Cuerpo-Territorio: Embodied Transformative Memory and Cartographies of Healing among GuateMaya Feminist Groups

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: *Cuerpo-Territorio*: Embodied Transformative Memory and Cartographies of Healing among GuateMaya Feminist Groups

My dissertation presented case studies of two GuateMaya feminist groups that are challenging state-dominant narratives of the Guatemalan 36-year- war (1960-1996) and foregrounding counter-memory with art, Maya cosmovision spirituality, and gendered embodied memory production. The groups also denounced contemporary feminicide cases through the cosmo-political praxis of *cuerpo-territorio*. Cuerpo-territorio declares the body our first territory and advocates for a communal subject agency. I develop this deeply embodied framework to examine how *8 Tijax* and *GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-Los Angeles (GMR-LA)* challenge the state's hegemonic memory by actively engaging in embodied transformative memory experiences, or what I describe as *healing cartographies*. I asserted that such healing cartographies at the scale of the intimate contribute to hemispheric decolonial solidarity. These healing cartographies contradict and actively challenge the Guatemalan state's claims of what can be remembered or erased when the evidence is embodied and reiterated, told through stories, and brought into being by active remembrance. I use a community-based participatory approach and feminist ethnographic methods to examine and support the transnational affective solidarity connecting GuateMaya women throughout the hemisphere. My research is a political project of unearthing the counter-memory, silences, fear, and intergenerational trauma from the oral and embodied *testimonios* of GuateMaya women survivors of genocide who are currently involved in collective projects to recover Guatemala's historical memory. While GuateMaya feminist groups

are connected across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, my dissertation focused on the relational *testimonios* of GuateMaya feminist groups in Guatemala and Los Angeles.

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Dedication

Para mis abuelas: Carmelina Macal Ruiz, Maria Hilaria Paz, Lidia Amanda Macal, y Juliana Osorio. Gracias por fortalecer en mi la memoria.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Affective Testimonios

On March 7, 2017, the day before International Women's Day, a day to honor the arduous labor of women all around the world, 56 girls attempted to escape from the ongoing sexual abuses, child sex trafficking, malnourishment, and physical abuses that they suffered at the state-operated shelter Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción in San Jose Pinula, Guatemala. The shelter's responsibility is to protect the well-being of children and adolescents who suffer abuse at the hands of their family members and in the streets. One of the girls staying at the shelter mentioned they wanted to feel a sense of freedom since they were denied every necessity, even menstruation pads. Their freedom lasted only a few minutes before the former president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, called on the police to return the girls to the horrible conditions of the so-called shelter. One hundred police officers arrived to capture the girls -identified as escaped criminals-and locked them in a small room. They were prevented from using the restroom and were forced to create a private area to pee using two mattresses. After a couple of hours, a fire broke out inside the shelter. The girls screamed for help, kicking the door to escape the fire. It took Linda Marroquin (police manager) nine minutes to open the door. The negligence of the shelter's staff and the police's criminalization of the girls resulted in 41 deaths, while 15 survivors were physically and emotionally scarred. It has been six years since this terror occurred, but the mothers of the girls and feminist activists in Guatemala and across the globe have continued to demand justice. Vianey Hernandez, mother of Ashley Hernandez, who died during the fire, says, "I won't stop until I see them behind bars, and if there is not a fair sentence, we will look for other ways to gain justice."

How do the mothers of the 41 girls preserve their daughters' memory? How do the mothers honor their daughter's death amidst the dominant narratives of the state? In what places are they allowed to remember? These are some of the questions I have asked myself and the research participants throughout the past five years while searching for answers in a country that continues criminalizing the 56 girls and their families. The emotional, mental, and physical distress the 56 Guatemalan girls experienced on March 7, 2017, reflects the Guatemalan society as well as the historical and contemporary worldwide conditions of dehumanization, terror, genocide, feminicide, fascism, apathy, the destruction of subaltern subjects, and the ongoing violence against women. I began this chapter with an excerpt about the story of the 56 Guatemalan girls to set the scene for the dissertation and its themes and connect *8 Tijax* and

GuateMaya[1] Mujeres en Resistencia-L.A. to Guatemala. The legal case of Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion shelter has been ongoing for over six years, interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and state officials' dominant narratives of criminalizing the 56 girls and their families. However, the mothers of the girls and GuateMaya feminist groups across the hemisphere zealously continue to seek justice. To examine state official dominant narratives, I analyzed Guatemala's newspapers like *Prensa Libre,* which is a popular newspaper and state laws 2002-2008 (Ley contra el Femicidio y Otras Formas de Violencia Contra La Mujer). In addition, the participant's oral and embodied testimonies provided evidence about state narratives to analyze.

The ongoing search for justice for the mothers and families of the 56 girls continues to be disrupted by the state of Guatemala, not only in the legal process (Castillo, 2023) but also through the public blaming of the mothers for what happened to their daughters and the continual destruction of the 41 girl's altar (see Figure 1) that is located in front of the presidential palace in Zona 1[2] (See Figure 2). The space where the altar is continually recreated and cared for has been renamed by feminist groups to "Plaza de las Niñas" (The girls' plaza). Vianey Hernandez, the mother of one of the girls, said, "The altar assures us that a tragedy like that will never happen again" (Flores, 2019). Based on the interview I conducted in 2021, Mayra, one of *8 Tijax* members, explains that the altar now is a symbol of remembrance of the 41 girls and serves as a place where Indigenous people can hold Maya ceremonies. *8 Tijax* is a volunteer grassroots group involved in producing what they call a "permanent memory" of the 56 girls who were victims and survivors of the fire and work against gender colonial state violence.

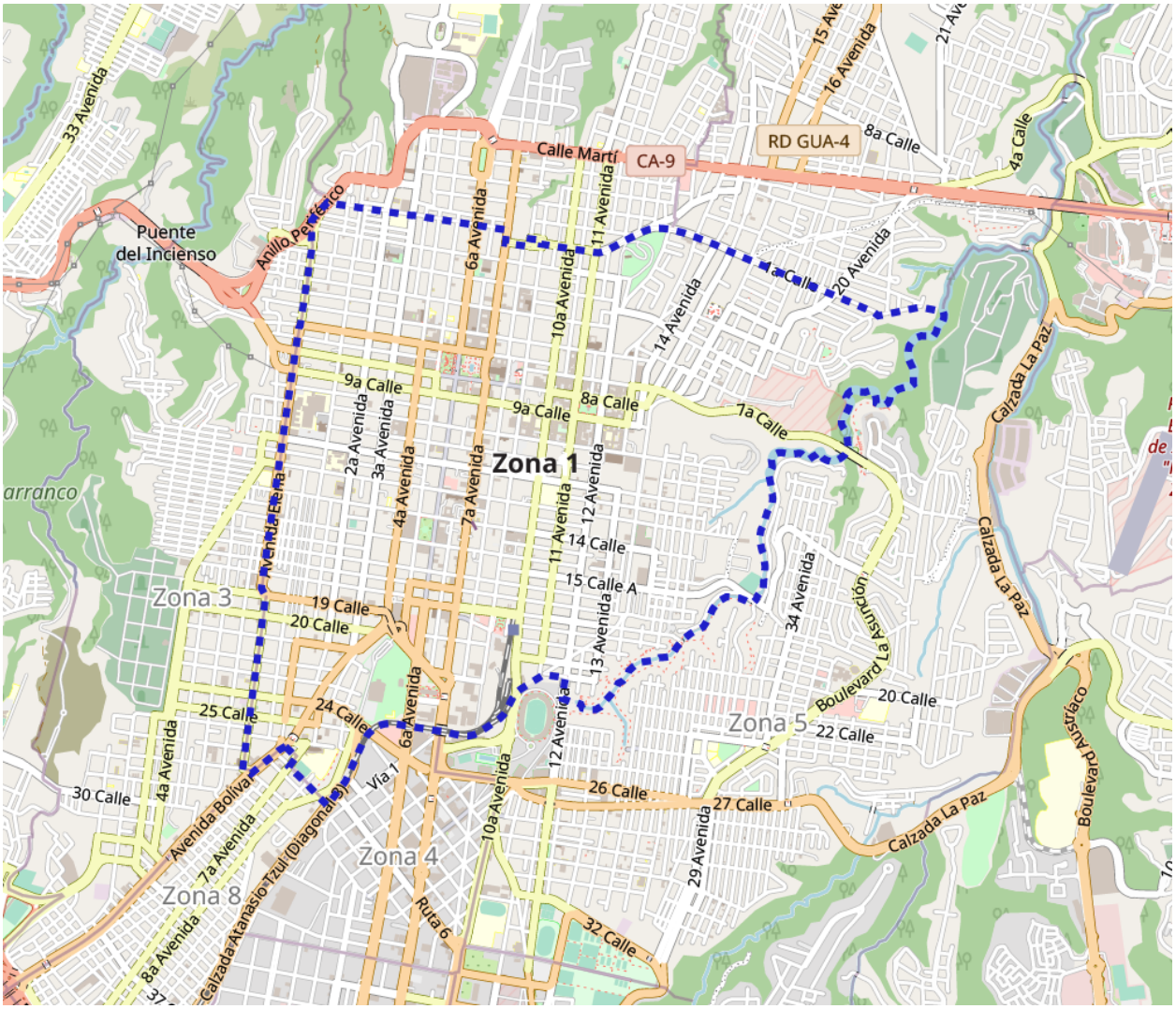
[1] GuateMaya, a growing term among social activist groups challenges the racial homogenization of Guatemalan people and creates a binary concept integrating the Maya culture.
[2] Zona in Guatemala is a district. Zona 1 is a historical landmark in Guatemala City

Figure 1

Destroyed Altar and Recreated Altar Honoring the 41 Girls in Zona 1

Figure 2

Zona 1 map



The story of the 56 girls and their mothers is one of many reflecting colonial violence and Latin America's Dirty Wars (Macmanus, 2020) that brutally separated children from their mothers. A historical group known as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina paved the way, teaching us that a commitment to memory transmits ongoing organizing, refusing never to forget. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo challenged and transformed traditional interpretations

of maternity by redefining it collectively and politically: They described themselves as mothers of all the disappeared and a new generation of Argentine youths, acting as their political mentors. They referred to the young people who gathered around them in support groups as their children, meaning that, like their disappeared children, they had become linked to them through their passion for political reform and concern for the disadvantaged. Referring to these youths, the Mothers described themselves as "permanently pregnant," who are heralding a new generation of political leaders" (Guzman Bouvard, 1994, p. 15). Similarly, the mothers of the 56 girls found themselves in a permanent state of grief as some also lost family members during the 36-year war. As Vianey Hernandez shared:

> *Le hice una promesa a mi hija cuando la enterré. Estaré con ella hasta el final porque ella está conmigo. Siento su presencia, nunca voy a dejar de buscar justicia. Ella sabe que yo no abandonaría su memoria.*
>
> I made a promise to my daughter when I buried her. I will be with her until the end because she is with me. I feel her presence, I am never going to stop searching for justice. She knows that I would not abandon her memory.

Decolonial scholar Macarena Gomez-Barris (2009) stated, "It is through the gathering of individual memory threads and reconstituted social experience that symbolic memory repertoires accrue and inscribe meaning to negotiate the past in contemporary society" (p. 7). The mothers and members of the GuateMaya feminist groups retell their memories of the war and current state violence, which produces cultural memory. Cultural memory is a concept I weave in throughout this dissertation as a tool to examine how individuals and groups constitute their memory through art, symbols, and transformative embodied memory. Cultural memory scholars (Alderman 2012; Gomez-Barris 2009; Pulido 2023; Sturken 1997) viewed cultural memory as archival fragments, as memory symbolics, as sites of disaster, and as ways to understand the persistence of state terror in people's lives, bodies, and subjectivities. For my research, the work

of Marita Sturken (1997) and her contributions to cultural memory are significant as she noted how cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history. In addition, cultural memory reminds us that memory is fluid and changing and is crucial to understanding culture precisely because it indicates collective desires, needs, and self-definition. We need to ask not whether a memory is accurate but rather what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present (Sturken, 1997, p. 2). In my research, memory unfolded multifacetedly as the groups shared oral, embodied, digital, and public memory by creating spiritual altars. Through the dissertation process, I built a very intimate relationship with two GuateMaya feminist groups (8 Tijax and GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-LA). I examined how the groups shared memories of the war and feminicide to reclaim and counter the state's hegemonic narratives.

