural ideology to state inaction, claiming that a pro-active state, with a greater gender sensibility can be the key for transforming the situation.

A better world? Oh that would be nice. In my experience, from what I have seen, women have incredible powers. Women who have access to education and land, or projects that will help them support themselves, they go forward. In a better world I would see that women have power. Money gives you power, education gives you power. If they are going through procesos de formación, they can speak. 213 If they were to be empowered the situation would radically change. They are super-oppressed, in education, health, legally—when the judge does not speak their language, they are not heard. It’s everything together, they don’t leave the house...(Olga Paz, ecap)

Olga brings forward the need to disengage with the mechanisms that maintain women’s limited access to power, i.e. reproduce their diminished societal position. This is not a natural state, she asserts; facilitating access to education and economic resources, allowing women to develop their potential, they will thrive.

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213 Literally, formation or educational processes: see more in chapters 3 and 5.
A better world? The first thing is to institute quotas, in all levels, to create a real affirmative action. Like in URNG—when they did not have enough women they went to look for them in women’s organization. For me, this is an example of a real political will to include women. The same with Indigenous women, you won’t see them in any power position at the university... if we are talking about gender equality, we need to create tools to facilitate it, we need more women in higher positions. That’s the first thing. The second, to end impunity. To put criminals in jail. If one knows that he can kill and nothing will happen to him, they’ll keep on killing. These two things will create a more just situation, this is what the organizations are trying to do. (Walda Barrios Klee, FLASCO, UNAMG, USAC).

While Walda’s utopia seems slightly disconnected from the others, I view it as yet another call for institutionalized equality, one that calls the state to generate actions that will revoke women’s devaluation. Interestingly, while her utopia has to do with political institutions, Walda also comments that this work is already done, in the present, by women’s organizations.

A different world? As an organization (Mujeres transformando el mundo or Women transform the world) we want a strong institutionalization that will protect our equality; equality between men and women with no ethnic division. We are well aware that we are a few, and we have a limited power, this is the reality. But if you are asking me what is our vision as an organization to transform the world it’s that the law will be implemented as is, will be accessible and equal to everyone. How would it look like? Well… simply the freedom to be. In a society where… well, here the situation is so grave that you don’t know... if you go outside… maybe you will not come back. In any street corner, ANY street corner someone can rape you and kill you. This is the local reality. So the difference will be to experience the freedom to be, with no fear of violence and discrimination. Here you can’t be a lesbian and walk in the street hand in hand with your girlfriend. You will be harmed. And if you were to file a complaint, no one would investigate. If the law were effective, it would influence this practice. We would be able to be. We would be able to be an Indigenous woman going to a discothèque and no one would hurt or insult her. And all the women whose partners abuse them and have nowhere to go… if they complain they get a piece of paper to protect them. If the aggressor comes back they need to call the police and then present the paper… our idea is that one day we will be able to live and be in peace. It’s utopia, but that’s the way to go. It’s a dream, Tal, but

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214 Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, URNG (The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) started as a guerrilla movement but laid down its arms in 1996 and became a legal political party (URNG-MAIZE) in 1998. Walda refers to the process in which they approached her to become candidate for vice president in the 2007 national elections.
maybe one day we can allow in everyone that buzzes our doorbell.\(^{215}\) (Lucia Moran, Mujeres transformando el mundo)

Following Sonia, Olga and Walda, Lucia suggests additional needed aspect for the institutionalization of equality, the law. Like Walda and Olga, she further emphasizes that the inequality and lack of value attributed to the category of women are graver when the woman is affiliated with a further marginalized group due to her ethnic background or sexual orientation. For Lucia the law can become a social mechanism that will promote peaceful life realities.

A better world? That’s a good question. I think in terms of liberation. The issue of freedom for women is urgent both here, and as far as I understand, in Israel. Not the freedom to go to work, not in the level of the everyday things. I talk about freedom on the emotional level, about how we women feel, understand ourselves. If I think about a better situation… it means that I don’t need, … that my daughter doesn’t need to create herself some kind of image for other people’s sake, a way that others will see her, an image that will protect her. This is very basic. This is where violence is coming from. All of this control and oppression. It all comes from this denial of freedom of each and every woman, freedom to live, freedom to be, freedom to be a woman. I want this sense of freedom. I want to feel that I can be free, free to be, and never think how others will read it and how it will affect me. In a better world a woman will feel free, and the center of her being will be her own life. (Claudia Acevedo, Lesbirada)

From state organizations and social institutions, Claudia brings us back to the cultural aspects of women devaluations. Going back to Evelyn’s utopia, Claudia’s utopia includes self-liberation of societal shackles, often maintained through violence. While for Evelyn this liberation includes freedom of moment and the opportunity to choose to educate oneself, for Mirna and Ixmucané it is about making decisions about one’s body, for Claudia it is about the freedom to be, to think, to desire.

\(^{215}\) Here she refers to an incident a few months before this interview, when their receptionist refused to let me in.
While these utopias represent different life experiences and realities, the lack of value attributed to the category of women—and more so to marginalized women—and mechanisms meant to reproduce this inequality, are central to each and every one of them.

It was 6:30am, the morning of the 2010 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and I made it safely to Tierra Viva’s office, the “only” danger the I was left to confront was Carol’s wrath.

In the next section, I move from these personal stories, to the collective act of decorating two trucks for the 2010 November 25 march, a creative collaboration in which activists build a powerful anti-violence statement. Borrowing from Hilda Morales’ *Alcemonos*, I will call it “building walls against violence.”

**Building Walls Against Violence.**

*But I didn’t understand this in the proper way, because we can only understand when we start talking to each other. And this is the only way we can correct our ideas.*
*(Rigoberta Menchú 1984:166)*

*Now I can talk, before I couldn’t. I cried a lot. Sharing with others made me stronger, much stronger. To see how much we have in common and yet how different we are.*
*(Maria Isabel Grijalva, CODEFEM)*

At 6:30, the usually busy street where Tierra Viva’s office was located was still traffic-free, giving that familiar corner an almost intimate feel. Two huge trucks were already parked at the corner, blocking the better part of the street, and members of the coordinadora and Tierra Viva’s activists were already cleaning the trucks platforms before we started decorating them. The office itself had piles of pre-made materials that would be used to decorate the trucks or distributed during the march. The inner patio, where we were all going
to have breakfast later, was packed with huge flower arrangements used the night before as a setting for the *vigilia*, soon to be mounted on one of the trucks.

![Image of flower arrangements](image)

*Figure 16: The Vigilia's flowers at Tierra Viva's inner patio.*

Two trucks were about to be collectively decorated. One will represent Tiera Viva, the other the Coordinadora. The first portrays a graveyard, made out of Styrofoam gravestones decorated with plastic flower and marked with names of women, their age, and cause of their death. The second brings forward a list of demands of the state held by women’s silhouettes placed between the *vigila* flowers and a figure of a blinded lady justice. These are just two out of several other trucks and other vehicles—decorated by other organizations in their respective locations—that will participate in the march, but as the two described here will lead the march, they will set the march’s tone and messages.
Figure 17: Tierra Viva, 6:30, Initial preparation. The sign reads: “Stop Femicide.”
Figure 18: Pre-made martials to be mounted on the trucks.
Figure 19: Tierra Viva Presents: A Mobile Graveyard. (Continues in the next page).

The right side banner reads: “50 years of breaking the silence. Mirabal Sisters, symbols of fighting violence against women.” Additional two (back and left) mimicking a crime-scene’s yellow-tape stating: “No more sexual violence against girls, youth, and women!” and “Machismo Kills.”

The gravestones read: Rosa Maria, Raped and murdered by her husband. Elena Carbajal, 23, died from lack of state attention. Lucia Campa, 16, too young to become a mother. Judith Costa, died of HIV, with no treatment or information. Gloria Mendez, died in a not well supervised birth. Lucia Toj, Killed by her husband with a gun. Ana Elena, was beat to death by her boyfriend. Sonia Carina Dubon, died out of lack of attention at the hospital. Juana Perez, 24, bled to death. Felipa Lopez, 17, died because of medical malpractice. Marisella, lived too far from the hospital, was not able to get there, and died. Lucia Toj, was killed by her boyfriend with a machete. Carmen Perez, died in an unsafe abortion.
Figure 20: Tierra Viva Presents: A Mobile Graveyard.
The Tierra Viva graveyard brings together women’s causes of death representing various life experiences of Guatemalan women. Every gravestone holds a longer account of pain, fear, and death, representing a private story of one woman and her family. The harsh Guatemalan reality is that most people are familiar with several such stories, thus for the Guatemalan spectator, a short version of this story of violence is sufficient to emphasize it. Wrapped with a huge banner commemorating the Mirabal Sisters as “symbols of struggle to end violence against women,” and two banners mimicking a crime-scene yellow-tape denouncing sexual violence and machismo, the “private stories” are put in context. “We can only understand when we start talking to each other,” said Rigoberta Menchú (1984:166). Bringing together these stories and statements, a connection is made between being murdered by a machete, and dying of an unsafe, illegal abortion—all are forms of silenced violence against women. The platform, thus, represents the political nature of violence against women, and its cultural patron: machismo.

The Tierra Viva display thus transforms acts of violence, from a terrorising and oppressing method, to a platform for presenting and politicizing a problem, and calling for action. The coordinadora truck further clarifies the complexity of this call by making multilayered demands of the state, placing them in a garden of funeral flower-arrangements in the company of a blindfolded Lady Justice, pointing to state accountability. The state inactions are further emphasized by a banner stating “Women are Done Waiting.” Bringing forward a graveyard (Tierra Viva’s display) and grounded within funeral flowers, the coordinadora display highlights the gravity of the issue, and does not stop with cultural ideology (machismo), but make demands of the state. This call for action emphasizes activists’ self and collective transitions into political subjects that make demands of the state.
Figure 21: “Women are Done Waiting. We Stop Violence Against Women and HIV NOW.”
Figure 22: Placing demands, Coordinadora 25 de Noviembre.
By putting together these displays activists tell stories about violence to themselves. It's a powerful moment that forces them to look at symbolic representations of violence, reflect on their own experiences of violence, and come together to demand the end of this violence. The collective and creative nature of the activity, the emphasis on expressing themselves and their hopes through doing, in a relatively intimate and safe space, generates a joyful get-together. The above statement by María Isabel brings to mind the collective self-transformations many of these activists went through. Hence, I see the activity as both an outcome of these transformations and a method to maintain and reproduce them.
Let Us Present: Voces de Mujeres

In the previous section we saw how anti-violence walls are erected collectively in a relatively intimate space. These walls have both voices and wheels, and soon after the traditional breakfast, were moved to a more public setting: the Human Rights Plaza in front of the Supreme Court of Justice. It is a crowded space, inhabited by pedestrians crossing one of the busiest corners of town or waiting for transportation, employees of the Supreme Court and Ministry of Justice, citizens that come to settle legal or bureaucratic issues, and street vendors. By 8:30 the space between the Supreme Court and the Peace Monument for the in the center of a traffic circle were packed with activists of many organizations, wearing and carrying their organizations’ particular messages, ones that are alien and go beyond the ones laid out by the coordinadora and Tierra Viva I discussed above. Some, but not all, of the organizations decorated their own trucks, pickups, or smaller vehicles. Overall, the street was flooded with collective and personal voces de mujeres.\(^{216}\)


It was a moment of great joy. People met coworkers they see every day, colleagues from other organizations they don't meet that often, and activists and participants coming from the periphery they hadn't seen since "the last big event." Many activists were accompanied by their partners, children, grandchildren, and even parents, who came to share this moment with them. At this point, I claim, these diverse stories come together to form a collective, politicized HERStory, in the hope to create a better future for themselves, other women, and their country.

\(^{216}\) Literally, “Women’s Voices,” a feminist radio program started in 1993. Also see FN 218.
Above: The hat reads: “I’m a woman, I’m a citizen.”

On the upper right: “The (San Carlos) University Women’s Institute PRESENT!”

Middle right: CONAPREVI. “FOR” (Blank space for killed women) “and For All Women.”

Below on the right: Tierra Viva’s purple, “the color of the feminist movement” T-shirts. The front reads “I’m a feminist,” On the back, a flying witch, with two optional captions: “and say STOP sexual Violence” and “no more sexual violence against girls, youth, and women.”
Figure 25: AMES: No Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health is also Violence Against Women.
Figure 26: ATRAHDOM with signs by Sector Mujer.

Above: “I’m a Woman. For our Participation Right,” below: “I’m a Woman. For life free of Discrimination and Racism for the Indigenous woman.”
Figure 27: MPA’s cars call for Justice, Respect, No more Violence, and Access to Femidom.
Figure 28: “Rural Women in Struggle for Land. The Invisibility and Devaluation of Women’s Contribution is also Violence.” “Visible Women. No more Violence.”

Figure 29: “Exclusion is also Violence. We Demand Complete Rural Development that Includes Women.”
Figure 30: CODEFEM: I’m a woman! I’m a citizen! I’m important! I’m happy!”

Car decorated with blindfolded Lady Justice and newspaper clips reporting killing of women within woman’s symbol on the right side and Guatemala’s map on the left (not seen in this picture). Side caption reads: “Women break the silence, and denounce violence to demand JUSTICE.” T-shirt reads: “Our Voices will never be silences again. I’m a woman! I’m a citizen! I’m important! I’m happy!”

“I’m a woman: not just a wife, a mother or a daughter; I’m a woman, with rights and obligations. I’m a citizen of this country, which means political participation, but also being protected (by the state). I’m important, my work is crucial for the survival and development of my family and country. If I believe in myself, my womanhood, citizenship, I’m happy!” (María Isabel Grijalva, CODEFEM)
Figure 31: UNAMG “We are looking for JUSTICE for Women. We will not forget nor be silenced.

The sign below specifically represents UNAMG’s chapter at Ciudad Peronia, Villa Nueva.
Figure 32: Sector Mujer:

The truck sign reads: “We appropriate and recover Our Territory: Body and Land.”

The flag reads: I’m a citizen I fight for full citizenship for women. I Demand to Eradicate Violence Against Women.”
Figure 33: The Space of the Movement, Human Rights Plaza, 9:00am.

Above: Set up between the Supreme Court and The Peace Accords Monument. Below: Two Coordinadora members read the *Comunicado* and then the order of marching while one of the *voceras* is being interviewed.
After the first half an hour of this “meet and greet”, the different groups start to set themselves in the edges of the plaza, holding big banners in front of the Supreme Court while the voceras (the designated spokeswomen) read the well-articulated comunicado that the coordinadora put together for this event. It includes the different organizations joint vision of the situation of violence against women in the country, the causes, and a list of their demands from the different state institution, agencies, and branches. This is no longer an intimate moment shared by few leading activists in a side street. Thousands of women are now standing in one of the busiest intersections in the city, in front of one of the state's most important symbols, the judicial branch, their backs to the Peace Accords memorial and stating their stories of violence and their hopes and demands for a better future.

On a side corner another designated vocera talks to the media representatives, explaining the main problems women face with and their demands, articulated in the comunicado. By doing that they expand the circle of sharing beyond the activists, their families, and the randomly passing crowd, to the greater public that is not physically present, who will be exposed to these messages later in news (radio, television, internet, and printed newspapers). A few representatives of the judicial brunch come to greet the activists before the march takes off, and witness a short political performance that further emphasized the movement’s particular demands of the judicial branch

About an hour after we arrived the plaza, it was time to move further into the public. The coordinadora’s voceras announced the order in which the organizations will march, creating an order and form to this new collective story: headed by the coordinadora’s truck, followed by the organizations affiliated with the coordinadora, continuing with non-affiliated women’s organizations, closing with social justice organizations.
Making Space for Moving HERstories

It was 10:00am, and the coordinadora truck started moving towards Ninth Ave.

Traditionally, the march went along Sixth Ave, but in 2010, due to construction work, the coordinadora had to request an alternative way and chose Ninth Ave, a major traffic route hosting several important state institutions that could be incorporated in the rally. Despite the police disapproval, it was the route taken, using youth participants to block the traffic and secure space for the march.

Each organization marched as a group, with their own banners, T-shirts, whistles, balloons, and other accessories, stating their particular visions and demands. Powered with sound-systems carried by the vehicles, they began moving their stories further into the public sphere, broadcasting both the joint comunicado and particular organizations’ manifests. These messages were complemented by rounds of participatory yells. The announcers call: *por la vida de las mujeres* (for the life of women), and the marching crowd answers: *ni una muerte mas!* (Not even one more death!). Some groups danced and sang while marching, along groups of professional street performers holding drums, wearing makeup and carnival-like costumes that kept the rally lively and cheerful.

This huge, colorful, vigorous stream flooded the streets, stopping and replacing traffic, the regular currents in these streets, with a human stream. Marching on the road, they left the sidewalks to street vendors, shopkeepers and other curious passers-by. Their messages were directed both inwards, to the cells that compose this plasmid flow, as well as outwards, to the media and the occasional spectators, to whom educational materials were constantly distributed. Walking within this powerful joyful human stream, it was hard to connect to my experience walking in these very streets, four hours earlier. Yet, occasional gazes to the
periphery of the stream, where non-organized women live and work, often behind security bars, served as a reminder of the utopian nature of this movement.

Figure 34: 10:00, Moving the “stories” to the streets. The marching crowd, headed by the Coordinadora’s truck, takes the road, and by distributing materials, expends to the sides.
Figure 35: The sign reads: “For the life of Indigenous Women, No More Machismo or Discrimination.” Below a vocera announces the comunicado, also read by passers-by.
Figure 36: The Space of the Movement takes over the street, with some help from the youth.
Figure 37: Spaces of Im/mobilization.

Tierra Viva’s activists march behind the coordinadora’s truck; observed by non-organized women.
Following a stop by the Congress for an additional political performance, they continue to move towards the Nacional Place and the Constitutional Plaza, their final stop. While the performative stops by national institutions are of high significance (as I discuss in chapter 6), I illustrate how taking the streets is in itself of great importance. During the prolonged Internal Armed Conflict the public sphere became a non-safe space that did not encourage much civil participation (Thomas et al. 2011:5). In post-conflict Guatemala, the state no longer rules out civil participation de jure, but as the situation of everyday violence is grave, it de facto does not invite a healthy civil participation. Further, as in Guatemala fear “penetrated the social memory” (Green 1998:55) many individuals choose to disengage from any political endeavour, hence civic participation is de facto limited.

Women (and men) walking—or dancing—together, confidently, leisurely in the streets, proudly and loudly drawing attention to their visible presence, and their political messages, celebrating the streets and themselves with music and costumes, are not an everyday sight in the Capital. During the march they temporarily take over and monopolize an area of the public sphere, turning it to a public stage to perform and fortify their right as Guatemalans to these spaces as well as their right to move between these spaces. Further, women of all locations in the Guatemalan society—and their allies—bodily enact new ways to perform a woman: happy, confident, rights-worthy citizen. By contesting the existing expectation of Guatemalan women's conduct, they perform what Claudia Acevedo (Lesbirada) called: “the freedom to be.” Finally, the march as a performance of unthinkable, alternative reality: such fun civil, inclusive participation, clearly demonstrates the state's failure to secure safe, inviting public space that will encourage healthy, open, vibrant civil participation, characterizing the democratic state it claims to be.
Figure 38: Taking over the Constitutional Plaza, from the Cathedral to the Palac, 12:00pm.
Figure 39: Youth-run activity at the Constitutional Plaza, 1:00pm.
Following a long morning in which activists and their allies moved their stories and demands through the city, presenting themselves as fear-free, rights-worthy citizens they finally arrived to the Guatemalan seat of power. In the Constitutional Plaza they rearticulated their demand through a political performance (discussed in chapter 6), a closing ceremony in the alternative plaza (discussed in chapters 2 and 3) and a youth-run artistic activity. Incorporating the youth as an integral part of the movement—marching, distributing materials, blocking the streets and running a public activity—takes us back to Morales’ utopian lines:

We are ready to build walls against violence, to make new rules so that our sons will break the ancestral chain of punching and hitting...so that Juanito doesn’t learn to kill the tenderness and dignity of our daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters.