In my work, I centered cultural memory as a transformative tool from which foregrounding counter-narratives of the war, feminicide, and memory interconnect the GuateMaya feminist groups. Pulido's (2022) work on the U.S. nation formation and its forgetting about the Mexican War described cultural memory as:

> How we choose to represent the past, including who, what, and where it is commemorated, the nature of such representations, and what is silenced. Hegemonic forms of cultural memory, such as celebrating Confederate soldiers and pioneers, not only build the white nation but act as barriers to transformative memory work. (p. 7)

Although her focus was on the U.S. nation formation, Pulido's analysis of hegemonic forms of cultural memory is essential in localizing mechanisms of memory across regions, objects, and, in my case, physical bodies. I aimed to build on Pulido's (2022) term of *transformative memory* by demonstrating how the groups I was studying were transnationally collaborating never to forget

the genocide or the memory of loved ones affected by ongoing gender-based violence. Transformative memory is dynamic as the groups are guided by Maya cosmology (Cabal, 2010) and care work (Cahill et al., 2010) to heal from generational trauma. I was primarily informed by anglophone feminist geographers (Eaves, 2019; Cahuas, 2022; Gokariksel et al.,2021) and Latin American decolonial feminists (Cabnal, 2010; Zaragocin & Carreta, 2020) literature to understand the structural forces instilling a war against indigenous women's bodies but also to center women's agency, empowerment, and creativity to resist state oppression and impunity.

By the 1990s, feminist geography contributed to broader feminist debates that questioned both the unity/singularity of knowledge and the subject of "woman" that once occupied the central position in feminist thought (Eaves, 2019; Nelson & Seager, 2005, p. 4). In addition, feminist geography is closely allied with diverse political movements and commitments; this invigorates it as an arena of analysis and broadens its appeal both within and outside the academy. Feminism is defined by explicit political commitments (against oppression or to make visible the working of social power), and feminist geography is unapologetically marked by this agenda (Nelson & Seager, 2005). One of the areas in the field that has strengthened geography is questions about the body, the intimate scale, and the personal.

Disciplines like geography have turned to the body as a site of study since the 1990s (Hayes-Conroy, 2010). However, feminist geographers like Gillian Rose (1993) and Robyn Longhurst (2010) discussed that it has taken a long time for disciplines like geography to analyze the body as a site for geographical thought and theory. This has to do with geography, a very Western colonial tradition, like many social science disciplines separating the mind and the body. On one hand, the mind has traditionally been correlated with favorable terms such as reason, subject, consciousness, interiority, activity, and masculinity. On the other hand, the body

has been implicitly associated with negative terms such as passion, object, non-consciousness, exteriority, passivity, and femininity (Longhurst, 2010, p. 99). To decenter the Western cultural tradition of separating the mind and body, a geographer such as Hayes-Conroy (2010) contributed to the concept of visceral geographies as a body-centered approach. The researcher concept stated that visceral geography moves beyond static notions of the individual (body) and toward more contextualized and interactive versions of the self and other, combining both structural (political-economic) and post-structural (fluid) concerns (Hayes & Conroy 2010, p. 1274).

Scalar analyses from the body to the nation are underscored. The interconnections that create complex power relations and relational privileges are foregrounded, showing the connections and impacts across multiple spaces, multi-species, and through everyday practices (Sultana 2021). According to feminist geographers, who include Lise Nelson and Joni Seager, the body is the touchstone of feminist theory (Nelson & Seager, 2005). Within contemporary feminist theory, "the body" does not have a single location or scale. Instead, it is a concept that disrupts naturalized dichotomies and embraces a multiplicity of material and symbolic sites at the interstices of power exercises under various guises (Nelson & Seager, 2005). The body as a study site has been examined in the humanities and social sciences (Sutton, 2010) within memory, embodiment, and power relations. Feminist scholars have been forerunners in "body studies," producing rich, interdisciplinary scholarship in this growing area of research.

Argentinian sociologist Barbara Sutton's (2010) research examined the bodies of Argentinian women in resistance during social-economic transitions. Sutton conceived the body as a site of power inscription and contestation. Examining the linkages between power, ideology, social structure, and women's bodies as a space could also yield insights into the interaction

between local and global forces (Sutton, 2010, p. 4). The body and the multilayers of embodiment were central to my dissertation as questions about women genocide survivors and their relation to territory, memory, and healing emerged throughout the research. Therefore, bringing memories together as a counter-narrative to hegemonic political histories was a central feature of this dissertation (Hariharan, 2021). The memories I was bridging in this dissertation come from women in the Global North and South, which took me to be informed by Latin American decolonial feminisms grounded in Indigenous feminists' epistemologies and cosmologies.

As many decolonial feminists have demonstrated (Cabal, 2010; Castro, 2021; Vasudevan et al., 2022), decolonial feminism is not grounded in any specific body of work but instead operates through the coloniality of power (Lugones, 2008). The *coloniality* of power in the modern world is entrenched in and through practices that privilege Western and Eurocentric actions and narratives (Castro, 2021). Latin American feminist geographers working toward these decolonial efforts ground most of their works in the relationship between land and embodiment, making embodiment a central feature in the discussions that propose decolonization for geography (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020). Embodiment is proposed as praxis of radical accountability in settler colonial contexts and a way to reconnect and re-embody the relationship to the land (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020, p. 1). Focusing on the relationship between land and embodiment, decolonial feminist geographers proposed the communitarian method of *cuerpo-territorio*, which stems from Latin American critical geography praxis. *Cuerpo-territorio* can be conceptually defined as the inseparable ontological relationship between body and territory: What the territory simultaneously experiences the body experiences in a codependent relationship (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020). Anglophone feminist geography and decolonial

feminist geography in Latin America continue to grow in geography and provide conversations around land, territory, embodiment, and a new way of mapping Indigenous women's stories resisting heteropatriarchy and global capitalism.

Positionality

In feminist research, positionality has become a critical concept and practice to address questions of voice and authority. The intensification of debates over "sisterhood" across geographic, sociopolitical, and racial borders pushed feminist academics not only to interrogate the power dynamics between the interviewer/interpreter and the interviewee/narrator but also to pose challenging questions ranging from who can/should write whose history to what kinds of struggles should research/theory enable (Benson & Nagar, 2006, p. 583)? I am a first-generation graduate student and identify as a GuateMaya woman in the diaspora. I considered my dissertation a product of my personal and political story. Throughout these five years, I have shed many tears when reading about the suffering, rape, sexual abuse, grief, and dispossession the people of Guatemala have endured.

On the other hand, I decided to do this Ph.D. work to unearth our silences on intergenerational trauma and recover our memory. Indigenous scholar Smith (2012) argued about the extractive nature of academia and how research is a negative word for Indigenous peoples. Conscious of power dynamics, I aimed to build intentional relationships in the field with research participants. Instead of just perceiving the women in my study as participants, I saw them as not only co-collaborators, agents of change, and disruptors against the state but also against the *Ivory Tower's individualistic* ethos. Therefore, I developed a collaborative research project based on trust, reciprocity, and accountability.

Benson and Nagar (2006) explained that collaborative research is based on the following premises: (a) Authority does not remain exclusively in the hands of the researcher; (b) neither the interpreter's nor the narrator's perspective is necessarily privileged, and (c) the meaning forged through dialogue is not necessarily arrived at through agreement and shared perspective but can evolve from constructive disagreements. Such a project, furthermore, takes on radically different forms of responsibility for assessment and analysis because it is simultaneously accountable to the people with/ for whom it is imagined and undertaken, as well as to multiple academic/institutional audiences who have supported or invested in the project (Benson & Nagar, 2006, p. 584).

Through the dissertation, I translated many documents from Spanish to English. Still, I was inspired by what feminist geographers such as Zaragocin (2021) shared about translation. Translation in this context is not just linguistic but implies taking responsibility for making conceptual work available to other audiences (Zaragocin, 2021, p. 237). Most of the interviews were conducted in Spanish; to honor this, I provided bilingual oral testimony throughout the dissertation. I hope the emotions of this dissertation center, uplift, and inspire a radical praxis to critique and question state narratives to uncover people's truths and stories of the past and present.

This research is a political project of unearthing the counter-memory, silences, fear, and intergenerational trauma from the oral and embodied *testimonios* of GuateMaya women survivors of genocide who are currently involved in collective projects to recover Guatemala's historical memory. While GuateMaya feminist groups are connected across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, this study focused on the relational *testimonios* of GuateMaya feminist groups in Guatemala and Los Angeles. Overall, the study aimed to center the *testimonios* of

GuateMaya feminist groups to learn from their production of counter-cultural and embodied memory to counter-hegemonic narratives produced by the state. By doing so, this research will also bridge the work of south-north Indigenous women.

Drawing from interviews with feminist groups in Guatemala and Los Angeles, I argued that post-conflict gender-based violence, or at the extreme level, feminicide, was a continuation of the ongoing state violence stemming from the 36-year (1960-1996) war and was also a product of the gender coloniality of power (Lugones, 2008) and settler colonialism (Speed& Stephen, 2021). While there is a body of work regarding cultural memory in Latin America and how it is produced through testimonies and visuals (Galeano 1989; Gomez-Barris 2009; RHEMI, 1999; Sutton 2018), less has been researched and written about how the human body as a site can connect to memory and heal from intergenerational trauma (Sutton, 2007). This research was attentive to the embodied experience of Guatemala and Maya women in the war concerning intergenerational trauma, memory, and healing.

At this moment in Guatemala's history, it has become necessary to identify the connections between gender, memory, testimonio, impunity, state terror, and assault. As these dimensions come together in post-war Guatemala, the country's future hangs in the balance (Hanlon &Shankar 2000). I used the counter-memory of GuateMaya feminist groups involved in a transformative remembering and commemorating of loved ones who disappeared and/or were murdered in the war. Additionally, I paid close attention to recent feminicide cases like that of the 56 girls, which denotes a continuation of violence by the state. Michel Foucault (1980) argued that there is a fundamental difference between memory and counter-memory.

Foucault (1980) asserted that memory sought to locate continuity between the past and the present and, as a result, imposed a hidden agenda on the past. Conversely, counter-memory

uncovers the discontinuities of history, the breaks between the past and the present that memory hoped to hide (Hutton 1993, p. 112). Logan (2014) also stated:

> There is a certain timelessness and power that survivor and witness testimony has that fuel advocacy and lobbying for memory and remembrance, in any form it takes. Whether survivors of genocide choose to remember or to forget does not need to be state-sanctioned or vetted by the dominant society. (p. 150)

Therefore, this dissertation transcends time and space as the counter-memories of the GuateMaya feminist groups across the hemispheres, which are linked to spiritual practices of Maya cosmovisions[3], altars in public spaces, art, poetry, and campaigns, building a collective voice. In addition, I identified *cartographies of healing* weaving in the past and present atrocities committed by a patriarchal neoliberal right-wing state. Most theorizing about the state in contemporary feminism emerged from Marxist and socialist traditions. In these traditions, the state mediates between capitalism's dual needs for market production and labor force reproduction. State policies toward the family reinforce women's unpaid work in the home and their subordinate status in the world outside it (Rhode, 1994). For this study, I identified the state of Guatemala using sociologist Gordon's (1997) analysis of being haunted and the state's affective relation on the GuateMaya groups searching for justice in an absent state. Gordon stated, "The ghost makes itself known to us effectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as recognition: Haunting recognition is a particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (p. 63). On the contrary, I identified the effectual solidarity

[3] Cosmovision is the Maya people's form of spirituality. It is a process that allows us to experience life and be part of the whole. The connection to the world and cosmos is the basis of the action, thoughts, and sentiments in life and of life (Mayan League, 2023).

networks woven among transnational feminist groups across the hemisphere as mapping healing tools and methods to preserve cultural memory and counter-state hegemonic narratives as cartographies of healing. Mapping GuateMaya feminist groups' stories, narratives, and counter--vision, amplifies and centers the voices of women survivors of genocide, providing a gender analysis of the past, present, and future.

This introductory Chapter is divided into six sections: (a) Cultural memory literature review, (b) intervention: embodied transformative memory, (c) framework: cuerpo-territorio which guided my research and methods, (d) case studies which introduced the GuateMaya feminist groups, (e) feminist ethnography, and (f) research questions and the architecture of the dissertation followed by contributions and conclusion.

Cultural Memory

The following section reviews cultural memory literature informed by cultural memory scholars (Garcia, 2014; Sturken, 1997) and cultural geography scholars (McFarland et al., 2017). In this, I engaged cultural memory as a transformative and empowering tool for Guatemalan and Maya women survivors of genocide in Guatemala and Los Angeles. I discuss Guatemala's state memory in Chapter 3 and how both groups I was studying engaged with cultural memory through the body as a vessel that stores memory and how our relationship with memory transforms the body.

Sturken (1997) defined cultural memory as a memory shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning (p. 3). Sturken argued that survivors of traumatic historical events are powerful cultural figures. They are often considered wisdom figures in popular culture while ignored in person. The discourse around trauma and memory informs us how the revictimization of survivors

occurs due to a lack of understanding of survivors' agency and distinct ways of coping with loss, human rights abuses, and land displacements. Garcia's (2014) ethnographic work on historical memory with the Ixhil community in Guatemala argued that a constant focus on trauma to heal brokenness can prioritize a discussion of dysfunctional communities and individuals. Instead, the researcher urged scholars to analyze the complex ways Maya community structures (i.e., language, ceremony, altars, speaking to the dead) do indeed function, despite the legacy of the war and how the Maya, as subjects of their history, respond to these "political moments" by prioritizing their cultural frameworks (Garcia, 2014, p. 665). The 36-year (1960-1996) war in Guatemala traumatized and victimized survivors, specifically the Maya population. For example, the state does not consider how Guatemalan survivors of the war and in the diaspora are transcending borders by creating solidarity networks and transforming their lives by producing personal narratives and memories of the war.

Nation-states aimed to deny the past to erase brutal atrocities committed against vulnerable populations with the end of exterminating or retaining power (Agamben, 2005; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Gomez-Barris, 2009; Pulido, 2022). For example, given its history of settler colonization, genocide, slavery, and empire, the United States has crafted a cultural memory that denies its true origins. Denial is central to settler empires because the truth would require the nation to fundamentally rethink its origin story and identity, a prospect that is deeply threatening to many (Pulido, 2022, p. 289). Charles and Rah (2019) asked how Western society's narrative of White supremacy and the social imagination of "otherness" developed. How do dysfunctional narratives emerge from a social reality and shape that reality? As social reality gets constructed, the social imagination plays a significant role in forming and sustaining that reality (Charles & Rah, 2019, p. 24). One central belief that justified U.S. expansion and colonization is *The*

Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery emerged from an externalized worldview by the European Christian powers that became institutionalized and later be internalized by the world (nations) conquered by the European powers (Charles & Rah, 2019, p. 26). The system of Western society needs the myth of redemptive violence to sustain its authority and legitimacy over its residents. The unjust systems perpetuate themselves by employing institutionalized violence. Therefore, violence is justified and redeemed. Something that inherently brings harm is now considered to bring about healing. The entirety of the system has become so corrupt that it perpetuates dysfunction. Therefore, Gomez-Barris (2009) noted how the cultural realm is often a critical arena of struggle, engagement, and identification, where the past gives vitality and social meaning to the present to those directly affected by violence (p. 6). The dysfunctional narrative has permeated the world, especially in places such as Guatemala that continue to uphold the colonial imagination and "otherness" by denying genocide and controlling the society by punishing racialized subjects.

To this date, Guatemala continues to deny what occurred at the state-operated shelter, Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion, to the 56 young girls. The state not only rejects what happens in contemporary Guatemala but also in the past, denying the sexual and gender violence during the 36-year war. The former president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, visited the site in April 2018, a year after the girls were burned alive, and did not even mention them in his speech. The United States government provided three million dollars to build a rehabilitation center on the same premise as the shelter. However, the families of the young girls continue to mourn and are left financially burdened with medical expenses (Vera, 2018). On another occasion during the celebration to honor the nation's Independence Day, state authorities destroyed the altar of the 41 girls in the city's central plaza because the altar's metal crosses were a hazard to the

public. This further explains the state's priorities, which negatively impact the girls' memory and respect for their families. McFarland et al. (2017, p. 181) articulated that public symbols are part of more significant cultural landscapes reflecting and legitimizing the normative social order. Thus, conflicts after efforts to destroy, altar, juxtapose, replace, or relocate these monuments indicate discord over the socio-spatial order and its legitimacy.

To best understand the intricate workings of memory, I focused on the impact culture and region play in one's body. Therefore, I asked, generally, what is cultural memory? And how does the concept help understand the survival of these groups' memory and culture? The ethnographic work of spiritual symbols and traditions by scholars Rodriguez and Fortier (2007, pp. 1, 12) informed how memory preserves the capacity to remember, create and re-create our past. "Cultural memory" as a concept has traditionally been introduced in archeological disciplines by Assman (1995) who defined it as the "outer dimension of human memory." In this sense, the power of cultural memory rests in the *conscious* decision to choose memories and to give them precedence in communal remembrance.

For example, nation-states build and rebuild hegemonic memory, forming the consciousness of a population. The formation of a nation depends on creating imagined communities (Anderson, 1983), regardless of war, exploitation, and social inequality (Gomez-Barris, 2009; Sturken 1997). To counter-hegemonic memory and hold on to specific memories, groups negotiate power dynamics within the nation and produce what Zavella (2011) identified as technologies of memory, such as art installations, films, archives, narratives, or murals, to create transformative memories never to forget the past. Rodriguez and Fortier (2007) further explained cultural memory by applying the following distinctions: (a) the survival of a historically, politically, and socially marginalized group of people and (b) the role of spirituality

as a form of resistance. The aim for this study was to use both distinctions but specialize in the latter because it allows for a more extensive discussion around healing. I included Maya's cosmology as a tool that helps reclaim the truth and memory of the past.

An example of where Rodriguez and Fortier's (2007) distinctions coexist is with the work of *8 Tijax*, a group dedicated to honoring the 41 girls. As families grieve and politically advocate for justice for these murders, *8 Tijax* sets up multipurpose altars that provide care, awareness, and prayers. Like Garcia's (2014) ethnographic recounting of the *Ixhil* community, the pain of the genocide is not only related to the deaths of loved ones but also to their inability to integrate the dead into their rightful places in the community of the living. For the Maya community, the spirits of the dead continue to play an important role in ceremonies and prayer. It is a constant relationship to be in harmony with the spirits of loved ones. Thus, *Ixhil's* ways of talking and relating to the dead in a ceremonial speech during the reburial of exhumed victims of war constitute a particularly important site for constructing and reflecting historical memory of the war. Spiritual traditions allow groups to connect to the dead daily with altars and prayers to honor their memory. Furthermore, memory becomes vital as a survival mechanism when it becomes part of artistic, emotionally laden ways of forming group identity and meanings (Rodriguez & Fortier, 2007).

In Los Angeles, GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-LA (GMR-LA), the second group I was studying, is forming their identity and making meaning and a place to honor family members and *compañeros* taken by the war. The group engages in the counter-hegemonic production of cultural memory by organizing protests, vigils, and art to share the truth of the genocide and continue the leftist groups' legacy in Guatemala. Hernandez's (2017, p. 145) work on mapping Central Americans in Los Angeles' public spaces and memory sheds light on GMR-

LA's cultural memory work. The researcher stated, "Migrants become embedded in a larger struggle for justice; they create community and provide a historical context for the following generations. This allows for creating spatial imaginaries on the urban cityscape of Los Angeles." In her work, the scholar recalled a mural production of the Salvadorean war and the culture that unites Salvadoreans in the diaspora, like food, music, and traditional celebrations. This mural (see Figure 3) is located at the non-profit organization Central-American Resource Center, Los Angeles (CARECEN-LA which greets viewers with its spectral image of a woman running with her child and another one who raises her fist behind a group of mourners and/or evacuated refugees carrying *Monseñor* Romero's portrait (p. 146). The mural presents the complexities of memory connected to Central America within the diaspora and provides a sense of agency, affirming those who choose not to forget the past. The memories represent a whirlwind of images that range from wars and martyrs to moments of resistance and solidarity among transborder communities. The younger generations of Central Americans are starving for the truth and curious about our roots and history that center dignity and collective memory. As Hernandez (2017, p. 148) explained, these new public sites of memory allow for intergenerational dialogue and invite multiple voices to intervene in the context of emerging U.S. Central American public memory, inviting survivors to confront the unspoken.

Figure 3

The Central-American Resource Center, Los Angeles Mural

Note: Adapted from Judith F. Baca, 2003. *Migration of the Golden People*

My intervention in this study was to examine how the body, in this case, Maya and Guatemalan women survivors' bodies, are used as sites where one can recover a range of memories, examining the *cargas* (heavy-weight) as one of the mothers of the girls identified the heavy emotions, pain, and isolation the mothers carry in their bodies. Extensive literature has stated how our physical bodies can endure trauma, survive historical trauma, and store memory (Cabnal 2010; Mucci 2013; Ringel & Brandell, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2014). *Xinca woman,* as described by Cabnal (2010) denoted bodies as the first territory, meaning we ascribe to our

physical body before region, allowing us to localize where we have been affected by violence. For this study, this process of understanding and mapping out embodied trauma through memories will enable healing to take place and be in relation to other bodies (Cabnal, 2010). I turned my attention to cultural scholar Sturken (1997, p. 220), who discussed the AIDS epidemic like a memorial, a quilt, or an image and explored how the human body is also a vehicle for remembrance–through its surface (the memory that exists in physical scars, for instance). In addition, Sturken also reminded us that bodies are often perceived to speak without words. The bodies of Vietnam veterans speak of guilt, forgiveness, and accusation in their presence, while those of people with AIDS speak of suffering, anger, resilience, and protest.

Similar to Maya women, survivors of genocide, their bodies also speak of loss, anger, grief, solidarity, and resistance. Approaching this study of Maya and Guatemalan women survivors, I aimed to use a methodology of body mapping to chart out their emotions. This approach best supported my intervention of demonstrating how bodies can carry memories of the war. I categorized body mapping as a methodology in this research as a socio-spatial-emotional process that serves as a transformative, spiritual, and healing tool that must be considered within the studies of memory and geography.

Intervention: Embodied Transformative Memory

Feminist geographers (Gokariksel et al., 2021) asked: (a) How can feminism take seriously the legacies and current embodiments of structural inequalities and respond to the rise of the global right in contemporary times? (b) How should feminist geographers' attention to the body as a political site enable productive work toward a different future? Thus, this study was a body-centered project (Hayes-Conroy& Hayes-Conroy, 2010) that approached the body as our first territory (Cabal, 2010), which stores memory and can provide embodied testimony through

a transformative memory. Disciplines like geography are turning to the body as a site of knowledge. Feminist geographers such as Smith et al. (2016) and Gokariksel et al. (2021) and groups like GeoBrujas (2021) declared the body as a landscape with boundaries, barriers, and obstacles that can lead to an examination of intergenerational trauma but also asserted that through a collective remembrance along with other traumatized bodies, we can emerge into a healing journey (Cabal, 2010).