The youth’s participation displays that another world, another society is indeed possible. It further validates women’s work as mothers (Maria Isabel Grijalva, CODEFEM) and activists, and their ability imagine and enact new rules, spaces, and legacies. Such displays further emphasize their demand to be acknowledged as women-beings with a long legacy of contributing to the nation, and worthy of state protection. Going back to activists’ utopias I opened this chapter with, at the constitutional Plaza the movement demands state acknowledgment of their value as women and the institutionalization of the equality they deserve. While they carry various messages and stories through the city, the coordinadora organizes them around a clear demand for state multilayered action to improve women’s, and by extension, Guatemalan, reality.

The march, though, is a utopian performance, presenting an alternative reality of inclusive civil participation. One has to ask—what is left at the end of the day? Were these stories incorporated within the collective national (hi)story?
Whose Story?

Figure 40: The—almost empty—Constitutional Plaza, 3:00pm.

The captioned figure reads: Denounce! (Both in the sense of condemn violence and in the particular sense: file a complaint).

The crafted signs read: “Don’t hit me” and “Stop Violence”.
Two hours after the march officially ended I returned to the Plaza to see what—if anything at all—was left behind. The plaza had regained its powerful aura of a detached seat of power. It was painfully empty, of color, of sound, of people. Its emptiness marked the void of vibrant civil participation. This emptiness was interrupted by occasional passers-by, crossing the Plaza on their way to a different destination. The crowd of activists and the public that joined them had already left, the alternative plaza seemed to have never existed, only the youths’ creative call for civic participation was left behind, catching the eyes of the occasional passers-by.

Documenting women’s participation during the ten years of spring and their subsequent political persecution, Ana Silvia Monzón (2011:159) writes:

This new dark age of authoritarianism cut the wings of the butterflies of 44, but the seeds of the “spring” remained in the minds of girls and young women who, years later, recuperate the legacy of their grandmothers, mothers, aunts and sisters.

Those girls and young women are the same ones who organized and led the 2010 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women’s march. They are also the ones who made sure that the next generations, girls and boys, will be part of this legacy, remember it, and have evidence to invent it “in the most positive way possible,” if needed.

In the next chapter I leave the march to visit the sites in which women and youth learn to understand themselves as rights worthy political subjects.
Chapter 5: Make It Right

_Y así me nació la conciencia_ (Rigoberta Menchu)\(^{217}\)

_We need to start by comprehending that we have the right to have rights, and that the first right is to live life free of violence._ (Sandra Morán, Sector Mujer).

One day at the end on June 2010, I had some time between pre-planned interviews so I stopped by one of the NGO offices to pick up some materials. While talking to the receptionist, a woman I met at the entrance followed me to the main office and asked if there was anything she could help with. The receptionist, familiar with my research interest, encouraged me to interview the woman, and the woman, Isabella, was more than happy to be interviewed.

Isabella is an activist and an employee of this organization, whose looks attest to her complicated life history. At the beginning of the interview she was not very responsive and I decided not to impose, but to talk to her briefly, as it was obviously important to her to speak, and then I would leave. I finished the interview quite fast and then we sat and chatted for a while. Before I left she suggested that she tell me “how she got involved with the organization.” I agreed and turned the recorder back on.

Isabella had always been a social activist, and at some point had to leave the country and, like many others, returned when the political situation improved. One morning, back in Guatemala, as she was doing laundry she heard part of a women’s program on the radio, and

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\(^{217}\) _My Name is Rigoberta Menchu and This is How My Consciousness Was Born_, is the original, Spanish title (1983) of Rigoberta Menchu’s testimonial book titled in English: _I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala_ (1984). The book is dedicated to Alaide Foppa, disappeared in December 1980, as mentioned in chapter 2.
ever since she listened regularly to this radio program, *voces de mujeres* (women’s voices), transmitted by the university radio.\textsuperscript{218} Listening to these daily programs Isabella learned a lot about women’s rights, a concept she was not familiar with earlier. Moreover, the programs always offered information about different activities organized by women’s organizations, and with time, she started to participate in these events. In one of these activities, she was invited to “a women’s meeting” where they welcomed her and promised to teach her about her rights.

At the beginning she did not understand the language and the political level of women’s rights discourse. But she liked the fact that there were many women who listen and support each other, so she stayed, and with time she learned a lot. She learned about her political rights as a citizen and as a woman. When she was introduced to feminism, she realized that she had been a feminist since she was very young.

Eleven years later, she sees herself as a different woman. She knows her rights and she knows where to look for support, which gives her a lot of strength. It gives her power to help herself as well as other women.

To demonstrate this, she told me another “little story”: One day when she returned home, her son was beating his wife, which was not an uncommon thing, though he was particularly harsh that day. Isabella ran outside to look for help, and saw two policemen at

\textsuperscript{218} The radio program *Voces de Mujeres* started July 12, 1993 and is still broadcast. Some of the new generation of activists grew up listening to it with their mothers. Nowadays it also has a Facebook page. It serves as an alternative communication space that brings forward voices of women of different professions, identities, and life experiences, and that celebrates women’s lives. It publicizes and promotes local events and publications relevant to the movement, thus it has an important role in creating a (sense of) community. It also encourages listeners to participate in the broadcast itself.
the street corner, so she asked them to come home with her and help restrain her son. The policemen refused, saying they had to stay on that street corner.

Looking at this woman, one would have assumed she’d returned home or look for help elsewhere. But… no. Isabella told them that she works for a human rights organization; that she knows the law; that they have to come with her and if they refused, she would file a complaint against them. This short statement was sufficient to make the policemen leave the street corner and go to help her.

“This is a story with a good ending,” I said. And Isabella responded, “Yes, but only because of the organization. It gives me power, I know my rights. A woman needs to know her rights to demand them.”

Isabella’s “little stories” unfold an account of transformation, in which a relatively oppressed individual embraces group affiliation and a political identity in order to break free. Following her participation in the training Isabella not only learned new vocabulary and ideas, but began to understand herself as a woman-being. First, she started to self-identify as a feminist, and later, she practiced it by choosing her daughter-in-law over her son, illustrating that “a real change will start with ourselves and in our family” (Evelyn Morales, Tierra Viva). Moreover, she was not only familiarized with the concept of human rights, but embraced the identity of a rights-worthy citizen. As such, she now understands state agents as civil servants, whose job is to protect and help her, in this case the policemen whom, as a former exile, she might have been reluctant to approach in the past. The transformation she went through is further emphasized by the fact that when the policemen refused to help, she
demanded their help and threatened them, using her knowledge of her rights as a citizen and a woman, and her right to demand those rights.

How does an individual who was subjected to human rights violations become a (women’s) human rights advocate?

If you ask Isabella, it is “only because of the organization.” The particular organization she is referring to is Sector de Mujeres and Isabella participated in their Escuela de Formación Política (School of Political Formation/Education). Such procesos de formación or educational processes create new identifications through which activists learn to understand themselves (Nelson 1999:5), and are offered by several Guatemalan women’s organizations and alliances in varied levels, lengths, and intensity. Becoming informed (of one’s rights), is at the center of a formation process and crucial for any further social or self-transformation. These educational processes are complemented with collective participatory activities, such as the March, where people are able to exercise, demonstrate and reaffirm these rights. In the previous chapters I discussed and illustrated how “transformed individuals,” women-beings, can transform the social spaces and structures that shape their lives. In this chapter, I leave the realm of public manifestation and step to the back stage, where these prolonged procesos de formación that transform marginalized individuals into actors of and advocators of change take place.

To explore the complexity of these processes, also known as (Feminist) Popular/Radical Education (Fink, 1992; Gore, 1993; Kane 2001, 2010; Manicom and Walters, 2012; Nadeau, 1996; Plantenga, 2012; Walters and Manicom, 1996), I draw on a

\[219\] For more information about la Escuela de Formación Política see: Cabrera 2009:47-48 and Sector’s website: http://www.sectordemujeres.org.gt/que-hacemos/2550-2/
range of sources.\textsuperscript{220} I start with a “little” story of an individual activist, Isabella, whose account illustrates the potent transition one can go through. Following, I frame the local \textit{procesos de formación} within a long Latin American (and to a lesser extent, global) tradition of (feminist) popular education. To locally explore these processes I turn to look at interviews with activists who deliver workshops on behalf of the organizations Actoras de cambio, CODEFEM, Colectivo Nazareth and my participant observation in workshops delivered by Colectivo Nazareth in Ciudad Peronia. Another, central source is a booklet produced by a Guatemalan women’s coalition as supporting material for women’s workshops: “\textit{Derechos Humanos de las Humanas}” (Women’s Human Rights). Bringing these sources together, I claim that women are informed (of their rights) in a mode that celebrates their diversity and encourages them to see themselves as actors of change.

\textbf{(Feminist) Popular Education}

In Spanish and Portuguese, explains Liam Kane, the word \textit{popular} means “of the people,” and has strong class connotations, referring to “poor” or “ordinary” people.\textsuperscript{221} Popular education refers to educational practices that aim to bring about progressive social change, in favor of “these people” (2010:277). Strongly influenced by the writings of Paulo Freire (1970), popular education aims to promote critical thinking, enable people to become “subjects” of change themselves, not followers of leaders, and is linked to action for change. Popular education’s principles were adopted and radicalized by thousands of popular grassroots organizations and movements, which emerged all over Latin America in the 1970s.

\textsuperscript{220} Similar discourses are found under: Transformative Education (Hansman and Kollins Wright, 2009; Mezirow, 2009; Taylor, 2009), and Human Rights Education (Gierycz, 1997, Dow et al., 1997).

\textsuperscript{221} Unlike in English, “popular” does not mean "desired by all," but rather the opposite—"of the poor." For further discussion about the specificities of popular education see Kane 2001:8-9.
and 1980s, and in the 1990s, it expanded its concern to gender and ethnicity, not just class (Kane 2010:277).  

Popular education, claims Kane, is based on the belief that all people possess important knowledge arising from their own particular experiences and that education should consist of a dialogue between these different sets of knowledge. Popular educators, thus, stimulate dialogue, debate and analysis, based on individuals’ own experiences and through the use of a participatory educational methodology (Kane 2010:277); they encourage political analysis of problems and promote organized action for change (279). Since popular education contributes not only to the formation of a social consciousness of the individual but also to the organization and construction of society, it is viewed in Latin America as an important process for the building of social movements (Fink 1992:182).

Feminist popular education combines ideas of feminism with theories of popular education (Walters and Manicom 1996). In addressing women’s oppression, feminist pedagogy operates from the assumption that the status quo must change (Walters 1996:33). Different feminist scholars discuss two central dimensions in popular education: pedagogic and political (Fink 1992), instructional and social vision (Gore 1993). However, the fact that they are intertwined, claim Walters and Manicom (1996:7) is what makes popular education distinctive. The pedagogical choices implement the political objectives, while the political objectives motivate the pedagogical choices. While critical pedagogy in general aims to

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222 For more about the historical development of popular education in Latin America, see Kane 2001:26-29.
223 The dominant idea of what constitutes knowledge (scientific, academic, and technical knowledge) is seen as corresponding to the particular interests of the dominant classes. In placing little or no value on knowledge acquired through the experience of belonging to a different class or cultural reality (usually called ignorance) the dominant class has no conception of the cultural world of other classes (Kane 2001:15).
transform the position of the oppressed, feminist pedagogy extends this with a particular focus on improving the position of women (Walters 1996:28).

It is complicated to define what feminist pedagogy is in practice, as it responds to specific political, economic, and social contexts in various time periods, and since people approach it from different ideological perspectives (Kane 2010:278-9). Further, Freire himself warns that his work should not be turned into a “Freirien methodology.” Rather he stresses that educators, together with their own learners, should recreate their ideas within their own context, and develop their own principles based on “real life” facilitation combined with critical personal qualities, particular skills, and talents, political values, and dreams (Plantenga 2012:26).

In this chapter I focus on several methodologies and tools used in formation processes in Guatemala. I first discuss how drawing on participants’ particular experiences, in a respectful, nurturing mode that acknowledges diversity, assists in generating a sense of self-esteem and self-worth among participants. In the process I also emphasize the fundamental role of the moderator, the group, and the space in which the workshop takes place, for the process. I then look at participatory methods that not only facilitate knowledge comprehension, but also draw connections between individuals’ experiences, assisting in understanding one’s difficulties in relation to greater social powers. Finally, I look at the ways in which individuals with a greater sense of self-worth, and a greater capacity for critical thinking, become, themselves, “subjects” of change.

For further analysis of feminist popular education see Walters and Manicom 1996, Manicom and Walters 2012.
In Search of (in)Formation

Procesos de formación, or formation (education) processes, I realized when I began to engage with women’s groups, are fundamental for the transformation process. My personal experience facilitating similar workshop on behalf of the Rape Crisis Center in Jerusalem further generated my interest in participating/observing such trainings. However, many of the workshops took place in rural areas and/or in various Mayan languages, often delivered by local activists trained by the organizations in the capital. As I was based in the city and my language proficiency was limited to a few words in kaqchikel (one of the more common Mayan languages), my ability to participate was limited. Further, these processes often lasted a year or more of monthly meetings that I was not able to commit to. Instead I conducted interviews with women-activists who deliver workshops on behalf of Actoras de cambio, CICAM, CODEFEM, ecap, Lesbirada, Sector de Mujer, Tierra Viva, and UNAMG. Considering the different nature of the target population and the organization’s emphasis—urban and rural youth, sexual minorities, midwives, survivors of state sexual violence—I got a better sense of the methods and rational behind such processes than of one complete process from the perspective of both moderators and participants.

In March 2010 I participated in a well-attended public activity organized by a coalition of women’s organizations. A conversation that started in a long bathroom line-up evolved to an invitation to visit Colectivo Nazareth, a women’s collective located in Ciudad Peronia. The collective, they told me, was established in 1990’s by a group of local women supported by the church (hence the religious name). A few years later, they began to

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226 As I mentioned earlier, I had traveled to the more rural areas on my own before. However, joining a team that travels to rural areas added to their work load, as I needed to be included in their travel and accommodation arrangements. And, while not necessary, they would have felt the need to care, accompany, and even entertain me, during the visit. While I was invited to join by two organizations, I perceived it as mere generous gestures.
collaborate with and operate through the municipality of Villa Nueva, and eventually, in 2001, were put in contact with UNAMG.

Ciudad Peronia, I learned two weeks later, is centrally located north of Villa Nueva (one of the municipalities composing the AMG), west of Guatemala City, and south of Mixco (another AMG municipality), and it is not well connected transit-wise, turning it into a remote urban community in the very center of the AMG. It was founded in the 1980’s by groups of internal migrants who came to the city to escape state oppression and economic struggles, and is known as a “red zone,” i.e. notoriously poor and highly dangerous. While the zones where I usually worked in the Capital were quite dissimilar from each other, they were all part of a planned modern urban setting. The situation in Ciudad Peronia, I discovered, is very different. To get there one needs to get off the bus half way to Guatemala City and travel on a series of microbuses. The area I ended up visiting was a gated community on top of a dry hill, with dense, disorganized houses, built out of salvaged construction materials, and with limited access to water and sanitation. With no grid or any other structure I could follow, it was practically impossible to find the house. Communication with the collective’s members was further complicated because the cell phone of the member I communicated with was stolen the day before. When I did not arrive, several of the collective’s members went on a search mission and found me on the other end of the community.

Thus, I was not surprised that their office looked very different from the ones I had visited in the capital. No receptionist, guard, not even a real gate waited for us. Unlike other spaces, it had a room dedicated for child-care, provided by the group for women participating in their workshops. The inside of the house was decorated with many posters and other
educational and political material related to the Guatemalan women’s movement at large, and especially to UNAMG, with which they are directly affiliated. A huge rally banner featuring the current UNAMG campaign: “For us, sexual violence is a Crime. We did not forget and will not be silenced,” was hung as a second layer on top of other materials. Unlike other UNAMG related materials, this banner had an additional caption: “Ciudad Peronia, Villa Nueva,” marking it as specifically theirs as well as marking their relation with UNAMG.

After a short tour in the house, we all—seven of the collective’s members, founders, veterans, young new members, and myself—sat for a group interview in the main room. Initially I assumed that I would speak with one or two of the members, but they seemed more comfortable having each other’s support, and I thought it would be interesting to see how they saw themselves as a collective. The interview indeed had an interesting dynamic where most questions (excluding the basic information ones) were answered by each and every member, complementing and building on each other’s responses. They run two training programs in the community, one for women, and the other for youth (boys and girls). Each program lasts six months and includes six theme-based workshops. Upon completion, participants are awarded a diplomado (graduating certificate) and, like Carin, who recently graduated the youth program, can join the collective and take an active part as a facilitator. Other members were originally trained by UNAMG. As members, they all take turns in administrating the different roles required for a workshop: facilitating, child care, taking notes, and special activities.

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226 Except for the first meeting, the two programs were rather different. The adults program included: Self-esteem, inequalities, citizenship, Legislation in favor of women’s rights, organizational processes, political consciousness. The youth program covered: self-esteem, rights and obligations, dating and chastity, responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive health, and prevention of alcohol and drug abuse.

227 One such diplomado awarded to one of the founding members was hanged on the wall (see figure 42).
Figure 41: UNAMG organizational and mission statement.

Figure 42: UNAMG graduation certificate.

Figure 43: UNAMG’s Chapter in Ciudad Peronia.
Following our group conversation it was agreed that I would come to participate in the next few workshops, usually taking place on consecutive days in the same weekend. As the opening ones took place during the previous weekend, the first workshops I attended took place almost a month later. Unfortunately, the third round was supposed to take place a day after the tropical storm Agatha hit the area, and I was never able to return. Having participated only in one meeting of each group I was not able to establish relations with the participants and my point of view remained focused on the facilitator’s perspective, with several insights by facilitators recounting their experiences as participants. It also means that I was able to observe only two themes, related to the earlier stages of the program, and less to the political formation that most of the adults program revolves around. In order to get a more complete understanding of the program, I incorporate into this chapter a workshop booklet created by a coalition of local organizations.

Derechos Humanos de las Humanas

_Derechos humanos de las Humanas_, (Women’s Human Rights or Rights of Female Humans, _dhdlh_) is a booklet created by Coalición Justicia constitucional para las mujeres en Guatemala (Constitutional Justice Coalition for Women in Guatemala) as supporting material for women’s workshops on the topic of women’s human rights. The _dhdlh_ is unique as it is both a tool for a workshop, and a portrayal of a made up workshop in which a variety of principals and methods of feminist popular education are demonstrated, together with leading themes on the topic of women’s human rights.