Longhurst (2010) argued that the body has "acted as geography's Other," being both desired and denied depending on the discipline. Disciplines have divided the mind and body instead of viewing these two discourses on a spectrum. In addition, Western disciplines categorize the mind with attributes of reason, consciousness, interiority, and masculinity and identify the body with terms such as passion, object, exteriority, and femininity. Feminist geographers claim the body is the site of territory and resistance and contribute to a body of work about embodied geographies. For this study, I approached the body, specifically the body of women survivors of genocide and gender-based violence, as a spiritual site.

Xicana Indigena scholar Zepeda (2022) studied Chicana writer and poet Gloria Anzaldua's spiritual activist roles and the many ways spirituality was rejected in academic spaces. Zepeda argued that Western-centered forms of academic training that rely almost exclusively on rational thought, anti-spiritual forms of logical reasoning, and empirical demonstrations lack engagement with cosmology. The silencing and attempted erasure of traditional Indigenous medicine and sacred Earth-centered wisdom uphold dominant forms of knowledge that need to be disrupted. The embodied transformative memory emerging from GuateMaya feminist groups in Guatemala and the diaspora is due to the connection with Maya cosmology, spiritual altars, herbs, and a reliance on radical love and tenderness. Through the

events, campaigns, and ceremonies, the women in the groups demonstrated *cariño*[4] to each other for collective preservation in the legal and violent processes to which they were subjected. This took me to a discussion about the visceral, which human geographers wrote about, on the importance of it to bodily and group engagement. Longhurst et al. (2009) described the "visceral" as the sensations, moods, and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with our material and discursive environments. The authors proposed that visceral geography can be considered a broad, dynamic, and sometimes inconsistent array of geographic scholarship on the body that collectively promotes and expands (Hayes-Conroy &Hayes-Conroy, 2010). I added that the visceral could be transformative for women survivors of genocide to engage in a process of healing in a collective embodied process.

Transformative Memory

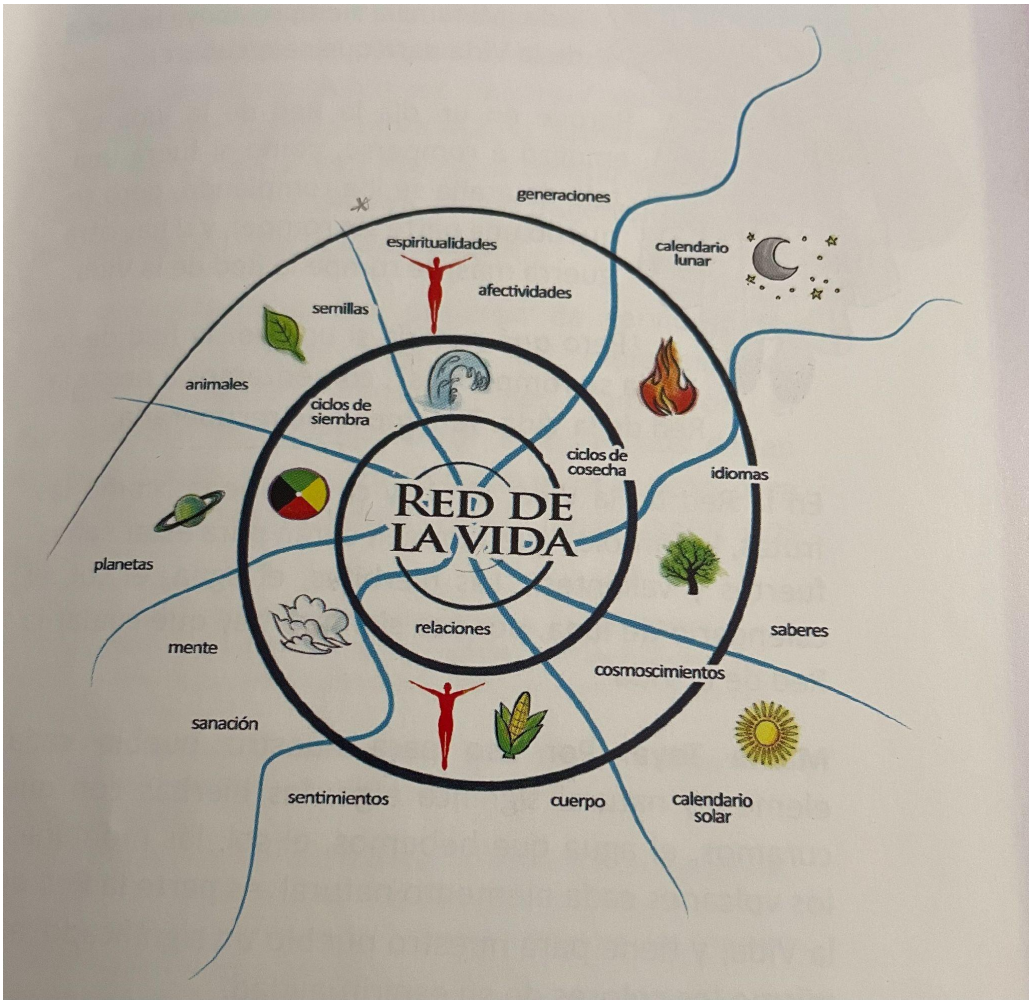
I use geographer Pulido's (2022) term of transformative memory to capture the groups' processes and activities of producing art in the streets, ceremonial altars, and campaigns as transformative to hegemonic state narratives of memory. The etymology of the word transformative or transformation derives from the Latin *trans,* which means to cross, beyond, and *formare* to form, to create life. The creation of life reminded me of Maya cosmology's *Red de la Vida* (web of life) (see Figure 4). The web of life is crucial as it demonstrates reciprocity with the life cycle, which prioritizes life and its many roles. As Cabnal (2015) shared, "The web of life, imagine it like a big spider web, in which everything is placed where life needs it to be. Everything is connected through reciprocal energy because everything is energy and everyone needs to live." The web of life is similar to "Buen Vivir" (the good life), derived from Indigenous peoples in South America. Buen Vivir is a pluralistic worldview in which the

[4] In Spanish, cariño is a word that is directly linked to love and affection

principles are shared by many *Indigenous communities* of being in relationship not only to the self and humans but also to plants, sky, nature, animals, and Earth.

Figure 4

Maya Cosmology's Red de la Vida (web of life)



Note: Adapted from L. Cabal, 2015. Copyright by 2016, Biodiversidad

Therefore, transformative memory is embodied for GuateMaya feminist groups that are struggling for social change because it starts within themselves as everyone in each group finds healing from their first territory, their own body, and in doing so, collective preservation and healing occur.

Framework: Cuerpo-Territorio

This research was guided by the emancipatory framework of *cuerpo-territorio* coined by communitarian Maya-Xinka feminist Lorena Cabnal. For Cabnal (2018), embodied emotions are vital to evidence and verify what is felt in the body. It was necessary to intentionally center the pain of the multiple oppressions felt in the body to initiate a process of liberation and emancipation for individual bodies and the greater body politic, or what I referred to in my study as intergenerational, emotional communities.

Cuerpo-Territorio is a decolonial Indigenous feminist concept that declares the body as our first territory and advocates for a communal subject agency. The notion of *Territorio Cuerpo-Tierra ("Territory body-earth or body-territory")* has emerged as a political slogan by Indigenous *Maya-Xinka* women in Guatemala and is central to the communitarian feminist political project (Cabal, 2010), as well as to Latin American women's territorial struggles more broadly (Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo 2017; Hernández & Tania, 2016; Ulloa 2016;). As Lorena Cabnal (2010) contended, *Cuerpo-Tierra* represents an ontological continuum between earth and bodies. This concept bridges the ongoing struggles of Indigenous women to defend their territories against extractive exploitation with the historical violation of Indigenous women's bodies. Apart from being a cosmological and epistemic-logical proposal, it is also a political call to defend and reclaim the body as a territory, a base to promote life and dignity while resisting capitalist and patriarchal exploitation (Cabal, 2010). *Cuerpo-Territorio* has become a central ontological base for Latin American knowledge production committed to a decolonial praxis. Working alongside Indigenous and peasant communities, various Latin American geographic collectives have operationalized this as a mapping method in significant and innovative ways.

To assess and analyze the questions, I used the following intersecting analytic foundation, guided by Lorena Cabal. These are (a) Indigenous women's bodies have a relationship to Mother Earth, and we need to reclaim our bodies and land; (b) our bodies are systematically affected by oppression (extractive industries, domestic violence, poverty, sexism) and are a product of it; and (c) body and territory are spaces of vital energy that must work in reciprocity collectively with other oppressed bodies. Employing these three points of analysis in my research provided critical interventions across the fields of feminist geography, gender studies, Indigenous decolonial studies, and ethnic studies by examining how GuateMaya feminist groups can use a multi-sited place-making approach (body, territory, hemisphere) to heal centuries of colonial violence.

Case Studies

To examine cultural memory, body-territory, and healing, I deeply studied two GuateMaya feminist groups as case studies. The groups identify as migrants, political refugees, and Indigenous with a critique of Western feminism. I situated the groups within a third-world feminism perspective as it centers women's history and voices locally and nationally (Herr, 2014). I also drew from women of color or feminists of color as a central site of knowledge that conceptualizes against and beyond the nation-state in a critical form. Xicana Scholar Zepeda (2022) stated, "Many who align with this site of knowledge do the root work to connect with their homelands and peoples through their sites of praxis, protest, and creative works, whether through visual forms, oral storytelling, or practices of ceremony" (p. 15). Both groups in this study demonstrated the sites of praxis they create or contest as a form to ground cultural memory amidst the hegemonic state narratives.

Informed by feminism without borders praxis, Mohanty (2003) problematized Western feminism's habit of universalizing struggle. Mohanty suggested that "imagined communities" of

third-world feminism oppositional struggles are "imagined" not because they are not real but because they suggest potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries and community as "horizontal comradeship" (p. 46). In a globalized era, borders are porous to corporations and the free market (Agnew, 1994; Hyndman, 1997; Sparke, 2004). In addition, feminist geographers (Acosta-Belen & Bose 2000; Gillman, 2013; Gokariksel et al., 2021; Costa, 2006) also analyzed how this global era has allowed for transnational feminist solidarity beyond borders. Thayer's (2010) ethnographic work of South American women groups found that women's social/activist movements have developed sophisticated and extensive transnational networks over the past several decades. These groups represent the other face of globalization—the emancipatory possibilities created by new interlocal connections (pg. 4). For example, around the world, the Zapatistas catalyzed a wave of solidarity that inspired a generation of young activists to organize for social justice in their contexts (Klein, 2015, p. xi).

The organizing of ordinary people, often led by women in local contexts of violence, and their daily struggles for social justice and human dignity provide glimmers of hope. The following paragraphs describe both groups' goals, interpersonal relations, and needs for resistance and justice amidst ongoing violence. Rather than treating these groups as separate case studies, the study moves outward to examine the web of networks and connections to which they are in relation. I aimed to analyze the emotional relations between the two groups and within each group and the networks they may be part of in Guatemala and Los Angeles that support identity group formation and the production of cultural memory.

GuateMaya and Feminism

The participants in this research associated with many intersecting identities, such as Guatemalan women, Maya, Ladina, K'iche', Q'anjob'al, and Mam ethnic identities. These

women also identified themselves as migrants, political refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, and exiles. The groups I worked with and interviewed defined themselves as feminist groups. Therefore, to categorize the groups, I identified them as GuateMaya feminist groups. GuateMaya is a popular concept used by activists in the diaspora to critique the homogenization of Guatemalan people and center the Maya population, which comprises the larger population in Guatemala. GuateMaya is a capacious, fluid concept, and I carefully used it and resisted state-imposed categorizations like "Hispanic" or "Latino/a/x" that exclude Indigenous populations. Zepeda (2022, p. 6) stated that Latina/o/x has also been understood as a term that does not acknowledge the specificity of Indigenous lineages or roots and Afro-descendent and Black roots and lineages. Ultimately, Native and Indigenous people on either side of the Mexico-United States border are rooted in distinct and multiple experiences that must remain complicated to resist the homogenization of Indigenous formations across the hemisphere. Chicana scholar Chacon (2017) also critically observed that Chicano literature engages with *Indigenismo* and mestizaje and erases Native Americans and Indigenous subjects. In Latin America, progressive intellectuals espoused *Indigenismo* to shed light on the exploitation of Indigenous peoples by depicting them as perpetual victims (Chacon, 2017, p. 183). Latinidad can also affect anti-blackness when it erases the Black diaspora and the Afro-ancestry of many Indigenous communities. Therefore, GuateMaya is a new category popular among the younger generations of Central Americans in urban settings like Los Angeles and includes Black and Indigenous Central Americans while still being cognizant of the anti-blackness that exists in the Isthmus.

Feminism has held a negative connotation among Indigenous women in the Global South due to its Western conception and the exclusion of Black and Indigenous women's voices and needs. As Chandra Mohanty (2003) argued:

> Feminist movements have been challenged on the grounds of cultural imperialism and shortsightedness in defining the meaning of gender terms of middle-class, white experiences, internal racism, classism, and homophobia. All of these factors and the falsely homogenous representation of the movement by the media have led to a real suspicion of 'feminism' as a productive ground of struggle. Nevertheless, third world women have always engaged with feminism, even if the label has been rejected in many instances. (p. 50)

The groups I engaged with identified with feminist principles and politics because it is a term that critiques patriarchy and gender-based violence. However, the groups and women in my study aligned with decolonial Indigenous feminism, which centers on the body, autonomy, and feminist solidarity away from hegemonic feminism (Blackwell, 2023).

8 Tijax-Guatemala

In the summer of 2019, with a Tinker Foundation grant, I could travel back to my motherland, Guatemala, to begin ethnographic fieldwork. My fieldwork study aimed to meet with community-based groups addressing gender-based violence, specifically cases of feminicide. Since 2018, a year after the tragedy of Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion, I have been immersed in the tragedy because I was part of a community solidary space in South Central Los Angeles, and we had the photos of the 56 girls, hanging all over the community space like an altar. Every time people would come into the space, they would ask: who are these girls? Why are their photos hanging on the wall? Some of us would explain their story and connection with other gender-based violence issues happening in the United States, from missing and murdered Indigenous Women to the feminicides in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. As a graduate student in Geography, I wanted to make the connections between Central American women's migration and

feminicide. Therefore, I applied to the UO Center for Latino/a Studies (CLLAS) Tinker Foundation grant. With the opportunity given through the grant, I thought it would be great to build relationships with feminist groups in Guatemala, which were leading efforts in the search for justice for feminicide cases.

Through a search on Facebook, I found two groups, MuJer a non-profit organization working to end sexual and domestic violence, and *8 Tijax* a grassroot group supporting the search for justice for the 56 girls. I contacted both groups via email, and both responded very enthusiastically, asking me to reach out to them once I was in Guatemala. Fortunately, both groups were in Zona 1 in Guatemala City, where I planned to do most of my investigation. On the third day of my visit, I met with Mayra from *8 Tijax* at a Mcdonald's in Zona 6. It was a beautiful connection as we sat down, invited her to lunch, and talked for three hours. Mayra is one of the co-founders of *8 Tijax*. She has two piercings on her face and looks very confident and passionate about her involvement with 8 Tijax. She shared how the group formed:

> *Somos parte del sector común de la población. Cuando nos enteramos de la tragedia, fuimos a ayudar con lo que las familias necesitaban. Hubo una falta de comunicación por parte de las autoridades. Escuchamos que las niñas fueron abusadas, experimentaron la trata de personas y muchos otros casos de abuso. Ayudamos a las familias a reunir una lista de niñas no reportadas y acompañamos a las familias al hospital y a la morgue para identificar a sus hijas. Estábamos haciendo lo que el estado no estaba dando un paso adelante para hacer. La gente se unió para cocinar comida, y tortillas, se hizo una ola especial de solidaridad, y en ningún momento el estado nos apoyó. Comenzamos a construir una relación con las madres y poco a poco también aprendimos sobre cada una de las niñas, como sus colores favoritos y la comida. Nos comprometimos con su memoria. El día de la tragedia, el 8 de marzo de 2017, fue nawal energia 8 Tijax. En la cosmología maya, Tijax es el nawal que representa la obsidiana, la roca y la pala y corta toda la energía negativa. Por lo tanto, decidimos llamar a nuestro grupo de voluntarios 8 Tijax.*
>
> We are part of the common sector of the population. When we heard about the tragedy, we went to help with what the families needed. There was a lack of communication by the authorities. We heard that young girls were abused, experienced human trafficking,

> and many other cases of abuse. We helped the families gather a list of unreported girls and accompanied the families to the hospital and the morgue to identify their daughters. We were doing what the state was not stepping up to do. People joined together to cook food, and tortillas, a special solidarity wave was made, and the state never supported us. We started building a relationship with the mothers and, little by little, also learned about each of the girls, such as their favorite colors, and food. We committed ourselves to their memory. The day of the tragedy on March 8, 2017, was nawal energy *8 Tijax*. In Maya Cosmology, *Tijax* is the nawal representing the obsidian, the rock, and the spade and cutting all negative energy. Therefore, we decided to call our volunteer group *8 Tijax*.

As Mayra mentioned, the state abandoned the girls and their families; instead, sectors of the population responded to the plea by the families of the 56 girls. The weeks of sadness and terror the families experienced by having to identify their daughters' bodies and then burying them were also met with a wave of solidarity from other mothers, neighbors, and concerned citizens of Guatemala. 8 Tijax has not only responded to the families with emotional support by accompanying (Yarris & Duncan, forthcoming) the mothers to the court hearings but also by becoming an extended support care network, advocating for solidarity efforts not just in Guatemala but also in Mexico, Canada, and the United States. According to Anthropologists Kristin Yarris and Whitney L. Duncan, accompaniment relies upon engagement with trust, a way of building relationships requiring humility and openness (p. 3). One of the many ways *8 Tijax* accompanies the mothers in the search for justice is by creating art and building global support. One of the members of 8 Tijax, Kimmy de Leon, organized a global art campaign dedicated to the memory of each of the 41 girls. The global campaign invited 41 artists from different geographies to draw each girl. The purpose of this campaign was to share each girl's story, their

name, their favorite colors, and interests. The campaign went viral on social media and is known as *#NosDuelen56* (see Figure 5). Kimmy de Leon shared her testimony as:

> *La campaña global es un ejercicio de memoria, para nosotras es una acción global. #NosDuelen56, artistas globales invitados para ilustrar a las niñas. Cada artista honra la vida de las niñas como el arte es un lenguaje para la memoria que muestra que la población tiene más empatía, y combate el odio, el prejuicio y el estigma, un grito del arte, una memoria permanente de las niñas, una campaña permanente que también acompaña el juicio penal. El arte ha sido fundamental en la búsqueda de la justicia.*
>
> The global campaign is an exercise of memory, for us is a global action. #NosDuelen56 , invited global artists to illustrate the girls. Each artist honors the life of the girls as art is a language for memory, showing that the population has more empathy and combats hatred, prejudice, and stigma, a cry from art, a permanent memory of girls, a permanent bell that also accompanies the criminal trial. Art has been fundamental in the search for justice.

Figure 5

The Global Campaign in Memory of the 56 Girls

The above examples from *8 Tijax* denote how they stepped in to support a vulnerable cause and care for strangers and communities in need during a crisis. Through emotional care and artistic expression, the group was practicing what Nagar (2019) called radical vulnerability. Radical vulnerability is an intellectual and political alliance where there are no sovereign selves or autonomous subjects and requires "trust and critical reflexivity" (Nagar, 2019, p. 513). These alliances are collectively reflexive and work across university-community boundaries to decentralize knowledge production (Chennault, 2021, p. 50). Nagar used a radical vulnerability to explain how academics can share the stories of the most vulnerable while avoiding the protagonist role and instead walking alongside those who are dispossessed, marginalized, and othered. I used a radical vulnerability to analyze the care practices that *8 Tijax* prioritizes when confronting the state's abandonment of the families and negative criticisms from society to continue forging alliances with the families of the 56 girls. The praxis of radical vulnerability opens up the possibility of togetherness without guarantees. It does not seek to know before the journey where the shared paths will lead us but commits to walking together with the co-travelers in the struggles and dreams that we all have chosen to weave, unweave, and reweave together (Nagar, 2019, p. 6). *8 Tijax* is a small-scale group walking with the mothers in everything that comes with the search for justice: the tears, the emotions, trauma, fear, violence, and everything in between. This group was practicing a feminist care praxis (Calhill et al., 2010), unfolding and unearthing what the case of the 56 girls represents to Guatemalan society.

As a community educator and scholar, I could not separate myself from the case and the people involved in the search for justice. Instead, I saw my role as the bridge to connect *8 Tijax* with other GuateMaya feminist groups in the diaspora and spread awareness of the case. I made

that bridge by connecting *8 Tijax* efforts to GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-LA group, which I will discuss more in the next chapter. I was also practicing radical vulnerability in that I intentionally shared the stories of *8 Tijax* and that of mothers to the 56 girls. One of the mothers I became close with was Vianey Hernandez (see Figure 6). I met Vianey in Guatemala in 2019 and interviewed her. She identified as the leader and spokesperson of the mothers. As I looked back to my field notes, I found a short note I had written about Vianey, which stated:

> *Vianey has no faith in the government, she's fighting for justice until the end. Mayra from 8 Tijax was there, providing emotional support for Vianey. There's sisterhood, compassion, and definitely high levels of sympathy. Mayra finalized the interview by sharing: Nuestros tejidos corren muy afondo (our weavings run very deep), meaning their stories, testimonios, lived experiences, and memories are complex (fieldnotes, 2019).*

Vianey was aware that if the state of Guatemala murdered her daughter, it would do anything to help them achieve justice. During the interview, Vianey described herself and the case of her daughter mentioning:

> *Soy una de las voceras de las 56 niñas, somos madres de bajos ingresos, y hay muchas madres que necesitan ayuda mental, ellos, nos han discriminado, no podemos llorar, ni ver a nuestras hijas. El Estado dice que tuvimos la culpa; Es tan agotador y frustrante. El caso está estancado debido a la pandemia. Es muy preocupante, no somos atendidas por el gobierno, y el Estado no está interesado en los niños de este país. Metí a mi hija porque se escapó de casa y pensó que estaría protegida. El estado me dijo que no iba a necesitar nada, que estaría mejor allí, y no fue así.*
>
> I am one of the spokeswomen for the 56 girls, we are low-income mothers, and there are many mothers who need mental help. They have discriminated against us, we cannot cry, nor see our daughters. The state says that we were at fault; it is so tiring and frustrating. The case is stagnant because of the pandemic. It is very worrying, we are not cared for by the government, and the State is not interested in the children of this country.

I got my daughter in because she ran away from home and thought she would be protected. The state told me that she was not going to need anything that she would be better there, and it was not like that.

Figure 6

Vianney Hernandez Speaking at one of the Court Hearings in 2022

GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-Los Angeles

During the peak of the Cold War in the 1970s and 1980s, the United States (U.S.) intervened politically and militarily in Central America to stop the spread of "communism." Guatemala, just like El Salvador and Nicaragua, was a place of civil unrest and proxy wars destabilizing the countries' social and economic future (Robinson, 2000). Governmental, military forces primarily targeted the Maya people in Guatemala as they perceived them as the enemy and scapegoated them for working with leftist groups. Two hundred thousand Maya people were killed, 45,000 disappeared, and 1.5 million were displaced (Manz, 2008, p. 152). Guatemalans were afraid to remain in the country, and many were forced to migrate to Mexico, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Many political refugees found a second home in Los Angeles, California. The Central American migrant population in Los Angele (L.A)s tripled between 1980 and 1990, and nearly half of today's 3.5 million Central American migrants arrived before 2000 (Foxen 2021, p. 2).