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228 For a while the whole area was declared as a disaster zone, and by the time things stabilized I mostly worked with the coordinadora.
229 The coalition includes organizations such as CALDH, CICAM, CODEFEM.
MAKE IT RIGHT

I chose to use the *dhdlh* booklet as a tool created by and for facilitators, bearing in mind that as a guideline it represents a vision of the future they aim for, not the present situation. Further, being a portrayal of a full, completed formation process, it helps me bridge the gaps in my own knowledge of these processes. Obviously, it is not a perfect portrayal of a women’s rights workshop, but it does outline the intentions and hopes these workshops set out to meet.

*dhdlh* is an idealistic, even utopian, text. Its cover features the workshop’s participants in the spotlight, on a theater’s stage, in front of local audience, hinting that the booklet represents a performance of a workshop. Being presented as a performance clarifies that the text does not mean to veil differences, but to offer—to facilitators and participants—a vision in the present of an alternative future. The text not only delivers relevant information, but also insists on ideas of diversity and agency. It features individuals of different ages, ethnicities and gender, with different life experiences and levels of knowledge, thus illustrating that the category of women is not homogenous. The practice of *versión popular* (popular version), i.e. cartoon-based with a simplified language, not only emphasizes diversity of knowledge levels, but also, in practice, makes the *dhdlh* more accessible. Further the text is in relatively simple Spanish, again, allowing greater accessibility, and the pages are marked in both Mayan and Arabic numbers, hinting at greater inclusiveness. Further, this communicates the ongoing sense that diversity should be respected, that knowledge is not limited for a limited few but can be accessed by all, the

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230 I often asked facilitators if they use this text—or others—in their workshops. It seems that for most facilitators such booklets serve as a guidelines for facilitators, not materials for participants, especially since each group (not only topic, but the human component) calls for different methods.

231 It is important to remember, the booklet represent a materialization of knowledge created by local organizations about several processes that were initiated by women’s organizations and through a collaboration between local and international organizations. In itself, thus, it is an accomplishment.
potential for participants’ transformation, and the strength of coming together and organizing, emphasizes individual’s agency.

The performed story is clearly imagined, and takes place in a made-up Guatemalan village, inhabited by members of different Guatemalan ethnic groups, which usually do not reside together in the same village/municipality. It opens with what we can assume to be a casual meeting of three women by the *pila*, the communal laundry facility. The conversation starts around the problem of lack of reliable running water, and authorities’ inaction on the matter. While Doña Chayo (35, Garifuna) and Doña Clemen (50, Ladina) discuss how the situation complicates their daily routine, Florentina (25, Maya) explains that reliable access to clean water is a basic human right. Anita (11) joins the conversation and helps Florentina further explains what human rights are, and when Josué (16), passes by, he helps expand the conversation about the historical—global and local—development of human rights and human rights violations. The last person that joins this improvised conversation is the village teacher, Patty (40, Ladina), who adds another layer of knowledge to the conversation.

Through the developing conversation it becomes clearer that the problems they deal with go much beyond themselves as individuals, beyond their village, and beyond their country. Throughout the conversation new concepts are introduced, and the participants in the workshop are encouraged to ask and familiarized themselves with these issues. An important level of the conversation revolves around the participants’ doubts about the utility of human rights, a constant emphasis that knowing one’s right is not enough, and the need for individuals’ demands for the enactment of these rights. It is also made clear that participants

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232 The participants’ ethnic affiliation is not stated, but it is indicated through their clothes. It is harder to determine the ethnic identity of the youth, which in a way may reflect the fact that local youth are less related to cultural traits or at least harder to classify based on mere looks.
Figure 44: The workshop is presented as a stages performance, and “the cast”. Reprinted with kind permission

Buenos días queridos amigas. ¿Verás? Nos da tiempo de terminar de lavar la ropa y sacar la tarea, antes de que corte el agua.

¿Qué buenos días van a ser? Este problema del agua ya me tiene abrumado, y todos los que llegan a la Muni, cuando están en campaña, dicen que lo van a solucionar y nos pintan todo bonito pero no dicen cómo lo van a solucionar, y después no cumplen, por eso a mí no me dan ganas de ir a votar.

Buenos días

Figure 45: Meeting by the communal Pila. Reprinted with kind permission.
come to the discussion with different views; the most notable is Doña Clemen, portrayed as antagonistic. Although they all find the conversation interesting, Doña Chayo and Doña Clemen need to leave to attend their other housework, and the whole group decides to set a meeting at the school to continue the conversation.

The second meeting is preplanned and takes place in a classroom. Following Anita’s request, it focuses more on women’s human rights. They account for different global, historical, and contemporary violations of women’s rights and struggles to secure rights. A special focus is given to international conventions in favor of women's rights, and the Guatemalan legislation in favor of women’s rights that resulted from this international legislation over the past few years including laws, state agencies and women’s organization. As the workshop develops, the women’s participation grows—they share more of their experiences and knowledge with the group, develop a (wider) political understanding of the problem, and develop an interest in organizing and acting to change the situation. Like in the first part of the workshop, the women are reminded a few times that frequently individuals need to demand their rights.

“Experienced” Knowledge
Freire critiqued conventional, conservative approaches to education, known as “the banking model,” in which the learner is viewed as an empty account to be filled by the teacher (Freire 1970:53). Because people inhabit different social realities, the knowledge they acquire is different. While people tend to accept uncritically what they experience, they also have the ability to step back from and reflect on experience. Freire calls this process “critical consciousness” and explains that it is never fully achieved, but rather is an ongoing process of “becoming” (Freire 1970:65, Kane 2001:37).
Popular education, following Freire, is based on the belief that all people possess important knowledge arising from their own particular experiences and that every educational process should start from where people are at (Kane 2010:277-8). The learners are seen as active participants whose experience is valued in the process of learning (Paulsen 2006:30). Furthermore, claims Denise Nadeau, the mechanisms of oppression in a society are reproduced and grounded in daily relationships; to counter the internalization of oppression or dominance, educators must first look to daily life and uncover how these mechanisms operate there (1996:53).

In Latin America, the point of departure for feminist popular education is the cotidiano, or “daily lived experience” i.e. the daily activities of women that revolve around family, domestic work and community. For popular education to be effective for women, it must start with concrete reference to these realms of life, rather than with abstracted external ideologies (Walters 1996:29). Such reasoning was explained by Ana-Maria, a K’iché Maya woman who facilitates workshops in rural areas as part of her work in CODEFEM, a [self-identified] feminist organization:

Feminism has a clear agenda in relation to sexuality, which has great impact in relation to religion. So how do you bring this to the community, can you tell them to stop following the church? You can't do it, because in many places the church did a lot for the community. You need to find the fine balance in order to get to people. **This is why we try to have everything coming from the women; their problems, their difficulties, their challenges. They talk about their issues and we help to name them.** (My emphasis)

Following this notion, the idealistic representation of a women’s workshop, the dhdlh, places women’s cotidiano as a point of departure. The storyline starts with a group of local women gather by the communal pila to do their household laundry. One of the participants, Doña Chayo, expresses her concern that the water supply will be stopped before washing is
done (Coalición 2008:9-10). From this very point, their formation in the imagined workshop begins.

A similar experience was shared with me in my first visit in Ciudad Peronia. Once we finally arrived the office of Colectivo Nazareth, Dora, a member of the collective, opened the house main water line and explained:

The water is a great problem. Because electricity is expensive, we don't have water all day; or ... one day yes, one day no. Sometimes the light goes for two-three hours, and the water for two days. Sometimes we don't have drinking water.

The fundamental issue of water insecurity sets the stage for the life conditions of the women in Ciudad Peronia, in relation to social marginality and state negligence. This basic insecurity further complicates the everyday experience of women, as the ones usually in charge of maintaining the household. The issue of water shortages, is thus a real, pressing problem that women in peripheral areas can relate to emotionally and intellectually; they can share their own experiences and feelings and be part of the conversation.

The authors of dhdlh emphasize this very point. The joint experiences of limited water supply, introduced by Doña Chayo, is further developed by Doña Clemen, and that indicates that it is an ongoing problem that every new municipal administration promises to fix but ends up doing nothing about. Based on this experience, Doña Clemen lost interest in taking part in the democratic process. This conversation illustrates how inviting women to share their own experiences allows them to participate in a conversation from a knowledgeable standpoint. Once this everyday experience of water shortage is suggested as a topic for discussion, it gains more importance as a public issue. In her short account, Doña Clemen starts in the cotidiano to illustrate how mechanisms of oppression in a society are reproduced and grounded in daily relationships. The lack of water makes women's
experience—laundry—a more challenging endeavor; the lack of official response affects women's appreciation of the democratic process and their place as valuable, rights-worthy citizens. Doña Clemen's account invites the question whether it would have been solved faster had it involved men's work? How has this avoidance influenced women's participation in the election process, and how has their non-participation influenced the probability that the problem will ever be solved?

In a reality in which women’s perspectives are actively silenced, unheard, or difficult to articulate, inviting them to share their experiences, to tell their stories, has a transforming impact (Manicom and Walters 2012:11). Through this practice, some women feel for the first time that they know something valuable, that they can contribute to the conversation and to the process of learning; that their experience—thus their existence—in the world, is valued. Sharing makes them feel important; explains one of Finks’ interviewees, “they feel like they’ve been taken into account, that as human beings they’ve mattered” (Fink 1992:179).

Starting with women’s everyday lived experience is thus helpful in engaging women in conversations in which they feel they can contribute to and are passionate about. However, focusing on such a sense of “women’s experience” may imply an essentialist women’s role. It is a great challenge, then, for facilitators to reach out to women while asserting that “the category ‘women’ is not homogenous, that it is socially constructed and that there are many ways of being a woman” (Walters and Manicom 1996:14-15). To reflect a greater variety of women’s experiences, even in a small village, the dhdlh’ authors feature participants of different ethnicity, age, and gender. Further, they clarify that they have a different cotidiano: we meet Doña Chayo, Doña Clemen, and Florentina in relation to

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233 For a wider discussion about essentialism in feminist pedagogy, see Gore 1993: 77.
housework, (doing laundry), while Patty, the village teacher, returns from her job at school (Coalición 2008:18).

Another key difference between participants is levels of knowledge and literacy. The fact that the dhdlh’s booklet is presented in a versión popular (popular version), i.e. in a simplified language and illustrations, both reminds us that people have different levels of literacy and facilitates the comprehension of individuals with lower levels of literacy. But literacy is not the only issue. Concepts, especially legal terminology, are framed and reframed within historical and ideological contexts that alienate many of the women-participants. To own these words, specialists’ legal language should be demystified, translated into terms that can be understood by women with minimal schooling. Clarifying concepts is not always enough, and it is thus important to create an environment in which participants feel comfortable to ask questions, a practice emphasized in the dhdlh. The participants are not only featured asking questions—and receiving simple, respectful responses by different group members—but are also featured when they begin to own the same concepts they were not familiar with.

For instance, when Florentina mentions the constitutional articles meant to prevent discrimination, Doña Clemen protests that they are using weird words that only the well-read-participants understand. Josué then explains that:

Discrimination is when a person’s dignity is not respected, when the person is seen as worthless, when a person is not allowed to attend school, not allowed to speak their language, not allowed to enter some places, or is looked down ... in a word, they are not treated as people or human beings. (Coalición 2008:26)

A few pages later, when discussing mistreatment of women, Doña Clemen starts to use the new concept and states: “this is discrimination's pretext” (Coalición 2008: 34).
Overall, the *dhdlh* authors clarify that there are terms that not all participants understand, yet they challenge the idea that certain kinds of knowledge are limited to specific people. The other way around, the reader learns that by asking one does not mark themselves as ignorant, but is rewarded with a fair answer. We also learn that legal concepts are comprehensible, and even people with minimal schooling can learn to use them. A similar process was mentioned by Isabella in our conversation. When she first joined the organization, she told me, she did not understand the language and the political level of women’s-rights discourse. But with time she learned a lot about her political rights. This learning was internalized: she learned to own these concepts and use them publicly in order to protect other women’s rights.

When differences are addressed and respected, it allows the participants first, to be able to fully engage with the process (Walters and Manicom 1996:18), second, for them to have a better understanding of how the process of oppression works (Plantenga 2012:27), and
last, to make sure these structures are not reinforced and perpetuated (Walters 1996: 31). Although the meaning of the featured differences is not explicitly discussed in the *dhdllh* text, by not veiling such differences under “solidarity” and “sisterhood” (Plantenga 2012:27), the authors invites a discussion about the connection between participants' personal traits and their access to knowledge and power.

Another challenge regarding the *cotidiano*, is that it may promote gender roles and values that the workshop has little sympathy with. However considering that women may already have a low sense of self-esteem, it is important to respect the traditional roles which may be their only source of pride and use them to challenge participants to think about how things could be different (Kane 2001:122). In their workshops, explained Dora and Maria-Elena of Colectivo Nazareth, they emphasize that both parents (assuming that the women is working outside of home) have similar responsibilities for raising their children and maintaining the household, and they encourage the participants to teach their children, boys and girls, to take part in the household chores. At the same time, they respect the fact that women are still the primary care givers and try to facilitate their participation (not condition it) by providing child care. According to Maria Elena:

> Usually the women have children, so they bring them along. We gather the kids in one of the rooms and we play with them and teach them similar things to what is said in the workshop, just with simple words and drawings. This way they can learn, and more important, it allows their mother to learn. We also give them some refreshments. It’s a way to encourage women to come.

In a sociopolitical situation where many women learn to understand themselves as insignificant, bringing forward women's everyday experiences as worthy of discussion can have transformative implications. It allows women to connect emotionally and intellectually to a conversation, and feel, maybe for the first time, that they can make a real contribution to
a general conversation; that their life experience is valuable in the world. It invites women to feel knowledgeable and important, and that their challenges (like their lives) are worthy of a serious conversation. A careful facilitation, that does not negate their everyday (traditional) daily practices, and at the same time does not feature it as the only possibility, helps nurture a sense of self-value, acknowledge differences in a non-moralistic way, and invites awareness for other optional life experiences.234

The moderators, thus, have a highly important role in the process' success. In general, moderators can be external to the group, like Ana-Maria (CODEFEM) and Lidu (actoras de cambio) mentioned below, or emerge “organically” from the community, i.e. community members who are prepared to work on the local level as educators, such as Colectivo Naserath. Some organizations, such as Tierra viva, seek to train “women-leaders,” to facilitate workshops in their own communities. External facilitators are usually urban, educated middle class women, some, but not all, are Indigenous. Local moderators are usually trained by an organization external to the community, and are called promotora (promoter/ facilitator).235 The training complies with the idea that knowledge should not remain the domain of a privileged minority. Through this training process, members of marginalized social sectors gain both knowledge and skills that allow them to take the future into their hands.

A local promotora can have a better understanding of the social situation in which she works and communicate more easily with the participants. Speaking the local language helps, of course, claimed Ana-Maria (CODEFEM), but according to Fink, it is also important to use

234 In Ciudad Peronia there was an extensive use of the expression autoestima (self-esteem). The first workshop in each series (youth and women) is dedicated to autoestima.
235 See for example Hansman and Kollins Wright's work on training legal promoters in Bolivia.
the same vocabulary level as the participants. Such practice invites the later to speak—unlike
the use of high language which makes participants feel they don't have the right words to
participate in the conversation (1992:179). Further, a local *promotora* by the mere fact that
she was trained and became a leading figure; becomes a source of inspiration for the people
she is working with, inspiring others in their community to learn more about a specific topic
or work towards leadership positions in the community.

External facilitators’ different access levels to knowledge and power are added to the
variation among participants. One of their challenges, claims Jennifer Gore, is to exercise
“authority with” rather than “authority over” in order to “empower” their students and
themselves (1993:68). This is indeed a great challenge. Ana-Maria, while emphasizing her
K’iché Maya identity also identifies herself as “feminist, Indigenous, educated, women,” i.e.,
more knowledgeable, educated, and less conservative than the rural women she works with.
For Lidu, a Non-Indigenous woman who delivers workshops in rural Indigenous
communities on behalf of *actoras de cambio*, the power relations are more present:

Clearly there is a power relation between us and them. It is us who constantly work,
think, and develop the topic, but we don't want to come and force dynamics on the
women. We are trying to create collective consultations and conversations, for us to
be able to grow together, to construct a joint project.

An important feature of popular education is the egalitarian sense of learning, in
which the participants themselves contribute their own experience to generate new
knowledge. A good moderator, then, nurtures the participants' sense that they are
knowledgeable and important enough to determine what they wish to talk about, and
encourage participants to develop along their own unique paths. Ana-Maria (CODEFEM)
illustrated:
We have seen cases when we arrive the community and the women say, “no, stop.’ If you came here to work on this theme with us, we do not accept you. We don't want to work on this theme, we want to develop a project.” And ... I like it. I like it because it shows us how far we went. And we accept it and work with the group on the projects they want to develop.

Putting ones’ agenda aside is not a simple practice, yet it reflects that the moderator indeed believes in the participants’ abilities and respects them as the protagonists of their own lives. Considering the power relations always built into these relationships, such an act of stepping back, described by Ana-Maria can be highly impactful on participants self-esteem.

In order to share their experiences and reflections participants need to feel comfortable and safe. As I have illustrated above, facilitators and promotoras strive to create a sense of a safe space and a climate of respect and inclusion, a sense that it is acceptable for participants to do only what feels right for them (Manicom and Walters 1996:10, Nadeau 1996:57). Much of such sense is dependent on the group and space where the workshop takes place.

To develop skills traditionally reserved for men, such as public speaking and leadership, all-women groups provide a more effective starting point (Fink 1992:177). Further, given the responsibilities of most women for family care and household management, a separated time and place, explain Walters and Manicom, allows for reflection that helps women to understand social relations from a broader perspective (1996:20-21). Isolation, explains Fink, leads women to blame family hardship on themselves or their spouse. The chance to break out of the daily routine, to sit down on a regular basis with other women and community members with similar burdens, helps women recognize that they are not alone, that their problems are shared, and upon further analysis, that the root causes go
beyond individual fault or responsibility. Hence, programs often become a key meeting place for women, offering support and a sense of community, and as such, the separate space in itself, contributes to the process it offers.

As I mentioned earlier, Colectivo Nazareth started as a church supported women’s group in the 1990s and became part of UNAMG only in 2001. Their creation story clarifies that the most important cause was not the group orientation, but the maintenance of the group, as it was an important source of support to all its members.

A telling example of the groups’ ability—as a group—to support and nurture its members took place during the collective interview I held with few of the members. One of the group's founders shared a story of her resistance to her father's physical abuse. The story was then followed by an account of one of the colectivo members about her decision to leave her partner who psychologically abused her and the great debt she owes the group, for supporting her through the process. Towards the end of her account she said: …

And I want to thank you all again, for having me as part of the group. I have suffered a lot. There is a lot of pain in me, but participation allowed me to be better, not well, but better; to talk to other people, to share with people with similar issues, it helped me cover the pain. I suffered a lot, but now I enter a new world where I can value myself. I was very down, but I will go up.

While being a painful account, it also highlighted the support these women are able to give each other, first by being a group of women, and further, by being trained promotoras.

To summarize, Maria-Elena stated:

The women in the adult group support each other, but we can also make a real difference in the lives of the youth, their children, and grandchildren.

Dedicating a separate space for workshops is thus essential for their success, yet grounding the process of social transformation in a specific space generates difficulties for
that same process. Several of the activists I talked to mention men’s objection to women’s participation in such process. Olga Paz (ecap), mentioned that men often come with their partners, wanting to know what exactly is done “there.” Others, explained Dora (Colectivo Nazareth), viewing the space as a threat to the hierarchical social structure of the household, simply prohibit women’s participation, or even came to physically drag her home. One way to overcome objection is to incorporate men in their activities, or at least, as done by organizations like CICAM, Tierra Viva, UNAMG (and by extension, Colectivo Nazareth) to offer youth (boys and girls), programs.

Considering many women’s daily reality of marginality and oppression, within their households and in the greater context of their community (and state), a safe, nurturing and supportive space is needed. In such an environment women began to understand their place in the world in relation to dignity, self-worth, and self-esteem. It is not surprising, then that the opening workshop Colectivo Nazareth offers as part of their youth and women’s programs is titled “Self-esteem.”

**Doing (Popular) Education**

Popular education rejects the *banking model*, i.e. the idea that learner needs be filled with knowledge by the educator, but not the idea that participants will acquire new knowledge in the process of education. This new knowledge is created in two main ways: first, in the process of dialogue between different sets of experiences brought into the conversation by the participants, and second, through experiences that take place in workshops. In both cases the learning is based on the participants’ experience, and done through participatory methods. Based on this knowledge, popular educators stimulate dialogue, debate and analysis (Kane 2010:277). The dialogue helps to establish the
generative themes that the community deals with. Once these themes are shared, the facilitator needs to find a concrete way of presenting a familiar experience of the core problem back to the group. Posters, plays, photographs, slides, songs can all be used to help focus the attention on the problem. These problem-posing materials are called codes (Hope and Timmel 1996:19).

The purpose of this visual representation explains Kane, is to objectify reality, to enable learners to step back from the immediacy of daily life and observe it from a distance, to reflect on their social situation and their own place within it (2001:40). Once the problem is presented, the participants are invited to describe the reality they see, to hear others' understanding of this same reality, and at times, to be challenged by the facilitator to look at this reality in a different way. This “decoding” process is meant to stimulate the appearance of new perceptions and the development of new knowledge (Freire 1970:96).

The women’s workshop delivered by Colectivo Nazareth that I participated in was the second in the series of six, and was titled “Inequalities.” The stated purpose was “that the participants will know to differentiate inequalities with a gender focus from equal rights and opportunities.” It started with posters illustrating inequalities of class, ethnicity and gender in Guatemala. The moderators reviewed these inequalities and through a discussion with the participants established, women’s (marginalized) position within the different social categories. Then the focus was turned to the differences between men and women, first the physical ones, when participants were invited to tag names of body parts on two human-shaped icons: women and men. Moving from the physical to the social, the moderators, using

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236 Freire explain that he named them “generative” since they have the potential to provoke further themes (1970:83).
237 These were “home-made” posters featuring pictures cut from local magazines.
input from participants, created four separated lists: “how men are” and “what do they do during the day?” How women are?” and “what do they do during the day?” The social (roles) lists were much more far apart than the corporal ones. The section was concluded with the notion that women and men are not similar but they have the same rights and opportunities.

The women then broke to pairs to write how they would like to see the relations between men and women and between women and society. These statements were posted on the wall, and the general group ranked them. The two statements voted by most were: “We don’t want to say that they are bad, nor that they will say that we are stupid and that they will leave us.” And “if we are respected, life could change. Everything can be different.”

The need to be respected, not only self-valued, but also by others, is viewed by the women-participants as the key for an alternative, better future. Such a demand, though, already reflects a sense of self-worth women-participants begin to nurture as a group. Finally, the moderator, based on input from the group, created a joint list of how they would like to see women in society. The 15 line list opens with “be free” and “express ourselves” and closes with “the right to study,” and “the right to say no.” The first set of their “wish list” was a reflection of personal challenges. The second, created through a discussion with the larger group, after the participants had time to reflect on their thoughts in a more intimate setting, is a more generalized, “coded” list. A dialogue, based on different sets of experiences brought into the conversation by the participants and through experiences that take place in workshops was thus the base for creating new knowledge.
Figure 47: Experienced and new knowledge at the “Inequalities” workshop.
Colectivo Nazareth’s youth workshop in which I participated was also the second in the series of six, and titled “Rights and Obligations.” Like the women’s workshop it started with a short introduction to the theme through premade posters listing “rights” and “obligations.” First, the moderator explained the idea of rights and obligation and their importance to society and individuals. As she was explaining the different rights and obligations listed, the moderators invited the youth to ask questions and even contribute more rights and obligations that they believed should be included in the list. Later, we were divided into small groups and asked to choose and discuss among ourselves one right and one obligation that we find most important. Our next activity, still in small groups, was to choose either the right or obligation that we previously discussed and create a short performance based on it. The pieces were then performed to the whole group and followed by a short concluding discussion. The protocol was rather similar to the one practiced in the women’s workshop: new knowledge was created through a group dialogue based on previous and new experiences and acquired in a participatory mode. Yet, this workshop offered an additional interesting twist.

One of the groups chose to enact the first right listed on the board, the right for life. While the earlier discussion about right for life revolved around “women's rights for life” and the state’s obligation to protect it, this group's performance on right for life was in relation to pro-life ideology. In the play, one of the girls got pregnant, and although she was still in school, because it was through her carelessness that she had gotten pregnant (i.e. as they

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238 As it was a youth workshop I avoided taking pictures.
239 Unlike the women’s workshop that I observed, in the youth workshop I was expected to actually participate. As I mentioned in chapter 1, being not married, not a mother and a student often situated me in the youth category.
explained, she was not raped) she decided to have the child and raise him.\textsuperscript{240} The direction taken by the group was unexpected considering colectivo's line on the issue, yet, the \textit{promotora} did not try to balance the statement that the girl has to deal with “the results of her actions,” and the workshop came to its end.

Considering that during the group interview the Colectivo, members identified as feminists and listed “women's rights to decide about their body” as the second most important theme for them (after violence), I found this practice rather surprising. Indeed, one can say that the performing girl actually decided by herself about her body, but since in Guatemala abortion is illegal, other options were not really discussed. The focus was on her responsibility to have the child, but it was not clear how she will support her or what is the level of accountability expected of the similarly “careless” father. Later, when I asked the facilitator about it, she explained that although the colectivo promotes women's rights to decide about their bodies, it was important to allow the youth group to express themselves. Speaking up, she explained, is a harder skill to learn, while knowledge can be acquired later. Meaning, ideologically committed to the idea of facilitating participants' own process of growth, she chose to step back and not give direction to the learning process (Plantenga 2012:39). By doing that, she further nurtured the participants’ sense of self-esteem, and confidence to speak up and participate.

The youth workshop also brings forward the importance of using participants’ actual bodies. Nadeau refers to women’s physical body as the primary site of struggle under global restructuring, and claims that the whole person needs to be involved in the process of transformation (1996:41, 57). Often, thus, facilitators use body work in workshops—meditative breathing, physical movement, and handholding—to fire energy, to ground

\textsuperscript{240} A baby sister of one of the participants was used as the newborn child in the play.
participants in their bodies, to generate mindfulness, and to create a sense of community and levity (Manicom and Walters 2012:11).

Ana-Maria (CODEFEM), for instance, explains:

We get together and start to do body work, to open the emotions. We work energetically with the body, so we do exercises to move all the body, we dance, do massages, play games. For the women to feel safe. … When the emotions are open, the women talk, talk about violence, and we talk about different modes of violence. We talk about the cycle of violence and that if you don't stop it, it will escalate. And also that we have the law to protect us. … but you have to start with the body. You need to work with it.

Women’s bodies are often sites of violence and oppression, and the experienced knowledge marked, scared on them, often internalized as shame, cannot always be shared and presented on paper. Corporal practices such as the ones mentioned by Ana-Maria, help create a stronger sense of safety and community that allows participants to reach in and expose these internalized layers of knowledge. This very practice is transformative, as it turns the body, when supported by other bodies, into a site of struggle, a liberating mechanism. Such experiences, explains Ana-Maria, are then generalized and coded as the cycle of violence. Once coded, participants can observe this reality from distance, to reflect on their own place within the social structure and identify specific elements in it that limit their ability to develop their full human potential. Identifying their challenges in relation to greater structures helps participants to reject shame and other oppressive mechanisms and to embrace a greater sense of self-worth. The next step, familiarizing themselves with legislation and mechanisms in favor of women’s rights marked that they came to see themselves as subjects of rights, and familiarity with such terminology is, as I illustrated with Isabella’s “little story,” a powerful tool that further helps women participants become actors of change.
**Becoming a Collective of Women-Beings**

Unlike “conventional education,” popular education is seen as a tool for social transformation. The belief is that once learners start to share their experiences and to understand these as part of a political structure of oppression they will organize and promote organized action for change. However, people do not necessarily take action once they understand their situation.

Concrete, local-based programs, claims Fink, help individuals escape isolation, strengthen self-confidence and cultural identity, and build individual and group skills; these help to create a sense of community and forge common purpose, but often fail to address adequately the broader issues such as laws, policies, and economic structures that inhibit women’s full contribution to society and national development. In order to increase the capability of participants to comprehend the bigger picture and context in which they function and to prepare people to develop broader strategies and actions that confront obstacles to full participation and equality, it is important to discuss the relationship between the law and socioeconomic development process that keeps women marginalized. Legal rights programs educate women about their rights, redress grievances, and work to change discriminatory legislation and policies (Fink 1992:186-9).

Many such programs take place in Guatemala, meant to enhance women’s political commitments to design strategies to create a more just world. Lidu (actoras de cambio) explains:

> We teach them about the different laws, conventions and rights in order for them to help each other, and [in order for them to] make the state to comply with this legislation.

Similarly, Dora (Colectivo Nazareth) states:
It is important that women will know they have rights and that they need to fight for them.

But how does one teach individuals, especially ones who are survivors of violence, and products of oppressive political structure, to “fight for their rights”? Two members of the collective, Carin, and Juanita, drew further connections between self-esteem (or lack of such), the support of the collective, and the legal knowledge they acquired as means to help themselves and others:

Participating in the diplomado helped me become the woman I am, it helped me let go of the internal fear I had inside, and I learned to value myself as a woman. More than everything I learned by being in the presence of the other members, especially about self-esteem … Now as a young member I know how to support women with low self-esteem and help them elevate it. (Carin, Colectivo)

Now that I learned, and considering my own experience, I show women that we have quite a lot of value. Many women have low self-esteem, and closed in their homes, sometimes they don't know their rights… So now that I have all this knowledge I can help other women step forward. We can also instruct the young women in the community what is good and not good, because we don't want that their future will be similar to their own past. Being knowledgeable, I can help other women, and it makes me happy. (Juanita, Colectivo)

Support and knowledge can help women see themselves as valuable women-beings, and assist others. Once one experience herself as a subject of rights, laws and rights become concrete means to improve (and secure) one’s life. At the same time, considering the local reality, participants learn that these rights need to be demanded of the state. Time and again, the authors of the dhdlh insist on reminding readers, participants and facilitators that rights need to be demanded and fought for.

Soon after Florentina introduces the idea of human rights and the fact that many of these rights, and specifically equality, are part of the Guatemalan constitution, Doña Clemen challenges her, claiming that there is no such equality on the ground. Florentina does not negate her, but explain that: "frequently these rights are not met or are violated, but they exist
and we must fight and organize for their fulfillment!” (Coalición 2008: 12). Similar discussion takes place in relation to international conventions, women’s rights and national legislation. For instance, later, after Patty and Josué introduce the UN as the “world government” that creates different international conventions and treaties, Doña Clemen asks if those are actually followed. Florentina then explains that: “Actually, many are not, but it is important that we get organized and that all the men and women will get involved in these things and get to know these conventions, because we have to demand that our governments comply (Coalición 2008: 23).

Further, women’s individual role in protecting their rights is suggested when the conversation gets to the topic of the law against femicide. Patty and Florentina explain that it requires women to place a complaint with the police. When Doña Clemen says she did not know about that, Florentina responds: “Well all women have a right to know that this law exists and that we can use it and protect life, liberty,
integrity, dignity, protection and equality of all women (Coalición 2008: 49).

In the idealistic performance laid out by the *dhdlh*’ authors, carefully weaving together women’s right to rights, women’s right to know their rights, and women’s responsibility to demand these rights, preferably through an organization, leads to a desired transformation from participants in the workshop into actors of change. In the last scene of *dhdlh*, as the participants are leaving, Doña Clemen, who was staged in the early stages of the text as antagonist, says: “I'm going but I have to say that you made me change my mind, now I realize that human rights are a very good idea and that we must fight for their fulfillment, we'll see Doña Chayo, if we can find a local organization to participate in, and if we don't find one we should found one!”

The “organization,” a collective of people who come together to support each other and promote a joint cause, is marked as fundamental to the process. The collective’s nurturing and supporting role was often mentioned in my conversations with the members of
colectivo Nazareth. Beyond each other, they also drew significant support from their alliance with a UNAMG, a veteran feminist political organization whose presence was announced on each and every wall.

**Women-Beings. porque no es una sola.**
The aim of popular education, explains Kane, is to help the popular classes liberate themselves from oppression; it is intrinsically linked to political action for change. People are encouraged to step back, metaphorically, from their practice, to examine it critically and to identify specific elements in the structure which limit their ability to develop their full human potential. Then, strengthened by this reflective process, to re-engage in action meant to overcome these “limiting situations.” In its turn, the new form of action is subject to the same critical appraisal, in the constant spiral of action-reflection-action that Freire, borrowing from Marx, called “praxis.” It is a process that helps people to explore the dialectical relationship between reflection and action, or theory and practice (2001:10, 42).

Looking at the different segments of formation processes I discuss above through Freire’s framework, we can see how participants learn to think of themselves as valuable women-beings. 241 When women are invited to speak about their everyday experience, it allows them to connect emotionally and intellectually to a conversation, and feel knowledgeable and important. When others listen to them, they feel that their experiences, just like they themselves, are valuable. Careful facilitation, that does not negate their (traditional) daily practices, and at the same time does not feature it as the only possibility,

241 I intentionally avoid the term “empowered.” Although it is prevalent in feminist and popular education discourses, in recent years it was broadly used and drained of clear reference and of its more political transformative meaning (Walters and Manicom 1996:16).
further nurtures a sense of self-value, while inviting them to imagine additional ways they can be valuable in this world.

A separate women’s space allows women to develop skills traditionally reserved for men. When they acquire new skills, such as legal terminology, it validates their sense of self-worth (specialized knowledge is not beyond them), while they can use it to improve their actual lived reality. Moderators, especially local ones, can become a source of inspiration for participants. Women further acknowledge their self-worth when they are encouraged to speak up and against their moderators and to create their own learning path.

Many women’s low-self-esteem and self-worth are frequently related to their isolation and self-blaming for the difficulties they encounter. However, when they listen to others in a women-specific space, they often find similarities between their experiences, and start to see their personal problems as general, derived from a larger system. Through dialogue about these respective experiences, participants develop a wider understanding of the social reality in which they live. The different methods I described above help women participants to establish alternative ways of relating to themselves and others, a new sense of themselves in relation to the system they live in. Looking at representations of the reality in which they live, they learn to understand their place in the society in relation to greater processes. This realization can motivate women participants to weave a collective, alternative, narrative of the relations shaping their life, which help them start to name the problems, give meaning to events at an individual level, and devise modes of action to solve the problems on which they will later reflect.
Strengthened by these reflective processes, women who now understand themselves as political subjects and worthy-beings are expected to engage in action meant to overcome the structures that limits their ability to thrive. Legal mechanisms are situated as an important tool to create such change, but while presented as “their right,” they are also framed as a tool one needs to demand. Hence while human rights and subsequent legal mechanism are presented as fundamental in advancing a more just living reality, such endeavors require, foremost, the agency or “struggle” of organized political subjects.

As I illustrate in chapter 2, while new public and political spaces meant to promote women’s rights were created in the past two decades, their implementation process is still lacking. Educating women that they have rights and the right (and responsibility) to demand these rights is a transformative act, fundamental for the implementation of these rights and a more just society.

Using feminist popular education practices issues of diversity and particular experiences are represented, respected and celebrated. Participants are not diminished to a worthless “mere women” category or reduced to a flat, unified “woman” category. Instead, individuals’ agency to demand their rights and the power of the group as a source of strength and action are emphasized and celebrated, reminding women that they are not sole humans, but a group: or as put by Hilda Morales, “porque no es una sola.”

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Isabella, a former refugee of state violence, a person whose life was deeply affected by violence, found her voice and strength by engaging with an organization. Her participation in women’s organization activities and their formation process not only
informed her of her rights, but formed her as an informed woman and citizen, a woman being. Knowing her rights—and the need to demand them—Isabella now demands her rights of the state and its agents in search of protection for herself and other women. Further, as a woman-being Isabella not only demands her rights from the state, but also regularly participates in symbolically challenging the state’s seat of power from within, armed with a battalion of butterflies.

Figure 51: Isabella in “her” plaza within a Plaza, November 25, 2011.

“This is a story with a good ending,” I said. And Isabella responded, “Yes, but only because of the organization. It gives me power, I know my rights. A woman needs to know her rights to demand them.”

In the next chapter I go back to the streets and plazas of Guatemala City, where women who know their rights go to demand them.
Chapter 6: Presenting the Present(e): Guatemalan Feminists' Anti Violence Performances.

It was 9:30 am, a beautiful sunny morning in Guatemala City. A large crowd of activists—women, men, youth, children, Indigenous, Non-Indigenous, and foreigners—gathered in front of the Supreme Court of Justice. It was November 25, 2010; the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and this large crowd was preparing to start the annual march. While some wore traje, the majority were wearing a variety of slogans, custom-made T-shirts, and other custom-made accessories. Their “activists’ regalia” distinguished them from the everyday crowd that usually occupies this central site—pedestrians crossing one of the busiest corners of town or waiting for transportation, employees of the Supreme Court of Justice, citizens that come to settle legal or bureaucratic issues, and street vendors. Their backs facing the Peace Monument, they set themselves at the edges of the plaza, holding big banners. The banners identified the organization they were affiliated with, publicly denounced violence against women, and proclaimed their hopes and demands for a better future:

JUSTICE; For the defense of our bodies, land, and territory; Women are done waiting: Stop violence against women and femicide; Our voices will never be silenced again; For women’s lives, no more impunity, we demand justice!; We are looking for justice for women, we shall not forget nor be silenced; EQUALITY!; I’m a citizen and I fight for full citizenship for women, I demand the eradication of violence against women; For the life of Indigenous women, no more machismo nor discrimination; Discrimination is also violence, there are many ways to kill a woman; RESPECT; No more violence.

While the groups were setting up their banners in front of the Supreme Court, the voceras (the designated spokeswomen) read the joint comunicado de la prensa that the coordinadora put together for this event. Thousands of activists were standing in one of the
busiest intersections in the city, in front of one of the state's most important symbols, the edifice of the judicial branch. A few representatives of the judicial branch came to greet the activists before the march took off; they distributed flowers, and stated their support. While the activists stated their critique and demands of the judicial branch, they also staged themselves for the audience of the various media representatives at the plaza. We were all ready for the show to begin.

In the previous chapters I discussed different modes of transforming social spaces by gathering and marching in the streets of Guatemala City as a method and outcome of activists’ self-transformations. In this chapter I continue to explore this connection, focusing on several examples of political acts I call antiviolence performances, also known as radical street performances (Cohen-Cruz 1998, Fusco 2000, Madison 2010, Taylor and Costantino 2003).242 I begin by introducing the concept of radical street performances, its Latin American context, and recent practice by the Guatemalan women’s movement. Following, I analyze and discuss several antiviolence performances that took place during the November 25 march or in the 16 days of activism that follows between the years 2009-2011.