Groups like *Colectivo Guatemalteco* formed in the early 1990s to bring awareness to the war and continue transnational solidarity efforts. Out of Colectivo Guatemalteco, GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia (GMR-LA) was born in 2018 and is an intergenerational group of Guatemalan women, Ladinas[5] and Maya, who work on gender issues and Guatemalan solidarity. Like *8 Tijax*, GMR-LA works to produce counter-cultural memory—what I identified as transformative memory of the war—and supports current social justice efforts like land defense and gender justice in both Guatemala and Los Angeles.

[5] Ladina refers to a woman who is mixed from Indigenous and European hybridization. Scholars identify ladino and ladina as a place in between the elite Spanish-speaking state and the Indigenous communities.

Like other groups organized by and made up of women who departed from the masculinist political culture (Blackwell, 2011; Pulido, 2006), GMR-LA is creating space and identity through an Indigenous-Ladina feminist group. The group's initiative to organize around gender solidarity has produced discussions around gender-based violence, femicide and even gender roles within GuateMaya groups in L.A. and focuses on gender equality. Of course, this has created tensions with male-centered groups like *Colectivo Guatemalteco,* who believe GMR-LA is too radical and divisive. Historically, literature on social movements, as Pulido (2006), in her analysis of third world left suggested, "Has a de facto masculine perspective insofar as it either was authored by men or, more typically, focused on them" (p. 180). Examining the GMR-LA group's formation and their work around memory and gender contributes to the growing literature on Indigenous and Ladina feminisms (Blackwell, 2023; Chinchilla, 2014; Harms, 2020; Menjivar, 2011).

Some ways the group addresses intergenerational trauma are by creating art in the streets of L.A. or becoming involved in public activities to raise awareness about femicides, the 56 girls, disappearances of Indigenous people, or the precarity in Guatemala. When the group was formed, one goal was to create unity principles that speak to the group's intentions and work ethics. The group identifies as a collective of diverse women, organizing and resisting colonial and patriarchal systems that generate violence. They follow four main principles: women's empowerment, preserving a collective memory, social justice, and transnational solidarity. The group continues to work on these principles while building community with other Indigenous groups in Los Angeles such as Mexicali Resiste, La Comunidad Ixim, LGBTQ Guatemala Diaspora, and Mayan League, which are also grassroots-based.

Emotional Communities

Emotions in social movements have been the object of study since the 1990s. Growing attention has been paid to the role emotions play in social organizing and how memories are evoked, testimony is given, and narratives of pain are transmitted. *Emotional communities* is a term that was coined by Colombian anthropologist Jimeno (2004). The term explores the emotions and bonds established between victims and survivors, their political and emotional ties created with committed academics, social activists, and others, and how emotions are embodied, enacted, and performed as a kind of cultural politics to reach a wider audience (Mcleod & DeMarinis, 2018, p. 1).

8 Tijax and GMR-LA represent emotional communities. Jimeno's (2004) notion of emotional communities has multiple virtues, particularly in that it includes victims-survivors' emotions in their struggles and the feelings awakened among academics and broader audiences. The term also invokes the political-cultural nature of emotions, in which nations, political movements, and organizations tend to manufacture content for social and cultural change in a given society (Parenti, 1992). Pain expressed to others by a single subject is the point of departure of "emotional communities" (Mcleod & DeMarinis, 2018, p. 6). Both groups create transformative memories of Guatemalan culture through creative ways reflected through poetry, art, protests, symbolic installations, and ceremonial altars. In contrast, the groups are in different geographies and are motivated by other outcomes.

For *8 Tijax,* they demand for justice for the families of the 56 girls. GMR-LA is a network that *8 Tijax* collaborates with to expand solidarity beyond borders about the girls' legal case and memory. GMR-LA continues to produce a transformative memory through embodied testimonios and place-making in Los Angeles for Maya women. However, both groups focus on

their interpersonal relationships and affective experiences. This broadening of the notion of communities breaks time and space barriers: Community is no longer perceived as closed and fixed, related simply to the present. Testimonies travel through different mechanisms connecting time and space (Mcleod & DeMarinis, 2018, p. 8).

Feminist Ethnography

I was primarily informed by feminist ethnography (Li et al., 2020) and a feminist praxis of care (Cahill et al., 2010) approach when conducting fieldwork and employing multiple ethnographic methods, including semi-structured qualitative interviews, *testimonio*, digital ethnography, and participant observation. In addition to these traditional research methods, I engaged the communitarian feminist method of body mapping, which brings together multiple approaches of care work to analyze the embodied emotions and memory in women's bodies in Guatemala and Los Angeles, to build collective cartographies of care praxis. This method is grounded in communitarian feminisms that center the body as our first territory to heal from colonial patriarchal oppressions.

My research was organized into three phases of transnational ethnographic research (Nolin, 2006), using traditional methods of qualitative semi-structured interviews, *testimonio*, and digital ethnography. In using what I identified as critical healing methods, such as body mapping, to capture the gendered dimensions of embodied memory of war and feminicides, I practiced a form of community participatory research guided by a *cuerpo-territorio* framework. After I acquired IRB approval, consent forms were provided to each participant for the semi-structured interviews to begin. Throughout my research, I took field notes and also engaged in participant observation in the field.

During the first phase of my research project in Guatemala, I conducted semi-structured interviews in Spanish, made participant observations, and wrote field notes with members of feminist groups in Guatemala, who honor the memory of the girls and are actively involved in the search for justice. Initially, I was curious to know if the high increase in feminicide cases is forcing women to migrate to North. I interviewed ten people from two community-based groups working to end gender-based violence in Guatemala. The group that caught my attention was *8 Tijax*, a small-scale collective of volunteers that supports the families and survivors of the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción massacre. The group identifies the murder of the girls as part of the state-sanctioned violence and genocide against Guatemala's vulnerable populations, particularly after the 1996 Peace Accords.

The second phase of my research project took place in Los Angeles, where I engaged with the feminist group, GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-LA (GMR-LA). I conducted ten semi-structured interviews and one body map workshop in Spanish with the group participants. In addition, I was invited to the group's online and in-person meetings. The final phase of the research project took place in Guatemala in August 2022. I finalized the second body -mapping workshop with the mothers of the 56 girls, while *8 Tijax* supported in organizing the workshop. Twenty of the mothers participated together with their children. The body map workshop occurred at Casa Q'anil, a cultural arts space in Zona 1. Guatemala City is divided into different zones, a section of a territory or Zonas, and Zona 1 is a popular destination in the city for its historic monuments and central markets. I intentionally chose the location of the body map workshops to provide funding to community-based organizations and as a place where the participants could feel safe and at home. My doctoral research was funded by the Tinker Foundation, Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies, UO Center for the Study of Women

in Society, UO Geography Rippey scholarship, and the American Association of University Women.

Informed by Smith's (2012) decolonizing methodologies, the methods for my study centered on the embodied voices, lived experiences, and creative cultural production that reflected *mujeres* and groups displaced and otherwise affected by the war. My research uplifts and centers the worldviews and concerns of Indigenous women. The oral and embodied testimonios of women will guide readers to new theoretical insights born out of lived experiences. Therefore, the methods I employed in this research were grounded in communitarian feminist praxis values, centering on the participant's experiences and being critical of extractive research. Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values, and behaviors as an integral part of methodology (Smith, 2012, p. 16). Overall, using methods that feel authentic to the participants facilitates a level of trust, relationships, and community building in the research process.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research:

Research Question 1: How do 8 Tijax and GMR-LA contest hegemonic state narratives of the 36-year (1960-1996) war and contemporary femicide rates?

Research Question 2: How are transformative memories specifically inscribed in the body, public space, and other symbolic and material geographies?

Research Question 3: What are the connections between territory, relational bodies, Maya spirituality, and healing practices?

Research Question 4: How do the groups engage in the process of healing cartographies transnationally?

Research Question 5: How can their healing efforts become a liberatory praxis for other feminist groups across the hemisphere?

The Architecture of the Dissertation

This dissertation used primary and secondary data from embodied and oral *testimonios* to analyze the multidimensional roles and historical accounts of women survivors of genocide. The participants in this research were survivors who forged counter-memory to exert their agency against global patriarchal imperialism. As the methods sections explained, I gathered semi-structured interviews. I facilitated two body-mapping workshops, including creating body maps of our sensory memories and group dialogue about trauma, place, emotions, and healing. The following is a Chapter outline of this study.

In chapter 2, feminist ethnographic methods-*Recordando Juntas provides* a literature review of feminist ethnographic methods to center a genealogy of these methods, followed by my contribution to this research. In addition, the Chapter centers on the framework of *Cuerpo-Territorio*, which is becoming popular in Anglophone feminist spaces (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020), and how the use of the framework differs in the North compared to the South. However, as the concept travels North, it also strengthens its meaning, praxis, and fluidity as it morphs and adapts into the stories of Guatemalan refugees or diasporic communities.

In chapter 3, the Guatemala-*Relationship to the past* is a significant phenomenon to this dissertation because it identifies and explores the place, *the bridge*, and the in-between among the feminist groups I was studying. The Chapter will detail Guatemala's history, from Spanish colonization to the 36-year war (1960-1996). It is essential to understand why this place is vital to the groups, even as GuateMaya feminist groups experience it as a contested place woven in with emotions of fear, anger, love, and care.

In chapters 4, the-Tranformative Embodied Memory and Building Gendered Memory through a Feminist Praxis of Care, will delve into the data and analysis of my study by describing the case studies based on GuateMaya feminist groups—*8 Tijax* and *GMR-LA*. These Chapters center on the *testimonios* of the women in the groups and look closely at my intervention of transformative embodied memory with a discussion of place-making with La Plaza de las Niñas and the body mapping workshops. Chapter 5 discusses gender migration, the Guatemala diaspora, and place-making of memory in Los Angeles through the creation of altars.

Finally, chapter 6, the-GuateMaya Decolonial future, is the conclusion/discussion where I delve into transnational feminist relations to define what both groups are doing and imagine the future of GuateMaya women across the hemisphere.

Contributions and Conclusions

The memory of the 56 girls and Indigenous women will live on these pages and is multidimensional and multisided. Their memory will prevail in creating spiritual altars and songs on the body and the walls of the streets filled with art and quotes from martyrs, the disappeared, and the murdered. Therefore, memory is crucial to understanding culture precisely because it indicates collective desires, needs, and self-definition.

Throughout this research, I made critical contributions to feminist geography, Latin American geography, essential trauma studies, memory studies, spirituality, critical Indigenous studies, ethnic studies, and feminist and women of color theorizing and studies. My research will contribute to ongoing discussions of emotional geographies and the body as a place/landscape connected to subjective experiences of counter-cultural memory production.

CHAPTER II: FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS -*RECORDANDO JUNTAS*

Researcher (me): What do your parents share about the war in Guatemala? What do they remember?

Sandra: We talk about the war, now but growing up, we didn't have those conversations because it was very painful for them. My uncle was killed during that time. He used to work for this attorney and they were stealing lands from Indigenous people during the war, and my uncle saw what this lawyer was doing to Indigenous people. So, my uncle disappeared; he was tortured, taken to a pueblo, disappeared, escaped, and ended up at one of my uncle's homes, away from the capital. When they found him, they told my grandma, and she went and told the police. But turns out the attorney was working with the police. My uncle disappeared, Juanito Arezes is his name, he loved me a lot, then they found and killed him, butchered him to death. When my grandma found him, it was hard to find him like that, but then that lawyer had a horrible death. Justice was never reached, and that's why we also left in the 1970s. He was killed in 1977. It was during the peak of the war.