I claim that these public performances are politically designed to 1) Present the situations of violence as a political problem in public space, 2) Present a vision of an alternative, better future, and 3) call for individual, collective and institutional action to bring forward this potential future. Therefore I see these performances as a further site of dialectic transformation—of individuals and society. I show how these performances, like other methods discussed above, are designed, on the one hand, to change individual women’s subjectivities into women-beings; and on the other hand, change the spaces in which they live.

242 I use the term (Anti-Violence) performance to connect it to existing literature; Guatemalan activists call it “political acts.”
to allow and encourage these new subjectivities. The antiviolence performances allow us to see how these two processes of denouncing a problem and suggesting an alternative and of (in)forming and (re)forming are in constant dialogue with each other.

** Radical (Antiviolence) Street Performances**

A radical act, explains Madison, is “a confrontation with the root of a problem,” an act that targets “the causes of an issue and not simply respond to its symptoms” (Madison 2010: 18). The antiviolence performances I discuss in this chapter are radical street performances. Radical, as they question and re-envision the social arrangement of power; street, as they take place on by-ways with minimal constraints on access; and performances, as they are indicative and expressive bodily behavior intended for public viewing (Cohen-Cruz 1998:1). I call them antiviolence performances as they specifically target various modes of violence experienced by women in Guatemala. Unlike the violence they contest, these performances are pacifist.²⁴³

Traditionally, Cohen-Cruz claims, the streets have been used to display power and social structures (e.g. religious parades, victory marches), and the role of performances was to conserve a culture over time, not to change it (1998:219). Radical street performances, she claims, publically illuminate a social problem in a site that directly relates to that social problem (1998:5). Further, these performances strive to transport everyday reality to something more ideal (Cohen-Cruz 1998:1) and suggest—in the present—pictures of a new vision of the future, thus facilitate gaining a new vista on the world (Muñoz 2009:50).²⁴⁴

²⁴³ The pacifist nature of these performances lies in contrast with lynching, often explained in Guatemala as a popular public antiviolence performance, contesting state inaction to the everyday violence.
²⁴⁴ Although we tend to see alternative, utopian reality as related with the political left, David Welch (1983), when discussing the film "Triumph of the Will" (1935), reminds us that it is not necessarily so, as he claims that the Nazi party rallies were also an enactment of utopia. Another example to a less comfortable utopia was
In Latin America, claim Diana Taylor and Roselyn Costantino, radical street performances relate to a long line of outspoken women performers and artists in various arts in the twentieth century; artists who had already challenged similar limits and restrictions imposed on them by the racist, misogynist, and homophobic world in which they worked (2003:15). Following this tradition, contemporary performances are directed not only to the authorities, but also to the systems of belief that demand that women behave like obedient, subservient creatures. Through these performances local activists fight for cultural participation—access to space, to resources, to authority, and to audiences—on local, national, and international levels (2003:6).

The strength of these acts, argue Taylor and Costantino, derives from the fact that they bring forward the performers’ immediate response to issues and circumstances they live with (2003:4). These issues, sometimes derived from larger frameworks, are “fought out in the here and now of each performance” (2003:22). Moreover, these performances embody and represent profound processes of identity (re)formation (2003:2). As structures of power are written over the female body, using this same body to send a different message is dually subversive, as not only the message itself undermines the structure of power, but also the fact that women (re)claim their own bodies to carry this message. A key feature of these performances, claim Taylor and Costantino, is they illustrate how different social positions are influenced differently once they intersect with gender; or “how gender affects everything” (2003:10).

suggested by Nicole Fabricant and Nancy Postero in their work on the Santa Cruz elites’ struggle against Evo Morales. Their struggle for autonomia is embedded in racism and their performance of alternative reality has an extremely violent manifestation (2012).
Gender, claims Judith Butler, is an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of bodily acts. It is a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment in which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, comes to believe and to perform in that mode of belief. Butler further explains that in its performative character resides the possibility of different sorts of repeating, i.e., the possibility of contesting it (1988:519-520). Therefore, there is always the possibility of performing this identity in different ways, and by performing it differently, constituting additional versions of this same identity. Butler emphasizes that individuals' acts, individual as they are, produce these individuals' situation of gender. Yet, although performed by embodying individuals, these acts are shared experiences and “collective actions.” Both political instrumental actions done in the name of women, and acts in and of themselves, Butler claims, can equally challenge the category of women itself in the endeavour to institute more just social and political relations (1988:523, 525).

Going back to Giddens, we can see the individuals’ performances discussed by Butler as a key practice to establish new social relations and structures, as well as a method to keep the (transformation) process going (Giddens 1981:27). In these performances, the street becomes a central space “through which social relations are made or broken” (Miller 2013:286). Performing in the street allows activists to respond directly to events that took place in the street (whether they took place in this specific location, or, more generally, in a street). By doing that they challenge the power relations inherent to the public sphere and suggest an alternative vision for more just social and political relations.

By performing in the streets, activists allow greater access to “the popular masses,” that at times also implies using vernacular, sometimes culturally coded terminology (Cohen-
Further, claim Taylor and Costantino, such popular performances allow people who do not imagine themselves as community to find links that bind them together (2003:18). While allowing greater access, it’s also important to emphasize these performances’ altruistic aspect, as the performers offer their bodies for some common goal, without the safety of a distanced, sheltered stage (Cohen-Cruz 1998:3). Since it is clear that public spaces are not equally accessible to everyone, the media is frequently used to mediate activists’ messages to the not-present public (Cohen-Cruz 1998: 2). Consequently, some activists claim that handling the media is just as important as creating the performance itself (Labovich 1985). Unlike massive rallies, smaller radical street performances reach only a small audience, but even then they still have the potential to modify people's opinions. Once this audience’s opinion is changed, they may influence their family and friends (Cohen-Cruz 1994:232), thus these performances have the potential to create a greater impact than is first thought when they take place.

This unpredicted impact is not limited to magnitude, but at times extends to reception. In March 2007, a Guatemalan women’s group, La Batukada Feminista, performed a political act on the Supreme Court’s staircase as the part of the International Women’s Day march. Their faces painted blue, wearing rain coats, they walked through a human-made corridor created by other activists, climbed the Supreme Court’s staircase, and formed a human-line facing the crowd. They then removed their raincoats, presenting their painted, naked bodies, each marked with a letter, all together forming the phrase: *Mi Cuerpo es Mio* (My body is mine). Joining their hands they presented their message to activists, state functionaries,
passers-by, and media who gathered in the plaza for several minutes and then they retreated the scene through the protective human corridor.  

The performance was endorsed by many activists as an act that indeed addresses the root of the problem, women’s lack of control over their own bodies; “it is the first issue that has to be discussed on International Women’s day, before anything else can be brought up” (Amandine Fulchiron, Actoras de Cambio). At the same time, other activists believe the act was highly problematic. Hilda Morales-Trujillo, for instance, critiqued it because first, public nudity is illegal, hence better be avoided, and second, it positioned women’s bodies as a means to convey a social message, a notion that the movement attempt to uproot. Ana María of CODEFEM explained that the act, also presented in the media, was experienced as offensive by many of the rural Maya participants, who come from a more conservative background, and greatly impacted rural Maya participation in the following years. Mi Cuerpo es Mío had a greater impact than intended and resulted in avoiding radical performances in 2008-2009 marches.

Presenting Utopia
The antiviolence performances I discuss in this account were intentional, public, political actions, performed at the same public locations where performances of violence take place. Yet, following the above described events, they were design to express more conventional, agreeable messages to the general public. Using vernacular as well as transnational human rights language, the activists utilize their own bodies, in what is prevalently considered an unsafe space, to critique and contest the social arrangement of

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245 I did not attend this event as it took place before my fieldwork began. This description is based on conversations with participating activists as well as a video recording of the event.
246 Political acts were included in pervious marches. In the November 2006 march, for instance, activists marked governmental institutions with crime-scene yellow tape, stating spaces such as the Congress as a crime scene of inaction.
power they live in. Their performances are directed to the immediate, present audience, as well as the media-mediated public, and they are well prepared to speak through the media, not to the media. Overall, these performances are meant to make visible the overlooked and even ignored multidimensional problem of violence against women, to denounce the existing reality, and, through performance in the present, to propose a new, utopian future.  

Femicide and the Crime Scenes of Inaction
Back at the Human Rights Plaza in front of the Supreme Court, occupied by activists, state officials, media and casual pedestrians, a group of 50 women, dressed in black, carrying big placards, create a great circle in the Plaza center. The statements on their placards, taken from different recent verdicts concerning the murder of women, read:

I was not killed because I'm a sex worker; I was killed for being a woman. I was not killed because I have many male friends; I was killed for being a woman. I was not killed for using drugs; I was killed for being a woman.

When the eyes of the activists, the random crowd of bystanders, the judicial representatives, and the media were focused on the circle, these black-dressed women dropped to the ground mimicking their own deaths. Once there was no more movement, the spectators witnessed a circle of signs resembling tomb stones held above each “dead women.” These statements demonstrated how the justice system tends to see the murders of women: individual cases, of women who facilitated their own death, ignoring the pattern of killing women for being women.

The efforts of women’s groups to draw attention to and condemn this violence were bolstered by reports published by the Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH) (2005) and Amnesty International (AI) (2005, 2006), and presented to the Guatemalan Congress by the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemala (URNG 2005). In March 2006, the first of what would become a series of commissions to confront femicide was established with the participation of the three branches of government. Since then, women’s and human rights groups have succeeded in keeping violence against women on the political agenda and in public discourse. However, although part of the political and public discourse, the reality of violence against women did not change significantly, therefore, de facto, it is still overlooked.
Figure 52: 9:30, Human Rights Plaza: "I was killed because I'm a woman."
After a while, the "dead women" were "resurrected," and the crowd of activists, accompanied by decorated cars and trucks started marching, taking over the busy Ninth Avenue. Marching in the order set by the coordinadora, each organization marched as a group, with their own banners, T-shirts, whistles, balloons, and other accessories, stating their visions and demands. The coordinadora's joint comunicado and particular organizations’ manifests were alternately read, and concluded with a few rounds of participatory yells. *Por la vida de las mujeres* (for the life of women); *Ni una muerte mas!* (not even one more death!) Some groups danced and sang while marching, along groups of professional street performers holding drums, wearing makeup and carnival-like costumes that kept the rally lively and cheerful. This huge, colourful, vigorous stream flooded the streets, stopping and replacing traffic, the regular currents in these streets, with a human mass. Their messages, carried through a pulsing stream of symbols, were directed both inwards, to the cells that compose this plasmid flow, as well as outwards, to the media and the occasional spectators, to whom educational materials were constantly distributed.

About an hour later, we arrived at the Guatemalan Congress and congregated there. A group of 50 activists dressed in white were already positioned there, holding blue balloons filled with helium, to which names of different Guatemalan laws were attached.


The white-dressed-balloon-holders’ group formed a tight cluster in front of the congress entrance, the women-dressed-in-black circled them, and the rest of the crowd slowly assembled around the women-dressed-in-black. Thousands of activists were now blocking
Figure 53: 11:00am, The Congress: “Legislation Light.”
one of the busiest avenues of the capital, standing in front of one of the state's most important symbols, the chief edifice of the legislative branch. The banners they carried publicly denounced violence against women and proclaimed their hopes and demands for a better future. A few representatives from the Congress came to address them, and the voceras read the comunicado again, concluding with a round of participatory yells: *Por la vida de las mujeres, ni una muerte mas!* When the eyes of the public, state officials, and media were focused at them, the activists let go of the balloons, signalling the movement's view of these new legislations passed by the Congress, the legislative branch. As the balloons were set off, the activists dressed in black fell to the floor, mimicking their own deaths and implying a connection between state inactions and women’s reality of violence. A short while later the "dead women" resurrected, the voceras yelled: *Por la vida de las mujeres,* the crowd responded: *Ni una muerte mas!* and we continued marching, heading towards the National Palace and the Constitutional Plaza, our final destination.

About half an hour later, the marching crowd entered the Constitutional Plaza. Led by two activists carrying a sign by Red NoVi stating: “We demand funding and political commitment in order to comply the Law Against Femicide and other Forms of Violence Against Women,” and the coordinadora’s truck decorated with similar statements, thousands of activists marched towards the National Palace. Once there, they created a circle around the plaque marking Guatemala’s geographical center (kilometer zero). Their signs and banners, carried through the city, used to challenge the Judicial and Legislative Branches as well as the general public, were now situated at the entrance to the symbol of the Executive Brunch, the National Palace. Likewise, the women who symbolically died by the Supreme Court and the Congress and carried their signs through the city were now fully present, forming part of
the human circle at the entrance to the National Palace. A few representatives from the Executive Brunch came to address the activists and the media, and the ATRAHDOM representatives to the coordinadora step forward to the center of the circle. Dressed in aprons, they addressed the diverse demands stated in the *comunicado*, as well as some of the more particular demands made by member-organizations. Finally a few more coordinadora members joined them in leading another round of participatory yells: *Por la vida de las mujeres, ni una muerte mas!*

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*Figure 54: 12:00pm, ATRAHDOM “serves the state” with the movement’s demands at the entrance to the National Palace.*
These three actions invite the present, immediate public, as well as the media-mediated public to witness two related social problems: violence against women, and state inaction against it. In the first performance the activists mimic the spread of bodies in the street, and redirect the blame from the murdered women to the state, whose institutional discrimination, sexism, or simply inaction normalizes and justifies these killings. Consequently, the spectators are first invited to acknowledge that violent killings of women are a common reality in the country. Then, presenting these statements from the Courts together, the public is invited to consider the second phrase in every sign: “I was killed for being a woman,” and to see these deaths as part of larger general phenomenon, femicide, the killing of devalued beings, i.e., women because they are women. Hence through the act activists reject the courts’ verdicts, reject the notion that these are individual cases, and point to state accountability.

In the second act, spectators are again invited to witness, through the performance of death, the lethal end of the everyday reality of violence against women, as well as the state's inaction against it. At this stop it is made clear that what can be seen as the state’s actions so far—i.e. passing new legislations in favor of women's rights—has not had an actual impact, as it has "no weight" in real, actual reality. The patricidal implementation and limited enforcement of the new legislation maintains and reinforces women’s inferior social status and facilitates more violence against them. Like the first antiviolence performance, the audience is invited to witness not only the acts of violence terrorizing women and their families, but also the less-discussed issue of the state's accountability for this reality.

See chapter 2 for the various mechanisms in favor of women’s rights developed by the state.
By performing women’s death the coordinadora presents the state’s failure to protect women’s lives and by situating the performances in front of state institutions they relocate the crime scene from where it physically took place to state branches. By doing so, they publically contest the work of powerful Guatemalan actors—judges and legislators as well as the institutions they represent—portray them as discriminatory and unjust, and point to their accountability for the violent killings of thousands of women.

Unlike the first and second acts, the third act does not include a performance of death, but emphasizes an important aspect of the first two acts—women as political subjects that make demands of the state. The last act, presenting apron-wearing *women-beings*, with clear strong voices, who demand to be recognized as such by the state, is, I believe, the most radical performance of the three. In this act they confront the root of a problem—women’s reduction into domestic laborers whose contribution to society is devalued—and not simply respond to its symptoms—the killing of women (Madison 2010: 18). Overall, the three performances publically present an alternative reality, one in which women are no longer devalued-being, but *women-beings*, political subjects worthy of state and social respect and protection.

The coordinadora’s triple performance embodied their joint message articulated in the *comunicado*: the rejection of violence against all women, the rejection of women’s devalued social position, the rejection their social normalization and institutionalization, and a demand for state action to change the situation. By presenting one, joint message, the coordinadora follows a practice proved effective since the 1970’s, i.e. that shared experience and political demands speak more powerfully than isolated voices (Crenshaw 1991:1241). This practice that has proved valuable in changing state policies in relation to violence against women
PRESENTING THE PRESENT(E)

overshadows the fact that the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities (Crenshaw 1991:1242).

While promoting a joint message, the coordinadora does not negate the fact that women experience violence in different ways, in accordance to their various axes of identity. Through the November 25 march, and in separate events taking place in the 16 Days of Activism, particular organizations perform specific experiences of violence, related to particular aspects of women’s identities. In the following sections, I describe and analyze three of these performances.\textsuperscript{249} It is important to note that although organized by particular organizations, representing particular experiences of violence, the participants and the audience of these events are often members of other organizations, and they may participate to express their solidarity with other organizations even if they themselves may not experience those particular aspects of violence.

\textbf{Sobrevivi estoy aqui estoy viva: Present(ing) the Past.}

In November 26 2009, the organization Actoras de cambio organized an outdoor event called \textit{Sobrevivi estoy aqui estoy viva} (I Survived, I'm Here, I'm Alive) focusing on the widespread sexual violence that took place during the internal armed conflict, especially towards rural Maya women.\textsuperscript{250} It was situated at Plaza Barrios, not far from the Supreme Court, and a very busy civic intersection on its own, usually populated by passing pedestrians and a big group of street people.\textsuperscript{251} The plaza was bordered by a huge cloth actoras hung the

\textsuperscript{249} There are, of course, many more performances and particular views of violence, but for the sake of this paper I chose only three.

\textsuperscript{250} On the widespread sexual violence against Maya women during the internal armed conflict see: Nolin & Shankar 2000, REMHI (1999), CEH (2000). Also, the powerful recent book reviewing the work of actoras: \textit{Tijidos que lleva la alma} (2009).

\textsuperscript{251} The plaza functions as a central public transportation hub and a shopping area and represents civil life. It is named after the former president Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-1885) who led Guatemala’s ‘Liberal Revolution,’ and worked to modernize the country, oversaw substantial cleaning and rebuilding of Guatemala City, and transformed the sleepy capital into a major hub in the global coffee trade (Smith 1990).
day before at Parque Centenario which the rally's participants had been invited to paint-mark their hands, along with antiviolence slogans.\footnote{Located in the west section of Plaza Mayor.}

At first glance, these prints of hands—one of them, as I mentioned in chapter 2, mine—resemble the image of Amnesty International's campaign to stop violence against women. However, they had an additional message; participants were asked to print both hands, index fingers and thumbs touch each other, creating what they call a\textit{vagina symbol}. A temporary stage was built in the middle of the plaza, together with a sitting area. The audience was composed of local (city) activists, a few state functionaries, a large highland Indigenous group (women, children, and a few men), and the street people whose “territory” this act invaded. The event started in the early afternoon, with a short, silent, narrated play, telling the story of a Maya woman who was sexually abused during the war and how this act influenced her in different stages of her life. The play powerfully conveyed the humiliation and pain the woman endured at the time of the abuse, but also the long lasting shame she carried through her life, and the silence she forced upon herself in relation to the abuse to avoid further mistreatment from her own community. The street people, challenging this invasion into “their” territory, tried to participate in the play, and were gently pushed aside by the organizers, seated with the audience.

Following the play, an act of giving testimony took place on the stage. Seven Maya women, from different communities, dressed in\textit{traje} stood up, one after the other, to give their testimony. Most of them were accompanied by a younger woman from the same community who translated their accounts—delivered in one of the 22 Mayan languages—into Spanish. In their testimonies they discuss the sexual abuse they endured on the part of
Figure 55: Plaza Barrios.

A collaborative cloth denouncing violence (left), public testimonies (right), and celebrating life (below).
state agents during the conflict, and focused on the ways in which such abuse—and other modes of state violence—influenced their lives. An additional testimony was given by a non-Indigenous woman, a survivor of a contemporary urban violence. A few state functionaries and international partners gave short speeches in support of the women, the political act, and against past and present impunity in relation to violence against women.

The crowd was then invited to visit an exhibit documenting actoras de cambio’s work with survivors of state-sponsored sexual abuse in the nearby museum. Upon returning to the plaza, a young group of dancers performed and light dinner was served to all attendees (including passers-by and street people). It was followed by a full performance of the group Banda Centroamericana feminista, to which the crowd joined in singing and dancing, while night was falling. The event further continued in a march of torches in different areas of the city, organized separately from this event, by another organization.

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In this prolonged, complex political act the spectators were invited to acknowledge the abuse and difficulties rural Maya women underwent during the prolonged Internal Armed Conflict, particularly the silenced widespread state-sponsored sexual violence and the broad influence it had on survivors' lives. The different acts displayed, together with the immediate pain and humiliation, the sense of terror and shame that shaped the life-courses of these women, influencing their physical and mental health, economic stability and their relationships with family and community members. Further, the event called the spectators’

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253 What used to be the train museum was transformed to an interactive contemporary museum, discussing the Guatemalan society and its different origins, histories, challenges, called – Porque estamos como estamos – “Why are we the way we are?” The exhibit by the activists - Sobrevivi. Estoy aqui. Estoy viva – “I Survived, I’m here, I’m alive,” was temporary.

254 As I discuss in chapter 2.
attention to the prolonged impunity and contemporary state inaction in bringing to justice those who committed these abuses and the lack of support (and even silencing) of women on the part of communities themselves. Finally, the event introduced the possible connection between past and present atrocities against women, as the legacy of war and impunity were explained as one of the causes of the contemporary widespread violence against women.  

Considering this performance, one has to bear in mind two important issues. First, Maya women are one of the most oppressed groups in Guatemala. Marginalized by the ladino society around them, and deemed sexually, socially, and politically subordinate to the men in their own communities, contemporary Maya women are doubly excluded and silenced (Taylor and Costantino 2003:2, 10, Marrero 2003). Second, an act of breaking the silence, especially in relation to sexual violence, entails confronting layers of social justifications and victim blaming often internalized by the survivor in the form of shame. However, in the course of this act, silence is broken by multiple methods: acting, dancing, exhibiting, and speaking out-loud on a public stage in the city civic center. This multiplicity speaks to the extent to which the spell of silencing was broken, a social situation in which women survivors are no longer silenced, and the shame and blame are directed to the perpetrators and the state.  

Wearing traje relates a Maya woman to a specific community and thus adds a layer of personal exposure to the courageous act of publically breaking the silence. Teresa Marrero claims that the traje not only serves as an ethnic marker of origin, but also marks normative

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255 Most feminist and human rights activists working on femi(ni)cide emphasize the 36-year internal armed conflict (1960-1996) as a central part of contemporary violence. See, for example, CALDH (2005), Sanford (2008), Musalo et al. (2010), Morales Trujillo (2010).

256 The contemporary Indigenous woman’s condition is exacerbated by an overt misogyny and the insidious denial of violent acts against her, silencing her at the most basic level: that of the self. Her virtue depends upon her willing to accept these norms of submissive obedience to the patriarchal order within her ethnic community and the larger heterogeneous society (Marrero 2003).
behavior and roles that differentiate Indigenous Highland women from men, and other women belonging to different ethnic groups. Therefore, she argues that the Maya women who participated in the Zapatista uprising “shed off” their traje to demonstrate their choice to assume a different role in their society; the politics of dress assumes wider implications (Marrero 2003:323-4). In this testimonial act, “women who have been socialized never to raise their gaze to men” (Marrero 2003: 4), not to mention discussing any issues concerning sexuality, stand on a stage in the heart of Guatemala’s civic center, and discard these norms in front of their community members, urban ladino activists and passer-by, as well as state functionaries. That the women chose to keep on wearing their traditional traje, while challenging cultural norms, shows not only that they break off with these traditions, but that they also continue to be Maya women—they suggest a different way to be, to do, a Maya woman.

By wearing their traje, as well as speaking their native language, they perform a reality in which rural Maya women, survivors of state-sponsored violence, are “here,” in the capital’s Civic Center. “Here,” they also celebrate their ethnic identity that the state attempted to destroy during the armed conflict and which is, still today, a cause for intolerance and discrimination. Further, they go beyond asserting their civic right for this central location, and alter it. Plaza Barrios, marked by a huge statue of the great reformer, Justo Barrios, was now bordered by a cloth of printed "hand-made vaginas," collaboratively created by activists of different organizations during the march. Even within the bordered Plaza, the focal point was no longer Barrios’ statue, but the crowded of activists who occupied it. The Plaza was now reframed in relation to women’s antiviolence activism, one that rejects conservative practices of shame and reclaims women’s bodies as their own territory. Namely,
the “here” they occupied was no longer the same as it was before they claimed it; it was transformed by their presence and actions.

The later celebration takes us back to "I'm alive". As we saw in the march, these women, their families, and the audience gather to celebrate life with food, wine, and music. Holding the event as the night falls, in a public location that is considered unsafe even during day-time, further emphasizes the radical nature of this performance: an act in which devalued women publically assert themselves as rights-worthy citizen, not victims, and denounce state violence and impunity. Further, they publically perform their right to life in its wider sense, women-citizens’ right to enjoy and celebrate life. By doing so, they bring together the past and present experiences of violence and publically present the state’s failure to provide such basic right to its citizens.

Unlike the performances organized by the coordinadora during the rally, at Plaza Barrios actoras point to a more specific problem, the widespread state-sponsored sexual violence against Maya women during the internal armed conflict. Moreover, while their performance presented the past, bringing its pains into the present time, their statement not only illuminated a forgotten memory that needs to be addressed as such; it also went further, establishing a connection between the overlooked past-violence and the contemporary one. While on the one hand, they relate it to the larger theme of violence against women, on the other, they illustrate how a general social problem—in this case the mass violence against rural Maya groups during the conflict — is experienced differently once it intersects with the status of “women”, e.g. through sexual violence by state agents, followed by community silencing.
Aquellare: Spelling out HIV+

Aquellare (Witches' Sabbath): Conjuring Spells To Dignify Life for Women Living with HIV was organized by Mujeres Positivas in Accion (MPA, or HIV+ Women in Action), on International AIDS Day, December 1, 2010. It was a radical public action, to which only 50 women from various organizations in the Guatemalan women’s movement were invited to participate, and the activity's content was kept secret until the last minute. The participating women dressed as witches with big black gowns, hats and brooms, and gathered at the Constitutional Plaza, between the National Palace and the Cathedral. The Plaza was full of social activists commemorating the day, yet the MPA group drew special attention. Forming a circle, we placed our brooms on the ground, marking another circle; in its center the action’s leaders built a fire under a huge iron caldron. Different herbs were thrown to the caldron, and smoke and scent start coming out of it. Placards explaining MPA’s demands were laid on the ground between the caldron and the human/broom circle. A giant sign was posted by the circle, indicating the name of the organization, activity, and the performance title: Aquellare: Conjuring Spells to Dignify Life for Women Living with HIV.

The women who built the fire alternated in leading a "witches' prayer" amidst the great crowd that filled the plaza and across from the National Palace and the Catholic Cathedral. Holding hands, the "witches" circled seven times to the right, raising their hands to the National Palace, while an organizer read out loud some of their demands, always structured in the same format:

We demand to know: Who shall ensure that women living with HIV have universal access to family planning methods? We demand to know: Who will buy 10,040 Didanosine tablets, 1064,400 Lopinavir + Ritonavir tablets, 149,820 Tenofovir? We

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257 Only a few of the participants were members of MPA, and it is likely to assume that the majority of the participants (including myself), were not HIV+, but only acting in solidarity with women living with HIV.
demand to know: Who will guarantee the welfare of HIV + adolescents who after age 15 are expelled from the IGSS? 

Holding hands, the "witches" circled seven times to the left, holding their hands up to the Cathedral, and another organizer read more demands:

We demand to know: Who shall ensure that women living with HIV have universal access to free Pap tests?... Who will protect us from the acts of repression we are subjected to?... Who will attend to the problem of violence against women and HIV acquisition?...

More demands were related to creating, maintaining and hiring staff in treatment centers, and to treatment protocol. Later, the “witches,” facing in, stepped one after the other to the center of the circle, throwing herbs into the caldron, each stating their own demand/ spell. Educational materials were distributed to the surrounding spectators and then the “witches” grabbed their brooms and placards and went to circle the whole plaza. Their presence could not go unnoticed, and attracted a lot of attention and questions from the surrounding crowd—as well as international and national media coverage, photos of the event being included in the Reuters World AIDS Day media package and run by the BBC and other media worldwide.

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In this performance, MPA illuminated a set of overlooked problems experienced by women who live with HIV. They reject the common tendency to shame individuals who

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258 IGSS = Guatemalan Institute of Social Security
259 State accountability for the prevention and treatment of HIV and access to reproductive health was established in the 1994 Cairo Program of Action designed during The United Nations International Conference on Population and Development. Many of MPA’s demands listed above are related to state failure to meet these expectations, and are viewed as institutionalize discrimination.
260 A small scale research (not published) MPA conducted in 2011 showed the impact of limited staff on women’s access to treatment. The centers are limited and short staffed, often marked by a line of patients waiting outside. Women who cannot afford travelling time and expenses but mostly the breach of anonymity, will not get treatment.
Figure 56: Conjuring Spells to Dignify Life for Women Living with HIV.
contracted HIV and bring forward the state’s role in enhancing HIV+ women struggles.\textsuperscript{261} The state, accountable for the prevention and treatment of HIV+, they state publically, is not providing the needed treatment (such as medications, staff, treatment centers), an inaction that both violates HIV+ rights and puts their lives in danger. "They" also include young adolescent women, who are excluded from health insurance coverage once they turn 15. The state, MPA remind us, should also be held accountable for not protecting women from sexual violence, a mode through which many women get infected with HIV. However, while failing to prevent sexual violence can be seen as acts of inaction, other policies, such as denying HIV+ women free access to Pap exams are acts of discrimination that first, situate HIV+ women in a greater health risk, and second, institutionalize their devalued social position, thus exposing them to greater violence.

In this act, women whose social devaluation is institutionalized publically reject this devaluation and present themselves as rights-worthy \textit{women-beings}, as citizens demanding to be acknowledged as such by the state. Dressing up as witches and performing Pagan ceremony they call “Witches Sabbath,” they position present-day marginalized HIV+ women in parallel to marginalized medieval and early modern women who were rejected, outcast, demonized and consequently burned to death as "witches." Situating their performance between the National Palace and the Cathedral further emphasizes this connection: they point to past and present dominating powers (state and church) as accountable for the death of

\textsuperscript{261} Considering this performance, one has to bear in mind stigma and shame as central issues impacting HIV+ individuals. AIDS stigma and discrimination exist worldwide, although they manifest themselves differently across countries, communities, religious groups and individuals. It is a life-threatening disease; therefore people react to it in strong ways. Moreover, HIV infection is associated with behaviors (such as homosexuality, drug addiction, prostitution, or promiscuity) that are already stigmatized in many societies, thus infected individuals are stigmatized, morally condemned. HIV infection is thus explained as a resulting personal irresponsibility or a punishment for moral vice. AIDS stigma makes it more difficult for HIV+ people to come to terms with and manage their illness on a personal level. On a national level, the stigma can deter governments from taking fast, effective action against the epidemic.
these women. The mythic “Witches Sabbath” took place at night in a hiding place, by performing this action in broad day light in the Guatemalan Seat of Power, they assert to spectators and themselves that they refuse to be marginalized and terrorized.262

The activity’s title, *Aquellare: Conjuring Spells To Dignify Life for Women Living with HIV*, further emphasizes the complex situation of HIV+ women. First, their call to dignify life attests to their present undignified living conditions. Second, as this powerful performance was designed to spell out the problem, it also implies that dignify life for HIV+ women will require some kind of a spell or magic. At the same time, this action embodies a public declaration of women who refuse to succumb to these social deficiencies, and look for alternative modes to transform this reality. Facing state and Church discrimination they reclaim women’s healing wisdom and the transformative power of coming together. The action thus is a daring public contestation of powerful sociopolitical actors and a presentation of women as valuable rights-worthy actors.

Like actoras’ performances of the past, MPA performed a specific set of problems in relation to the present reality of women living with HIV; on the one hand, it relates it to the larger theme of violence against women, on the other, it indicates how general social problem—in this case HIV+—is experienced differently once it intersects with the status “women”, e.g. how it negates access to women-specific health services such as pap exams. The last performance calls spectators’ attention to and politicizes another silenced mode of violence, domestic sexual abuse.

262 Many of the MPA Aquellare’s participants participated in the first Aquellare, organized by Tierra Viva. As I discussed in chapter 3, the first Aquellare took place in a semi-private space and little happy colorful witches were distributed to activists. The second took place in a public space, and activists themselves were dressed as witches.
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*Ni en la calle, ni en la cama: Intimate Violence in Public*

The last performance I discuss here, *ni en la calle ni en la cama (Neither in the street nor in the bed)*, organized by Tierra Viva, took place during the November 2011 International Women’s Day march. Unlike the acts described earlier, this performance was not limited to specific location, but took place within the space of the movement, as it moved through the city during the march; the performance’s setting and performers constantly change. The performance publically presented “private” or “intimate” violence. That year, Tierra Viva chose to use a small pickup truck, instead of the full size trucks they used in previous years. The pickup was decorated with the organization’s emblem on the front, and a big sign on the back that said: "Women break the silence. We no longer keep sexual violence secret." On the sides were attached pouches that held colorful, long, narrow pieces of placards, with different messages against sexual and gender violence. The centerpiece was a queen-sized bed, beautifully set with cover and pillows. The bed head frame, a gigantic piece of shapely-cut purple-painted Styrofoam, announced: *Neither in the street nor in the bed do we accept sexual violence*. A group of young activists, boys and girls, circled the truck, holding a long clothesline "decorated" with colorful women's underwear at their waist level (underwear level). Each woman’s briefs had a message attached to it, usually in the form of a sticker that the organization uses frequently:

> Caution! Machismo kills! Not even one more moment of sexual violence! No more maternal death! No more sexual harassment! No more incest! No more unwanted pregnancies! No more HIV no more AIDS! No more forced marriages! No more unsafe clandestine abortions!

Through the rally, the well-staged bed was surrounded by youth—and sometimes younger kids—alternating the role of carrying the clothesline of briefs.
Figure 57: Neither in the Street nor in the Bed.
This prolonged walking exhibit publically presented several aspects of the often silenced problem of sexual violence. Just like underwear, typically kept private, sexual violence usually takes place away from the public-eye and is maintained as a shameful secret. Organizing the act around a matrimonial bed emphasized the fact that sexual violence often takes place in “safe” spaces, such as one’s home and bed, by intimate partners or other family members. Having the underwear carried by youth—some of them young kids—emphasized the often-familial, intimate dimension of sexual violence. Carried at waist level by both boys and girls, the clothesline creates a further unsettling scene and suggests that not only women are targeted by sexual violence. The messages attached to the underwear situated the problem of sexual violence in relation to other experiences of violence, often considered private, such as illegal, unsafe abortions and contracting HIV. Carried through the city; these experiences of violence are no longer marked as private not only because they are publically presented, but also because their burden is shared collectively.

In this travelling exhibit, a specific, mostly unspoken, dimension of violence is publically presented, linking it to the greater theme of violence against women. At the same time, this act presents a wider understanding of sexual violence, one that is not limited to women, i.e. that includes younger individuals of all genders. While actoras’ performance presented the past and linked it to the present, and MPA’s performance presented the present reality, Tierra Viva’s performance focused not only on the present, but also on the future.
The acts I have discussed above are subversive embodied performances that call spectators' attention to a series of related problems, often seen as personal or private, and publically politicize them. Each one of these performances presents—in present-time—an alternative vision of the future. The 2010 triple performance organized by the coordinadora, challenged the institutionalized devaluation of women as a category and its impact on women’s everyday realities and experiences of violence. By doing so, they presented rights-worthy women-beings, who fully participate in a welcoming, safe, democratic public sphere. The performances organized by actoras, MPA and Tierra Viva further reinforce this vision and challenge specific forms of normalized and even institutionalized discrimination. Most significantly, these performances present women-beings who refuse to continue to carry the burden of violence they endured and instead redirect the blame and shame to the Guatemalan society and its institutions.

Through these performances, unconceivable acts became possible, and then constitutive; what people were not able to imagine was suggested to them as something they can will into being. Similarly to Peter Handke' analysis of the Berliner Kommune (1969), I see these various antiviolence acts as performances of their thesis, stating their argument right in the middle of reality. Handke concludes his analysis with the hope that the performers will go on performing until reality too becomes one single performance area. This aspiration takes me to the next section, discussing the audience in these performances.

**From Plaza to Plasma**

A performance requires an audience. Who is the intended audience in these performances? Although these performances are staged beside symbols of state power, such as the edifices of the legislative, juridical, and executive branches, I claim that the state is not
their primary intended audience. Buildings, unfortunately, are not affected by these pacifist performances. The acts are witnessed by the buildings’ gatekeepers, who do not have a great influence on policy making, thus I tend to see them as part of the unintended audience. The acts are also witnessed by state functionaries who come out of these buildings to address the march’s participants, but these functionaries are usually the ones who already support the cause or are those who are interested in gaining some political capital by associating themselves with being human-rights advocates. Therefore, I see these performances as intended first for the participants themselves, followed by “the people” and only finally, the state.

Performing specific political acts as well as participating in the march has great impact on the participating women. The performances I discuss above presented a set of powerful messages: violence against women goes beyond specific cases and represents a widespread social phenomenon; the state is responsible to protect women from different forms of violence and should be seen accountable for preventive as well as punitive action; women are full citizens and thus have the right to make demands of the state, as well as inhabit the public sphere; womanhood and citizenship can and should be celebrated; acts of sexual violence — in the past and present, in the urban or rural areas, by a un/familiar perpetrator—bear great shame, but this needs to be directed to the perpetrators and the state who failed to protect them; similarly, HIV+ is not a moral vice and the state is accountable for its prevention and treatment.

These important messages are stated and restated in several modes that are meant to enable activists and the general audience to acknowledge, accept, and claim them. In a complex and prolonged process the audience witnesses these messages stated and enacted.
The performance of this alternative utopian reality in broad daylight and at the most public national spaces has a great impact on women’s ability to accept, possess, and act upon these views. The enactment of these messages allows the women themselves and the public in general not only to observe this utopian vision, but to participate in it, and to practice it, even if only for a short while, as a tangible, realistic short experience. Practiced through a collective, mass action, in which a supportive, potent community is presented, further reinforces this experience. As the participants practice this utopian alternative in the present, they start to envision themselves as part of a collective of potent, rights-worthy individuals who can make this performed possibility a reality. Or, put differently, as they self-transform into women-beings, they act to change the spaces in which they live to allow and encourage further transformations.