Sandra Luna was a volunteer for GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-Los Angeles (GMR-LA), one of the GuateMaya feminist groups that this dissertation examined. We were sitting at Memories of El Monte, an art community space, eating *pupusas* and drinking *horchata,* when an hour into the interview, I asked her about her memories of the Guatemalan war and breaking up the silences in her family. It has taken us years of building a friendship around Guatemala for us to be sitting down *recordando juntas* (remembering together) to get to this question of what her family shares about the Guatemalan war and any memories they have. For many of the participants in this study, questions about the Guatemalan war and memory can be re-traumatizing (Macleod, 2021). For example, Sandra's response illustrated a time of losing family, experiencing death, and grief, forcing families to migrate without justice. For scholars who study trauma, grief, and genocide (Lopez Garcia, 2019; Mcleod, 2021), there are specific ethical recommendations that have been documented to respect the participant's emotions, testimony, and account of the situation (Kobayashi, 2001, p. 58; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended the following categories when conducting qualitative research: (a) Utilitarian (informed consent, avoidance of harm, confidentiality); (b)

Deontological (reciprocity, avoidance of wrong, fairness); (c) Relational (collaboration, avoidance of imposition, confirmation); and (e) Ecological (cultural sensitivity, avoidance of detachment, responsive communication). These four categories are instrumental for qualitative research, and I intentionally followed all but prioritized the third category about relational research and building a collaborative process with the research participants.

To initiate each of the interviews or body mapping workshops, I always followed the ethical practice of asking for consent, communicating to the participant that we could stop the interview whenever she wanted, and asking if it was okay to record the interview. I also asked the participants if it was okay to use their birth name or if they preferred using a pseudonym for confidentiality reasons. Out of the 23 participants, only one chose the latter option. My study received IRB approval, and I also communicated to the participants that this work was institutionally supported, as my co-principal investigator Dr. Laura Pulido, was my advisor. If any emergency arose, she would be notified. As I started collecting the participant's *testimonios,* I observed that sharing their stories made them feel empowered, seen, and affirmed.

The majority of the participants identified as Guatemalan women. Three women identified as K'iche' and one as Q'anjob'al—the younger generations of the participants identified as GuateMaya as a way to acknowledge their Indigenous roots. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 56, making the research an intergenerational study examining memory and healing across generations. The testimonios were gathered in Spanish and transcribed and translated into English for this study. I however, recognized the troubling colonial legacy of the Spanish language. This language was forced upon Indigenous communities and then later prohibited from being spoken by many Latinas/os/x through U.S. The Americanization efforts

and because of this history, scholars acknowledge that not all Latinas/os/x in the U.S. speak Spanish and that this often can be a source of shame (Morales et al., 2023, p. 6).

I navigated this research process cautiously and critically to avoid an extractive process. Instead, I braided a process of accountability, trust, and respect for the testimonios, body maps, and digital ethnography of and by GuateMaya women. Indigenous scholar Smith's (2012) study was critical in this research, being rooted under an imperialist gaze and stated:

> The word itself, 'research,' is probably one of the dirtiest words in many Indigenous contexts. It stirs up the silence, it conjures up bad memories, and it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that Indigenous people even write poetry about research. (p. 1)

The history of Western research is painful for Indigenous communities and people of color. From the 1920s to 1960s, the United States conducted unethical research in places like Guatemala and Puerto Rico with a syphilis experiment and testing of birth control pills on Puerto Rican women. From the 1930s to the 1960s, nearly half of Puerto Rican women of childbearing age were sterilized without their informed consent. The procedure came to be called "la operacion" ("the operation") because it was so common (Rojas, 2004, p. 185). Smith (2012) provocatively stated:

> It is a history [Western research] that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and comparing the amount of millet seed to the capacity for thought offends our sense of who and what we are. (p. 10)

In other words, Western research and experiments dehumanized people, making colonized people feel inferior, without any "consciousness." As a woman of color, learning the

history of research never sat well with me as I did not want to perpetuate participants' feelings of being "researched" and being just another statistic. I would reflect and ask myself constantly, how can this project be transformative for underrepresented communities? How can I put into practice a liberatory praxis for the participants and even for myself?

In *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance*, Madison (2005) articulated that critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. By "ethical responsibility," she meant a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being and compassion for the suffering of living beings (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Madison recommended that the critical ethnographer push the boundaries of traditional-based research methods and use our positionality, resources, and skills to make accessible stories that are otherwise restrained and out of reach. The critical ethnographer contributes to emancipatory knowledge and social justice discourses (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Throughout this research, I took an activist-scholar stance by having a clear position of intervening in hegemonic practices. I served as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives.

I identified my research as what Kobayashi (2001) terms "critical" scholarship that conveys the social consequences of our study situations and attempts to uncover people's tensions and contradictions. Critical scholarship takes a position on what is and on what could be, as well as providing a theoretical understanding of the systemic ways social relations are constructed. I also took the ethical position; however, that was necessary (for me, at least) to go beyond critical scholarship, which explains contradictions in the world, to activist scholarship, which attempts to resolve those contradictions to bring about actual change (Kobayashi, 2001, p. 55).

As a multi-sited, scalar, and sensory study, I was deeply involved in both case studies through the research and within the group's organizing efforts by participating in events, fundraisers, political campaigns, and accompaniment. The study participants were aware of the scholarly work I was engaging in and producing, but at the same time, they are also aware of my long-term commitment to social justice. Chicana scholars Morales et al. (2023) agreed that as academicians, we seek and are drawn to theoretical and methodological approaches in research that allow us to express our whole selves while at the same time pushing us to be accountable not to the institutions that we work for, but rather the communities with which we seek to collaborate.

Chapter 2 is divided into four sections: (a) Positionality, which as a decolonial feminist geographer, is essential to discuss and prioritize; (b) the feminist ethnographic methods literature review, which discusses feminist ethnographers' contributions; (c) the centering testimonios section which focuses on why I prioritized the testimonio method throughout my study. The body can also produce embodied testimonies and counter-narratives; and (d) the methods section covers the main methods I used for this research: testimonios, body mapping, and digital ethnography.

Positionality

Feminist geographers center positionality when discussing identities, geographies, and privileges concerning navigating our research and the academic institution (Castro, 2021; Gokariksel et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our power, privilege, and biases, denouncing the power structures surrounding our subjects (Madison, 2005, p. 7). Therefore, centering my positionality in this research was important because I also identified with some of the participants' stories. I identify as a GuateMaya woman

in the diaspora with Maya roots, acknowledging my conflicting *mestiza* identity, formerly undocumented, and from a working-class background. These intersections of my identity also categorize me as a non-traditional first-generation student and someone who arrived in academia later in their career trajectory. My training has been in the social sciences, specifically sociology and social work. Coming to geography has been a new journey for me. However, I feel I am constantly involved in geography in my community as I am continually involved in grassroots efforts in transnational and local geographies. Therefore, women of color and feminist geographers (Cahuas, 2022; Eaves, 2021; Gokariksel at al., 2021; McKittrick, 2006) contended that being in tune and having a sense of place in our work, manifests who we are as activist scholars.

Working and writing this dissertation was a part of my healing journey of unearthing and investigating the place where I am originally from Guatemala. This work has helped me unpack the silences entrenched in my family's lineage and within the Central American diasporic communities in Los Angeles, with whom I am in relation. I was curious to know why I have family living in Australia, Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States. How can so many of us be dispersed? Why are we not together in Guatemala? What forced my family members to migrate and be far away from their origins? I always heard that people were migrating to the United States to send money back to their relatives due to economic issues. Although this is factual, and immigration literature (Abrego 2014; Menjivar & Abrego 2012) affirmed it, I was curious to know more about what drove/forced my family members to migrate, whether due to the economic conditions produced by U.S. interventions in partnership with the Guatemalan elite class.

Literature by Latin American and Central American scholars (Alvarado et al., 2017; Escobar, 2012; Galeano, 1996) introduced me to the brutal history of Latin America and inspired me to be where I am now, pursuing a Ph.D. in geography with an emphasis on Latin America decolonial feminism. It has been this journey of delving deep into the research and traveling back to Guatemala to discover why the family separations and the deep silences exist. Although I identified with the participants' stories, I am also aware of my privileged positionality (Ley & Mounts, 2001) of having academic degrees, being bilingual, and having citizenship, which can influence power dynamics when conducting research (Castro, 2021; Kobayashi, 2001). As the dissertation advanced, I could not attend the group's meetings or events and had to prioritize my studies, leading me to step back from organizing. This created a gap between the participants I saw as *compañeras* and me, the academic and professor. It felt uncomfortable initially, but I know how to use my positionality to further the group's efforts. For example, this year, I wrote a proposal for GMR-LA to get a grant from NISGUA (The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala) for an educational forum that will take place on November 25, 2023, in honor of Latin America's Day, to eliminate violence against women. The forum will invite three speakers to share their work and efforts.

I began noticing that I was in constant reflexivity which in ethnographic work is known as "reflexive ethnography." A concern for positionality is sometimes understood as "reflexive ethnography": a "turning back" on ourselves. When we turn back, we are accountable for our research paradigms, positions of authority, and moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation (Kobayashi, 2001; Madison, 2005, p. 7). For example, many Guatemalan people disappeared and/or were killed because of the subversive literature or writings they read. At the same time, I had the privilege of reading and writing about this history. I was aware of my

positionality, and these differences connected me to the spiritual realm as I would light a candle and burn some sage before writing to open up a healing space (Anzaldua 2015; Lopez Garcia 2019; Zepeda, 2023) and connect with the disappeared. This is what I call embodied *conocimientos* (knowledge).

Embodied Conocimientos

Throughout the interview process to gather participants' *testimonios*, heavy emotions arose as the topics I was covering in this research were personal, political, and structural, affecting many generations. At some point during the interview, I had to pause the recording because both the participant and I started crying or the content was too personal to be recorded. Although it is recommended for the researcher to be neutral, I took a critical perspective, as previously mentioned. I became very committed to the research process to the point of integrating my story at the different events, especially in the body mapping workshops. I centered authenticity in the process, and it also made the participants feel safe and comfortable so that they would share their emotions. Another aspect was the silent moments we encountered in the interview process. The crying also allowed for the silences to be sacred and respected. When those moments occurred in the interview, I chose not to follow up; instead, I allowed us to sit with our emotions as it became a sacred space to honor our stories and narratives that others have silenced.

Chicana feminists Morales et al. (2023) discussed that what is silenced is stored in our bodies. Centering the body-mind-spirit also asks us to pay attention to what is not said, what is silenced, or the "papelitos guardados," the intimate secrets we keep to ourselves (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The concept of silence has long been interrogated within Chicana Latina feminist thought. One way silence has been theorized is in relationship to "being silenced," that is, not

having your voice to be heard or being purposefully excluded, as evidenced by patriarchal men in the Chicano movement as well as White feminists invested in Whiteness in the feminist movement of the 70s and 80s (Davalos, 2008). Silencing is prevalent regarding queerness and homophobia within Chicana/Latina feminisms (Leyva, 1998), even though so many revered Chicana feminists like Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrıe Moraga are queer (Morales et al., 2023, p. 4). Chicana/Latina feminisms make the body an explicit site of theorization. The commitment to center the body comes from a need to identify our multiple ways of knowing to reclaim the intergenerational knowledge passed down to us from our mothers, grandmothers, and other women in our families. Within academia, this reclaiming of theorizing from our bodies becomes especially important given how much of academic theory and methods rely on Eurocentric epistemological and ontological frameworks that fragment the lived realities of Chicanas and Latinas who experience multiple intersections of the oppression felt and expressed through the body (Morales et al., 2023).

Methodology: Cuerpo-Territorio

The research was guided and influenced by the methodology of *cuerpo-territorio*. As the central framework and methodology of this research project, *cuerpo-territorio* reminded me of how powerful our bodies, minds, and spirits are and how we are connected to embodied knowledge from our ancestors and *abuelas,* who were and are connected to plants, herbs, and the spiritual world. In the words of Xinca decolonial feminist, Lorena Cabnal (2010)

> The statement Body-Earth territory has cosmogonic and political force, so it is conceived as a relational unit. Therefore, it is not, nor is it created partially. That is, it is not designed on the one hand the body territory and on the other the land territory, but in unity.