As I mentioned above, an important audience of these performances is “the people.” Following Goldstein’s work on witnessing acts of lynching (2003:30), by “the people”, I refer to the local inhabitants of a specific place (in this case the occasional passers-by), as well as the community or the nation. In this case it can also be extended beyond the nation, as the performances are also intended to reach an international audience. “The people”, are presented with the same set of statements, and witness them performed towards these state institutions. “The people,” thus, witness acts of (in)formed feminine identity, performed by women-beings, asserting that the state is accountable for their well-being. The participation of international human rights organizations further conveys the message.

Witnessing, claims Cohen Cruz, supposes a connection between knowledge and responsibility (1998:65). In his work about Greenpeace, Steven Durland states: “A person who bears witness to an injustice takes responsibility for that awareness. That person may
then choose to do something or stand by, but he may not turn away in ignorance” (1987). Similarly, “the people” witnessing the coordinadora, actoras, MPA, and Tierra Viva’s presentations of violence against women are made to acknowledge these experiences as women’s reality. Like the inter/national spectators of the Argentinean Madres (Taylor 1998:84), “the people” witnessing the Guatemalan antiviolence performances were challenged to applaud or look away, to do something or to stand by. Yet, once they witnessed these performances, these spectators could no longer shelter themselves with ignorance.

As I mentioned earlier, public spaces are not equally accessible to everyone, therefore the media is frequently used to mediate activists’ messages to the not-present public. The coordinadora organizes a media conference the week before the rally takes place and informs the inter/national media agencies about the acts that will take place during the day and the following 16 Days of Activity In addition to the comunicado de la prensa (press release) outlining the movement’s views in relation to the situation of violence against women, the media also receive other “supporting materials,” such as the latest available statistics on violence collected and analyzed by women’s groups. Further, the coordinadora designates between four and six voceras (spokeswomen) who both respond and initiate media briefs through this time period.

The different inter/national media agencies report the event to different degrees, and in the three years I took part in the events, the rally (and with variable regularity, the other events) was always reported in the main newspapers and TV news programs. Through this involvement of media, the Plaza, or City Square, that public space representing the

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263 However, with the 2012 change of administration the winds have changed and the movement is no longer given that much of media exposure (Sonia Acabal, personal communication, November 2012).
relationship between civil society and state, is transferred into a different civil space, the plasma (TV screen), or any other digital “square”. Thompson (2005:32, 35) discusses how technology thus enables us to transfer these images beyond time and place. Staged for national and international media cameras, these anti-violence performances, just like performances of violence itself, are broadcast beyond time and place.264

This wider presence of the antiviolence performances, beyond time and place, brings the performed messages to further audiences: “the people” who were not present in the street to witness the performances, as they were otherwise occupied or simply “out of town” (whether in or outside the country). Although mediated, the viewers have a similar witnessing experience; they can no longer shelter themselves with ignorance and are challenged to applaud these performances, or to look away.265

As I discussed earlier, this moment of acknowledgment challenges the mediated inter/national audience to do something or to stand by. In Guatemala, decades of state repression taught “the people” to overlook social problems that did not immediately concern them. However uncommon, choosing to do something is not impossible, and represents an optional, alternative reality. Choosing “to do something” is the moment when these antiviolence performances may influence the state; sometimes as civic action like elections, other times in economic and political external pressures on the state.

264 Some of these reports are uploaded to YouTube and can be repeatedly watched at any time or place: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga2cSa69gTk&list=PLD3AAD475554B735&index=1&feature=plpp_video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sW-UkWefVs&feature=BFa&list=PLD3AAD475554B735 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VeEiCEv_Aw&feature=BFa&list=PLD3AAD475554B735

265 While the immediate experience of witnessing can be very powerful, the mediated experience, beyond time and place, bringing public affairs into ones’ private space, usually multiplied by few different reports, has quite a powerful impact.
**Show Time: Carnival or Dress Rehearsal?**

The antiviolence performances I discuss in this paper are radical, though pacifist, street performances, meant to challenge and transform the existing social arrangement of power. However, the inevitable question raised by such performances, claims Cohen-Cruz, is what happens after the celebration? Should these performances be seen as what Mikhail Bakhtin defines as a modern form of carnival, a critique of the status quo; a playful, non-hierarchical and sensorial excessive events, in which the existing social order is temporarily suspended and reversed; only to resume and reproduce the same power structure afterwards? (1968:225). Alternatively, is there a way to capture that energy, stay grounded in that longing, and make permanent change? (Cohen-Cruz 1998:168).

Sometimes, like in Eastern Europe in 1989, street action can bring about change, claims Richard Schechner (1993), but mostly such scenes, both celebratory and violent, are temporary power reliefs sponsored by the old order that result in restoring the old order. The carnival, he argues, can act out a powerful critique of the status quo, but it cannot itself be what replaces the status quo. But what is the meaning of is this “powerful critique”?

The power to define is the power to control, therefore, claims Jerry Rubin, the role of the revolutionary, is to create a revolutionary frame of reference that can be used to challenge the structure of power. Hence, the goal of street performance is to get as many people as possible to overcome fear by offering them a new frame of reference and encourage them to take action. Living our fantasies, he says, we create reality (1970: 142-3). Diana Taylor in her work with the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* suggests a powerful example of the (limited) impact of performances that challenge the status-quo has. The fact that the *madres* did not
topple dictatorship does not mean they had no impact, as they called international attention to civil rights violations in Argentina (1998: 81).

Although the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, or *16 Days of Activity*, takes place on a designated date, and is usually supported by the state, I don’t see these performances as “temporary power reliefs sponsored by the old order that results in restoring the old order.” The state, indeed, “allowed” these performances to take place, mostly to ease international (political and economic) pressures to comply with international human rights conventions. However, after these performances have taken place, after an alternative reality has been presented and embodied, is it possible to go back to the “old order”?

Indeed, Guatemalan women still live in a violent reality, in which the quotidian act of walking in the street is experienced as unsafe, while returning home, to the private sphere, can be just as life threatening. However, following Agusto Boal (1992:231), I suggest seeing these performances not as “carnival”, but as “dress rehearsal”, not a one-time carnivalesque celebration, but a process in which women activists and their allies rehearse for a while, through various actions and processes of formation, new way to practice their identities. The antiviolence performances are thus the “dress rehearsal”, that moment when (social) actors are still not sure that the play will take place, but they already wear their own fitted costumes, and know their lines by heart. Although a complete social transformation was not accomplished, I claim that the performers have already transformed themselves. This self-transformation, will allow them to find a way to change the reality they live in, even if that will take much longer.
Conclusion

How do people generate social transformations? How do they learn to imagine alternative futures? How do they teach themselves—and others—that they are worthy of a better present? And how do they secure support and resources for such struggles? In this doctoral dissertation I address these questions in relation to Guatemalan women’s legacies of struggle for social justice.

While Guatemalan women, as individuals rather than as a collective, have always been involved in political struggles, in this research project I focus on the strategic transition from articulating their hopes for social justice through left wing, socialist ideology to doing so using women’s human rights discourse. I therefore ask: can women’s human rights discourse generate a social transformation in Guatemala? Can it help individuals to imagine an alternative future, to believe that they are worthy of a better present, and to secure support for their struggle? I claim that by reframing the discourse around dignity the Guatemalan women’s movement promotes a revolutionary social transformation in Guatemala.

Dignity, the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect, is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. The fact that Guatemalan women systematically demand the right for dignity reflects their sense that they have been denied said quality, and further attests to the fundamental state of injustice and inequality that has prevailed in Guatemalan society. Guatemala, the biggest economy in Central America is among the Latin American countries with the highest levels of inequality, with poverty indicators—especially in rural and Indigenous areas—among the highest in the region.

This structural inequality, formed through the colonial period and further developed with the liberal reforms of the nineteenth century, is maintained through legacies of structural
violence and upon challenge, violent repression. Namely, the acute state of inequality is maintained through various social, political and legal mechanisms that limit individuals’ access to resources that otherwise would allow them to develop and meet their human potential. Guatemalan women in general, and poor, Indigenous, and displaced women in particular are highly impacted by this reality. Their limited access to land, education and health maintains, reproduces and justifies their marginal social position. Structural violence is further reinforced by symbolic violence, the process in which individuals mentally absorb the hierarchical social structures in which they exist and so come to blame themselves for their own suffering. When individuals challenge these mechanisms, the challenge often provokes additional modes of violence used to push individuals and groups back to what is perceived as “their natural place” within the sociopolitical order.

In contrast to the confining mechanism of terror, hope, the ability to imagine change, is a key mechanism for any social transformation. However, how can individuals whose access to resources and understanding of the world and their role within it are shaped by these structures of power, imagine an alternative reality? How can women brought up in a society that socially devalues them and deprives many of them access to resources essential for their growth imagine a different vision of the future?

In Guatemala, I claim, the excessive state-sponsored political violence intended to keep individuals and collectives “in their place,” played an important role in opening new paths for imagining. This violence forced women to become the protagonists of their own lives in order to survive. It also facilitated their engagement (through exile and aid projects) with feminism and the women’s human rights discourse, generating the creation of women as a political subjectivity. The peace process further consolidate the category of women as a
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political subjectivity, by encouraging inclusive political participation and opening the political sphere to new actors.

Subsequently, organized Guatemalan women began to change their modes of operation. First, they began to participate through women-specific organizations, promoting women-specific agendas. Second, viewing themselves as political subjects and the state as a space of struggle, not an enemy, they began to make demands of the state. And third, they strategically chose to use transnational, neoliberal human rights discourse to articulate and represent their demands over the socialist discourse they had engaged with in earlier struggles. Beyond a new language to express their concerns, the women’s human rights apparatus provided Guatemalan women-activists with a powerful political and economic support crucial for challenging the structural mechanisms that limit their access to power.

Evidently, transnational women’s human rights discourse, a feminist agenda that both challenges and relies on the human rights discourse, reified several of its inherent contradictions. Grounded in feminist ideas, the emerging transnational movement institutionalized and incorporated new key concepts into human rights’ language and generated a wave of feminist policy-making around the globe. At the same time, the implementation of the new agenda was compromised as the new legislation does not guarantee enforcement and does not necessarily reflect new feminist standards. Further, two fundamental assumptions, “inherited” from the human rights discourse, seem to undermine the feminist spirit of the agenda particularly. First, its Universalist notion that while expanded to include the category of woman, is now unifying the category of woman. By so doing, it collapses the diverse experiences of women, ignoring the differences between them and the ways in which such differences shape diverse lived experiences. Second, its
assumption of the source or the structure of power, rooted in its mechanisms and practices, dividing individuals into victims and saviors. This practice, particularly in relation to women, reaffirms their assumed inferior social position and reproduces patriarchal structures.

The situation in Guatemala was similar to other locations. On the one hand, local women’s organizations, supported by international—political and financial—pressures lobbied for new legislation in favor of women’s rights and state institutions to support and regulate these new standards. Such new legislation went beyond their punitive nature and marked state declared accountability for women’s well-being and women’s activism as a venue for social transformation. At the same time, enforcement of the new legislation was limited, as were the resources extended to the state agencies meant to regulate the new norms. The legislation itself, as I discussed earlier, did not always reflect the new feminist standards. Further, it failed to recognize women’s diverse experiences and categorized them as a vulnerable category. Considering its internal contradictions, can a discourse that unify categories of women, views them as potential/victims, and fails to enforce the protection of their rights, serve to challenge their devalued, marginal social statute?

The Guatemalan women’s movement offers, I argue, a path to bridge these internal contradictions. On the one hand they utilize the discourse vocabulary and authority as well as the resources extended by the women’s human rights platform and the transnational momentum. On the other hand, they frame it in terms of dignity, emphasizing women’s right to have rights, i.e. their state of being worthy of respect, as well as their place in the world—and the country—as political subjects, not victims, worthy of happiness and hope. They further strengthen women’s sense of self-worth by emphasizing the diversity of women’s lived experience, their agency, and the strength they can draw by coming together. This
approach inspires women to begin to imagine themselves as rights-worthy political subjects, gradually assuming a new identity I termed women-beings. Such transformation, from a devalued being to a woman-being fundamentally challenges prevailing cultural patterns such as patriarchy and machismo and promotes further societal transformation.

My research, thus, portrays a movement. First, in the most basic sense of social movement, aiming to move, change, and transform social structures, the social norms and spaces that maintain and reproduce these structures, as well as the individuals who constitute that society. Second, this social movement is generated by movements, or flows of people, ideas, funds, and materialized into material objects that are then moved within and beyond the space of the movement, i.e. they are carried by activists, but also distributed to non-organized women. Methodologically, as I discussed in Chapter 1, this endeavour poses an additional challenge: how does one represent a social structure in a process of transformation? In this account I do so by maintaining the movement through the account. That is to say, I organized this dissertation around the annual November 25 march, in itself an act of movement and mobilization, but also used it as entry point to address back-stage processes. By moving between different sections of the march and between the march and other activities, I aimed to invite the reader to experience some of this sense of movement.

Further, I used the march to represent the movement’s work and to highlight how the march, as a culmination of the activity year, serves to present the main flows and transitions constituting the space of the movement: The presence of international, regional and local ideas, individuals and funds; the constant move between past, present, and future; the coexistence of general and particular demands; the dialectic transformation societal and individual, spatial and corporal; and above all a strong sense of diverse, vibrant community.
Activists standing between the Constitutional Plaza and the National Palace at the end of the march. The T-shirt reads: “15 years of building history” (front) and “I say, we say, everybody say: I’m a citizen. I fight for women’s citizenship, from my territory: Body and Land” (back), and the truck sign resonates: “We Appropriating and Recover Our Territory: Body and Land.”
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To conclude, I would like to freeze one moment in time and look at its antecedents and trajectories. This moment takes place at the end of the march, after the closing ceremony at the alternative plaza, and as activists pause, they allow us to better see the space of the movement. They allow us to see the space created by the physical flow, from one location to another, of people, funds, ideas; the space they created by coming together. As the front of the T-shirt worn by the three activists at the center of the picture states, they have been moving for 15 years now. The Mayan numbers ground us in a specific locality while the purple caption adds a transnational feminist presence. The purple little butterfly brings forward the local and regional legacies of women-activists’ struggle for transition and alternative reality, and the logos of the international sponsors reminds us the international—political, ideological, and financial—dimension of the campaign.

The back of the T-shirt highlights the sense of community and coming together, an empowering experience that encourages women to claim their position as citizens, one that they are willing to struggle for. As political subjects they occupy the Guatemalan Seat of Power, while challenging the assumption of the source of power. The fundamental territories they came to claim their right for are their bodies as well as economic resources that will allow them greater control of their own intimate territory. The butterfly wings worn on top of this T-shirt emphasize how multilayered this campaign is. Further, they mark this location, the Guatemalan Seat of Power, as a site of ongoing dialectic transformation, individual and societal, one that represents both an outcome of a long process, and a method to keep the (transformation) process going.

The individual and collective ability to imagine and present an alternative future, I illustrated, is fundamental for the social transformation the movement is aiming for. Creating
a better reality in Guatemala, though, is a dual, dialectical process that goes beyond transforming individual women’s subjectivities into *women-beings* and also requires transforming the spaces in which they live to allow and encourage these new subjectivities. The new public and political spaces that the movement promoted began to undermine legacies of institutionalized discrimination against women and thus directly impacted women’s lived experiences. Furthermore, the mere existence of new spaces encouraged individuals to continue imagining a better, alternative reality. Hence, publically presented individual and societal transformations are both an outcome of a long process, and a method to keep the (transformation) process going.

As activists present themselves as rights-worthy political subjects entitled to make demands of the state, it may seem as if they have replaced their revolutionary intent with a reformist agenda. However, as I have illustrated above, the “reform” that they are aiming to promote through collaboration with the state is revolutionary by nature. The fact that they are now employing the state in order to transform society attests to and reinforces their own transformation into *women-beings*.

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing. (Arundhati Roy 2003)

In 2003 Arundhati Roy, an Indian author and political activist, was asked to speak about “How to Confront Empire?” at the World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Denouncing a complex web of powers that compose the neoliberal order and their impact on people all over the world, she also stated that these powers could be challenged. Starting with a few contemporary examples of such challenges from Latin America, she insisted on
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maintaining hope and confronting such powers “with our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories.” This transnational call for activism, which emphasizes creativity, diversity, and human agency, resonates through this doctoral thesis, and reminds us of the extent that sociopolitical structures need be confronted in order to guarantee an alternative reality in Guatemala. By using the pronoun “her” to describe the world, Roy reminds us that when confronting such powers, the mere act of proposing an alternative reality challenges this reality and its oppressive structures of power.

While the discourse of human rights has become the way people speak about what is universally good in life, as I discussed earlier, it often serves as an alibi for the neoliberal order. In this account I illustrate how an alternative framing and practice of the human rights discourse, one focusing on dignity, can promote a substantial improvement in individuals’ lived reality. The Guatemalan women’s movement, I demonstrate, utilize the discourse’s vocabulary and authority as well as the resources extended by the women’s human rights platform and the transnational momentum. At the same time, their practice emphasizes values that contradict the discourse: community, diversity, and agency. This emphasis, I claim, assists in promoting a sense of dignity which encourages individuals to view themselves as important to their society and worthy of respect and happiness; as such, they begin to own the discourse that helped in transforming them. Owning this discourse, they reject the status of victims and demand to be seen as actors; they demand to be viewed through diversity and solidarity. By assuming a rights-worthy, political subject position (women-beings) organized Guatemalan women present an alternative vision of the future and
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promote a revolutionary societal change. Going back to Lorde, I suggest that through such practice, the “master’s tools (can) dismantle the master’s house.”
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Tierra Viva

Torres-Rivas, Edelberto

Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemala (URNG)
2005 Feminicidio en Guatemala: Crimenes Contra la Humanidad. Guatemala City: URNG.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Velasco, Natalie Jo.

Velásquez Nimatuj, Irma Alicia

Véliz, Rodrigo J. and Kevin O’Neill

Walters Shirley with Linzi Manicom, eds.

Walters, Shirley

Warren, Kay B..

Warren, Kay B. and Jean Jackson, eds.