Cuerpo-territorio came from the lived experiences of women protesting extractive industry and the displacement of their lands in Santa Maria de Xalapan in Guatemala around 2005 and 2007. Using the framework felt like a big responsibility because it is a proposal meant initially for Indigenous women in Abya Yala. Therefore, when I returned to Guatemala to finalize fieldwork for this research, I asked permission to use the statement of body-territory in academia. Cabal (2010) stated that cuerpo-territorio is not meant for academia but to be used on oppressed and marginalized subjects. Its objective is to propose reflections in collective groups led by Indigenous women, feminist movements, and campaigns (Cabal, 2010; Patino 2020).

However, the concept is becoming very popular in Anglophone circles. Feminist geographers Zaragocin and Caretta (2020) discussed how the concept has traveled and how it morphs through the spaces, "When the method and the concept of cuerpo-territorio travel from South to North and vice versa through the bodies of feminist geographers situated in these spaces, a different appreciation and analysis of the term occur. Distinct forms of accountability arise, particularly as one of us is part of the collective, putting into practice this method in Latin America, and we are both engaging in constant flows of transnational dialogue and practice" (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020). Similarly, I was cautious of using the concept not to perpetuate co-optation and appropriation within academia because it is for and by Indigenous women of Abya Yala[6]. As cuerpo-territorio travels north, it also moves with the bodies of Indigenous, diverse migrant women in the diaspora. It foregrounds new frameworks within the concept and aligns it withdisplaced populations in the Global North.

[6] Abya Yala is a place and concept of the Kuna people of Panama and Colombia used by activists to name an Indigenous scale of interconnection and responsibility to land (Blackwell, 2023, p. 4).

Feminist Ethnographic Methods Literature Review

This entire study process heavily relied on feminist ethnographic research. As mentioned in chapter 1, this research is interdisciplinary and is informed by feminist geography, anthropology, ethnic studies, Indigenous decolonial feminisms, and the growing field of Central American studies. Davis and Craven (2016) explained that most social scientists would agree that ethnography is a form of qualitative research that centers on studying people, their actions, and the contexts in which they live over time. Ethnography typically involves long-term interactions through participant observation (p. 10). Anthropology uses ethnography more often than the other social sciences, and there is a history of geographers (Cahuas, 2022; Nagar, 2013; Nolin, 2006; Wright, 2006; Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020) also delving into ethnographic methods. Therefore, Davis and Craven (2016) defined ethnography as examining and understanding how groups and people live their lives. The ethnographic account that results from understanding how groups live is a detailed description of that interaction, and the product is also referred to as ethnography. Far from being notable solely as a methodological choice, ethnography is as much about bridging theory and practice—praxis—grounded to explore situations from the perspective of those living the experiences being researched (Davis &Craven, 2016, p. 10). Feminist geographers explained that feminist methodology is about the approach to research and the relationships among people involved in the research process, the actual conduct of the research, and the process through which the research comes to be undertaken and completed (Moss, 2002, p. 12). In addition, geographer Mullings (1999) explained that the conduct of ethnographic fieldwork is firmly grounded in an empirical methodology that is devoted to the analysis of research data acquired using first-hand interactions with members of a local community over a

substantial period (Mullings, 1999, p. 337). The subsequent paragraphs discuss feminist ethnography and a literature review of feminist geographers (Cahuas 2022; Nagar, 2013; Nolin, 2006; Wright, 2006; Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020) involved with ethnographic methods.

For feminist geographers, qualitative methodologies have been particularly important. Limb and Dwyer (2001) explained that although it emerged from a Marxist structuralist framework, feminist geography has been centrally concerned with rewriting geography both to incorporate the "missing half of a people" geography and to show that all geographical analysis requires an interpretation of gendered processes and subjectivities (McDowell, 1999; Rose, 1993). Feminist geographers (Moss, 2002) argued for methodological approaches that are collaborative, non-exploitative, and that seek to challenge the unequal power relations between researcher and researched. The researcher sought out qualitative methodologies, mainly in-depth interviews, because of the empathetic research encounter that they felt to engender. However, feminist researchers have also actively critiqued these possibilities, arguing that ethnographic research methods cannot be assumed to be empowering and, thus, raises many significant issues about the vulnerability of research subjects (Lymb & Dwyer, 2001, p. 4).

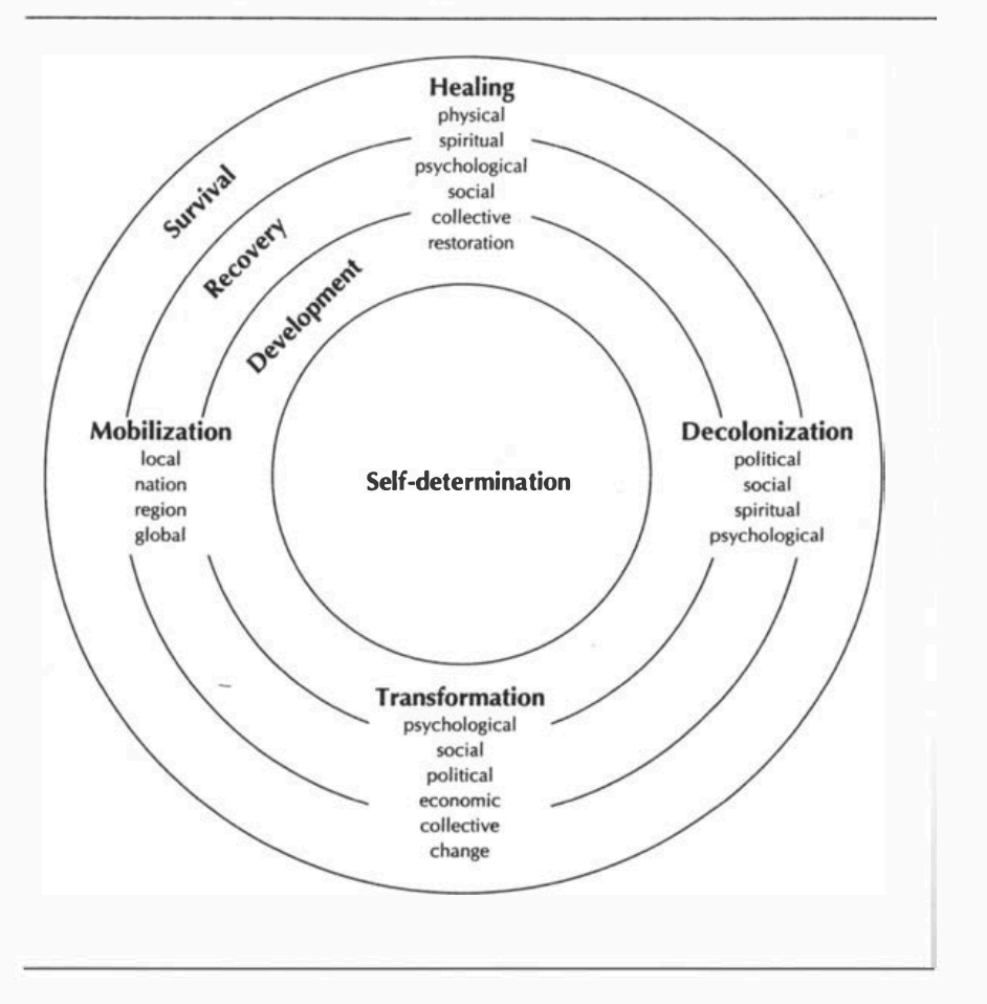
Feminist ethnographic research is generally understood to have emerged during the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It is essential to understand what led to the development of feminist ethnography, frequently referred to as the "waves" of feminism. Acknowledging that the notion of waves focuses upon a Euro-American history of feminism and that feminist activism has occurred at various times in many locations is necessary and relevant (Davis & Craven, 2016, p. 7). Davis and Craven (2016) further explained that feminist ethnographic research and activism have contributed to developing the activist-scholar model. Feminism is a prescriptive project with a social justice vision that attempts to explain, in

analytical terms, power differentials of several processes, including colonialism, capitalism, militarism, ableism, and homophobia. In the 20th century, being an activist-scholar often means developing formal relationships with organizations or community-based programs in which research priorities are determined by the organizations for their benefit. The point is that the feminist ethnographer who seeks to be public, engaged, or an activist aims to accomplish research that is meaningful for those who participate in it (Cahuas, 2022; Li et al., 2020; Nagar; 2019; Nelson &Seager, 2005; Pulido, 2008).

As a community educator and scholar, my intention with this research was to center the worldviews, narratives, and stories of Indigenous and Ladina women. Informed by Native scholar Smith (2012) about decolonizing methodologies and the Indigenous research agenda of countering Western perspectives of research, I worked on guiding my study with ethical research protocols (p. 118). In the following figure (see Figure 7) I borrowed it from Smith to denote the cyclical research patterns according to her recommendations: Healing, Decolonization, Transformation, and Mobilization. In my research, healing and transformation were crucial to recover memory, grief, and well-being from years of pain, trauma, and resistance against the Guatemalan state.

Figure 7

The Cyclical Research Patterns



Note: Adapted from Decolonizing Methodologies L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 117. Copyright 2012 by Sage.

Inspired by feminist geographers who are interested in the situatedness and interconnectedness of lived experiences (Cahuas 2022; Nolin, 2006; Nagar, 2013; Wright, 2006; Zaragocin& Caretta 2020), I designed my project to contribute to social science research that centers marginalized voices at the forefront. A study by feminist geographer Nolin (2006) contributed to transnational ethnographies centered on the lived experiences of Maya women

who migrated to Canada and how they built social networks of support and reciprocity. Nolin (2006) explained:

> I call transnational ethnographies a continuing tradition of fieldwork-based writing. Validity becomes the goal, then, rather than generalizability and replicability. Validity means the integrity and value of the research achieved through accountability to the participants and those affected by the outcome. (p. 17)

Fieldwork reciprocity is vital to an engaged qualitative research project, especially when participants are those often identified as living on the margins. Like Nolin's research, I engaged in fieldwork reciprocity by informing the research participants of how their stories and narratives would bring awareness about gendered injustices in Guatemala. In addition, I provided stipends, food, and resources for wellness during the workshops to honor participants' participation, time, and energy in this project. Aside from the resources, I was/am committed to seeking justice for the 56 girls and their families. Throughout these five years, multiple fundraising campaigns have been for the families and the groups' efforts and sustainability. Therefore, I have been a part of both groups' organizing efforts and fundraising campaigns.

In addition to perspectives of fieldwork and research validity, Wright (2006) spent years producing qualitative ethnographic feminist work in the field of geography. She coauthored foundational pieces in studies of *feminicidio* and the social movements against state terror and labor exploitation. For my research, I was interested in her contributions to theories of embodiment, global capital, and the construction of bodies. Wright has extensive transnational research expertise as she embarked on eight years of transnational research between Northern Mexico and Southern China from 1991-2003. Her principal objective was to illustrate what is at stake in telling the myth of women as disposable for these factories, for the people who work in

them, and for the constant flow of global capital that produces disposable women and workers (Wright, 2006, p. 2). Although Wright's research focused on global capitalism and the disposability of women factory workers, the multi-sidedness aspect of her research and questions about space-time and how bodies are produced and designed under a neoliberal state, is what resonated with my dissertation work.

The work of radical feminist geographer Nagar (2013) has inspired me as she proposed and engaged with people's stories as coauthors, producing popular knowledge within academia. Nagar (2013) stated:

> A radical rethinking of how we can (re)make knowledge and redistribute the right to theorize through a dialogic approach of educating, organizing, and agitating requires a serious engagement with geography. (p. 4)

Nagar's intentional and intimate proposals to geography attracted me because she was practicing an intimate liberatory feminist praxis in her research and writing, as she was careful in how she wrote about her participants and the people she walked with throughout her research. This intimate approach to research interested me, and it is how I delved into my research practice, building intimate relationships with the participants, relationships based on trust, and co-creating feminist collective epistemologies. In the same light, Latinx feminist geographer Cahuas (2022) reflected on her research