## Appendix 1: Time Line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>The October (20) Revolution, overthrow the liberal dictatorship of Jorge Ubico, and marked the beginning of the Guatemalan “Ten Years of Spring.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td><strong>New Democratically Elected Administration</strong>&lt;br&gt;Juan Jose Arevalo, Revolutionary Action Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>New Guatemalan Constitution, that extended citizenship to all men and literate women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td><strong>New Democratically Elected Administration</strong>&lt;br&gt;Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, Revolutionary Action Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>CIA backed coup commanded by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, who became the first president in a long line of military presidents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>The assassination of the Mirabal Sisters (Patria, Minerva, Maria Teresa) and driver Rufino de la Cruz, Dominican Republic, November 25.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>New Guatemalan Constitution, granted suffrage right to illiterate women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>UN First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, marking International Women’s Year and the start of the UN Decade for Women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the UN General Assembly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>The burning of the Spanish Embacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>The UN's second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>First Latin American and Caribbean Feminist “Encuentro” in Bogotá, Colombia November 25th was instituted as Day to End Violence Against Women as a tribute to the Mirabal Sisters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Adoption of CEDAW in Guatemala (decree 49-82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>The UN's Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>New Guatemalan Constitution, including the principle of liberty and equality between men and women (article #4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td><strong>New Civil Elected Administration</strong> Vinicio Cerezo, Guatemalan Christian Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>The fourth Encuentro in Taxco, Mexico (including substantial Guatemalan participation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Following the encuentro: creation of the first Guatemalan Feminist organizations GGM, Tierra Viva.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>The Fifth Encuentro (San Bernando, Chile). The Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is formed to foster regional collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td><strong>New Civil Administration</strong>&lt;br&gt;Jorge Serrano Elías :Jan 1991-June 1993, Solidarity Action Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Creation of the No Violence Network (RedNoVi) in response to the assassination of Dinora Pérez.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Constitution of the “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence” between November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Against Violence Against Women, and December 10, Human Rights Day. (By the international feminist leadership conference at the CWGL).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td><strong>New Administrations</strong> Following a defeated coup by president Jorge Serrano against the government, the army appointed Gustavo Adolfo Espina Salguero (June) who was soon replaced by the congress with Ramiro de León Carpio, who served as president until the end of the original term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Adoption of the “Convention of Belém do Para” in Guatemala (decree 69-94).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, Egypt. First international document that defines Reproductive Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Creation of Sector Mujer to represent women in the Assembly of Civil Society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing Restated Violence Against Women as a Violation of Human Rights Reproductive health declared as a Right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The Guatemalan Constitutional Court declares unconstitutional the gendered dependent treatment of adultery (proceeding 936-95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><strong>New Civil Administration</strong> Álvaro Arzú, National Advancement Party/Unionist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Peace Accords between the Civil Government and URNG. Issues of particular interest to women are discussed in The Accord on Socio-Economic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation (May 1996), and in The Accord on Strengthening of Civilian Power and the Role of The Armed Forces (September 1996).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Constitution of the National Civil Police (PNC), as response to the peace accords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Reforms in the Civil Code. Issues of particular interest to women: Equal conditions for the marital / family representation were granted to men and women. The act that granted husbands to oppose their wife’s work outside the household was repealed (decree 90-98).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>November 25th officially designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Law for Integral Women's Promotion and Dignity (decree 7-99).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>New Civil Administration</strong> Alfonso Portillo, Guatemalan Republican Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Creation of Organismo Judicial [Judicial Body or &quot;OJ&quot;], the federal entity responsible for the administration of the courts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Regulation for the VIF Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Creation of the Presidential Women’s Secretariat, SEPREM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Creation of the National Coordinator for the Prevention and Eradication of Interfamilial Violence and Violence against Women, CONAPREVI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Social Development Law (decree 42-2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Ratification of CEDAW’s additional protocol (decree 59-2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Action plan for Guatemalan Women’s Full Participation 2002-2012 (designed by ‘national women’s forum’ and SEPREM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Law of national languages, that allowed rural, monolinguual women to access justice in their language (decree 19-3003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2004 | **New Civil Administration**  
  Óscar Berger, National Solidarity Party/Grand National Alliance                                                                         |
| 2005 | Law for Universal and Equal access to Family Planning Methods and its integration in the National Plane for Reproductive Health (decree 87-2005) |
| 2005 | Creation of the Protectorate of Indigenous Women, DEMI                                                                                 |
| 2005 | Framework Law for the fulfillment of the peace accords, full representation of women in the national council of the peace accords (decree 52-2005). Luz Méndez Gutiérrez y Sandra Morán were the first elected representatives. |
| 2005 | The constitutional court declares unconstitutional article 200 of the penal code. (An article that stipulates that a man accused of rape is relieved of charges is he marries the victim, proceeding 2818-2005.) |
| 2006 | Creation of the Guatemalan National Institute for Forensic Sciences, INACIF.                                                              |
| 2006 | Creation of the Women’s Unit (*Unidad de la Mujer*) at the Judicial Body, *OJ*                                                          |
| 2007 | Creation of the The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG.                                                       |
| 2008 | **New Civil Administration** Álvaro Colom, National Unity of Hope                                                                      |
| 2008 | Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women (decree 22-2008)                                                           |
| 2008 | Gender Equality Policy in higher education (IUMUSAC/USAC)                                                                               |
| 2009 | Law Against Sexual Violence, Exploitation, and Trafficking (decree 9-2009)                                                             |
| 2009 | Policy for Universal and Equal Access to Family Planning Services                                                                      |
| 2009 | Policy for attending victims of sexual violence.                                                                                         |
| 2010 | Creation of the specialized courts                                                                                                     |
| 2012 | **New Civil Administration** Otto Pérez Molina, Patriotic Party                                                                         |
### Appendix 2: Women’s Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Created</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actores de Cambio</strong> (Women) Actors of Change</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Supporting and capacitating women survivors of state sponsored sexual violence during the Internal Armed Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGMM Guatemalan Association of Women Doctors</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Promotion and protection of women’s comprehensive health (including sexual and reproductive health, violence against women as a health risk).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMES Association of Women in Solidarity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting women's rights particularly reproductive and sexual rights and health, violence against women, and labor rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATRAHDOM Association of Domestic and Maquila Workers</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Promotion and defense of human and labor rights of women in Guatemala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CalDH Center for Human Rights Legal Action</td>
<td>1980’s/1996¹⁹⁹⁶</td>
<td>Promote and defend basic human rights in Guatemala focusing on post-conflict reconciliation, women’s rights, indigenous rights, and youth rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colectivo Artesana Artisan Collective</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Protection of the rights of women prisoners and fighting against their social discrimination. Promoting women’s rights through art, sports and other creative methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centro Q’anil Q’anil Center</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Contribute to the regeneration of the Guatemalan social fabric through processes of personal healing for activists dedicated to social transformation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CICAM Center for Women’s Research, Training and Support</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Promotion of women’s rights in relation to violence against women and women’s sexuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODEFEM Collective for the Defense of Women’s Rights in Guatemala</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Promoting full, active, civil participation of Mayan, Xincas, Garifuna and mestizas women, in community, municipal, national and international levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCPM Women Civic Political Convergence</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Promote, advance, and stimulate active women’s participation in sociopolitical processes and institutions, in order to guarantee a genuine democracy and women’s full citizenship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁹⁹⁶ A few of the organizations were recreated or reorganized hence the use of 1980s/1997.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ecap</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team of Community Studies and Psychosocial Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment of victims of political violence during the Internal Armed Conflict.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Fundación Sobrevivientes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survivors Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to the prevention, sanction, and eradication of violence against women through legal, psychological and social support of survivors (and family members of murdered women).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>GGM</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guatemalan Women’s Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote full development of women and the elimination of all forms of oppression, discrimination, and violence in Guatemala. Strengthening the women’s movement as a political actor in Guatemala. Comprehensive support for women survivors of sexual and domestic violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ICCPG</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of Comparative Studies in Criminal Science Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural change of the Guatemalan legal system in relation to legal plurality and alternative modes of conflict resolution. Promoting and protecting women’s human rights and vulnerable populations (prisoners, youth at risk).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>LaCuerda</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting women as political subjects for the transformation of Guatemalan democracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Lesbirada</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the development of young lesbians and organized lesbians into social and political activists.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MuJER</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women for Justice, Education, and Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower women sex workers to become socially and politically active by offering programs that range from literacy and vocational training to emotional well-being and violence prevention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>** Mujeres en Resistencia **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women in Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transform women’s political status through the appropriation and appreciation of their bodies and lives, and the recognition of their multiple identities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MPA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIV+Women in Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the human rights of girls and women, Mayan, Xincas, Garifuna and mestizas, who live with HIV/AIDS in Guatemala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mujeres Transformando el Mundo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RedNoVi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector de Mujeres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tierra Viva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAMG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 3: Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Organization/Role</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alba Trejo</td>
<td>Special Presidential Advisor on the topic of Femicide</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejandra Meuegazzo</td>
<td>SEPREM</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alitza Navas</td>
<td>Tierra Viva</td>
<td>May, November 2010, November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amandine Fulchiron</td>
<td>Actoras de Cambio</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Castillo Hueratas</td>
<td>Fundacion Guillermo Toriello</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Gladis Ollas</td>
<td>PDH</td>
<td>June, November 2010, December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Grace Cabrera</td>
<td>UNIFEM (UN Women)</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Maria Alvarez</td>
<td>CODEFEM</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Maria Cofino</td>
<td>LaCuerda</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Silvia Monzon</td>
<td>Voces de Mujeres, Mujeres al Aire, FLASCO</td>
<td>May 2010, December 2011, May 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabethsy Leonardo</td>
<td>SEPREM</td>
<td>February 2010, November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen Lopez de Caseres</td>
<td>Convergencia</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen Yolanda Lopez Palacios</td>
<td>IUMSAC</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia Alvarez</td>
<td>GGM</td>
<td>June 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia Acevedo</td>
<td>Lesbirada</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia Areli Rosales</td>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colectivo Nazareth</td>
<td>UNAMG</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia Castillo Godoy</td>
<td>Unidad de la Mujer OJ</td>
<td>June, November 2010, December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dora Amalia Taraceua</td>
<td>Convergencia</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvira Avila Barahoua</td>
<td>Tierra Viva</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa Portillo</td>
<td>CONAPREVI</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Morales Pineda</td>
<td>Tierra Viva</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabiola Ortiz Martinez</td>
<td>CONAPREVI</td>
<td>November 2010, December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flor de Maria Peña</td>
<td>MuJER</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giuvana Lemus</td>
<td>GGM</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Evelyn Dalila Curuchich Simon</td>
<td>DEMI</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda Morales</td>
<td></td>
<td>June, November 2010, November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris Elizabeth Campos Garcia</td>
<td>CalDH</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irma Esperanza Salzar</td>
<td>CONAPREVI</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irma Yolanda Avila Augueta</td>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel Cruz</td>
<td>Sector de mujer</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karin Ramos</td>
<td>Mujeres en Resistencia</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonor Eunice Gonzalez Arrecis</td>
<td>CICAM</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liduvina Mendez Garcia</td>
<td>Actoras de Cambio</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nombre</td>
<td>Organización</td>
<td>Fecha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia Moran</td>
<td>Mujeres transformando el mundo</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luz Mendez</td>
<td>UNAMG</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luisa Cabrera Perez</td>
<td></td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucrecia Leal</td>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magda Medina</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Elena Reynosos</td>
<td>Tierra Viva</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Isabel Grijalva</td>
<td>CODEFEM</td>
<td>June 2010, November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Ixmucane Solorzano Castillo</td>
<td></td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta Olga Rodriguez</td>
<td>Assistant to the Special Presidential Advisor on the topic of Femicide</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya Alvarado</td>
<td>UNAMG</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirna Espaderos</td>
<td>CICAM</td>
<td>January, June 2010, December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam Maldonado</td>
<td>IUMSAC</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina Escobedo</td>
<td>UNAMG</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma Cruz</td>
<td>Sobrevivientes</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Borrayo</td>
<td>IUMSAC</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Galicia</td>
<td>IUMSAC</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Pinto Quijano</td>
<td>CODEFEM</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Alicia Paz</td>
<td>ecap</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Marina Rius Arriaga</td>
<td>SEPREM</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula Beatriz Gonzalez</td>
<td>UNAMG</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilar Mareque</td>
<td>UNIFEM (UN Women)</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebe</td>
<td>GGM</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reina del Carmen Lopez</td>
<td>SEPREM</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Gallardo</td>
<td>Mujeres en Resistencia</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario Escobedo</td>
<td>Sector de Mujer</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
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<td>Rossana Cifuentes</td>
<td>AGMM</td>
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<td>Sandra Morán</td>
<td>Sector Mujer &amp; Casa Artesana</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
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<td>Shirley Samapa</td>
<td>ICCEP</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
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<td>Sonia Acabal</td>
<td>RedNoVi</td>
<td>June, November 2010, November 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susana Vasquez</td>
<td>Tierra Viva</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
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<td>Virginia Hizabeth Galuez Rafael</td>
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<td>June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walda Barrios-Klee</td>
<td>UNAMG, USAC, FLASCO</td>
<td>June 2010, November 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wendi</td>
<td>MujER</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yolanda Aguilar</td>
<td>Actoras de cambio, Centro Q'anil</td>
<td>May, November 2010, November 2011</td>
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Appendix 4: Documents

Comunicado (Press Release) Coordinadora 25 de Noviembre

PRESS RELEASE

NOVEMBER 25 COORDINATION

WE REJECT THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Yesterday, today and always, violence against women has been part of our life. It affects women of all ages, education levels, geographical locations, sexual identities and social conditions. All women, in some moment of our lives, have suffered some type of discrimination and have been undervalued or abused due to the mere fact that they are women. This situation has been “naturalized,” and due to this the society apparently sees it as a normal behavior, allowing and justifying it.

We, women, have been relegated to a second position in society, our roles are considered to be reproductive (home, maternity, domestic). This situation promotes a lack of respect of our rights and the disregard of our contributions to society: labour, social, economic, professional, political, the defense of our territories, and others.

Some effects of violence against women are:

- The lack of access to justice for those women that denounce the CRIME of violence against them.
- The criminalization of women that suffer violence, and of those that defend their territories and their individual and collective rights.
- The blaming of women for the sexual violence exerted against them.
- The re-victimization of women that denounce, due to the lack of sensibility of judicial officers that refuse to apply the law in defence of the life, security and dignity of women.
- The lack of criminal prosecutions against the aggressors and murderers of women due to sexist and racist interpretations of judges and judicial officers. At the same time, the lack of homogeneity in the interpretation and application of the “Law against Feminicide and other Forms of Violence against Women.”

Translated by Naayeli Ramirez-Espinosa and Erika M. Cedillo.
• The isolation of women that happens when they are confined to their domestic roles, limiting the complete exercise of their rights.

• The lack of opportunities for education, dignified employment, access to housing, financial support, health, recreation, and the exercise of our sexual and reproductive rights.

These effects derive from “machismo,” discrimination, phobia against lesbians, and racism, and this is why WE REJECT AND DENOUNCE THEIR EXISTENCE AND DEMAND CHANGE IN THE STATE STRUCTURE AND THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE GUATEMALAN SOCIETY.

Therefore, in celebration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the women organizations and groups of organizations that integrate the “Coordinadora November 25,” demand the following:

TO THE EXECUTIVE POWER:

• The strengthening of the institutes of women: DEMI, SEPREM and CONAPREVI with financial support, political support and respect to their mandates.

• The elimination of institutions that debilitate the current system of institutions established for women. For example, the establishment of the “Commission against Feminicide” which duplicates the functions of the CONAPREVI.

• The political and financial support for the government ministries for the execution of the “Policy for the Promotion and Integral Development of Women” and the “Plan for Equal Opportunities 2008-2023.”

TO THE JUDICIAL POWER:

• The establishment of measures and punishments for judges that do not apply correctly the “Law against Feminicide and other forms of Violence against Women.” And also for the courts that refuse to hear the cases contemplated in this law.

• To make MANDATORY the training of judges in regards to the “Law against Feminicide and other forms of Violence against Women,” as well as other laws to protect women.

• The broad diffusion of the specialized courts’ mandate aiming to hinder the re-victimization of women, who incur in expenses and put their security at risk when coming to these places believing that there they can denounce violence against them.

TO THE LEGISLATIVE POWER:

• The approval of the necessary budget to strengthen the women’s institutions: DEMI, SEPREM, and CONAPREVI, and the necessary laws to guarantee their permanence and abilities.

• The auditing of all public institutions that are involved in applying and enforcing the “Law against Feminicide and other forms of Violence against Women.”
• The coordination, articulation and reporting of the “Women Commission” to the women organizations regarding its political, legislative and auditing role.

• The prioritization of the approval of the Women’s Legislative Agenda, emphasizing labour, political participation and rural development.

TO PROSECUTORS, “THE INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC CRIMINAL DEFENSE” AND “THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FORENSIC SCIENCE.”

• The coordination of actions with the aim of homogenizing criteria to specialize criminal prosecution against criminals and women aggressors. And the submission of the necessary evidence for the judges to deliver exemplary decisions and fighting impunity.

TO THE MEDIA:

• The practice of truthful, impartial, objective and well-researched journalism in reporting information about violence against women, hindering the use of women with sensationalist aims.

TO THE GENERAL POPULATION:

• The REJECTION of the effects of violence against women, to identify those effects, and to unite in SOLIDARITY with thousands of women, sisters, friends, daughters, mothers, grandmothers that live violence every day.

THE PROBLEM HAS NOT BEEN SOLVED!

What are we doing as a society to solve the problem?

Guatemala, November 25, 2010

Violence against women is a crime and feminicide too!
**Somos Brujas /We are witches**

We are independent women, wise women, free women, we are witches.

For thousands of years, women have had the art of healing; they gathered food, kept the fire going, tanned and preserved skins.

According to tradition, in medieval times, healers were the possessors of this ancient wisdom, and were knowledgeable about herbs and their transformation into balms and medicinal products. They were midwives, alchemists, perfumers, cooks and nurses who had knowledge of fields such as anatomy, botany, sexuality, love, or reproduction, providing an important service to the community. This expertise and wisdom was interpreted by conservatives and dominant groups of the time as a power of the Devil.

This knowledge was passed from woman to woman in families and communities; extending them the art of healing and its application to the needy. Women honed their skills and enriched their knowledge of health, education, literature, astronomy, astrology threatened the Christian authorities’ indoctrination.

These women also recognized the goddesses and gods of ancient religions instead of the one God, our Father, a male divinity of patriarchal religion, worshiped by Christians. For these reasons, the Inquisition defamed these women accused of being witches and everything they did was viewed as Witchcraft. Relying on such false legitimized to commit one of the biggest crimes witnessed by humanity, as they tortured, murdered and burned at the stake thousands of valued women just because they had accessed and practiced this ancient wisdom.

Recognizing these women and identifying with them, on our 21st year of work as Tierra Viva, affirms that witches were not destroyed. They still exist and are:

Feminists, healers, midwives, homeopaths, counselors, therapists, teachers, artists, writers, women lawyers, women doctors, intermediate, philosophers, lesbians, mothers, whores, young and not so young and thousands more ...

We are witches: we are those that continue to create and spread magic in various spaces from our needs, aspirations, expectations and utopias, transforming ourselves into protagonists of our own lives through the appropriation of our bodies and the exercise of our sexuality and eroticism until the creation of the free, equitable society to which we aspire.

On Tierra Viva’s 21st birthday we want to renew our commitment to ourselves and other women to continue contributing to the cause of women, from a feminist point of view in order to get a bit closer to that world we dream of and try to build, where there is no violence, injustice, discrimination and various miseries; A world where we can be found through diversity, a world where solidarity and justice are a constant, a world in which we enrich each other in different ways; A liberating and libertarian world.

We also commit ourselves to continue to spread feminism as a global proposal, open and flexible, where we women propose, decide and implement actions to achieve that just, equitable and solidar society, where patriarchy does not limit our development.

Witch to witch, we wish that the magic of creativity and collaboration will accompany us.
Alcémonos (Let us rise up) / Hilda Morales Trjillo

Mujeres

alcémonos para que compren que no es una sola.
que todas unidas formamos la mitad del cielo, formamos la mitad del mundo y estamos dispuestas a levantar muros contra la violencia, a hacer nuevas reglas para que nuestros hijos hombres rompen la cadena ancestral de golpear y golpear... para que Juanito no aprenda a matar la ternura y la dignidad de nuestras hijas, nietas y bisnietas.

Women

Let us rise up so that They will understand that it is not only one woman. that all of us together form half of the sky, we form half the world and we are ready to build walls against violence, to make new rules so that our sons will break the ancestral chain of punching and hitting... so that Juanito doesn’t learn to kill the tenderness and dignity of our daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters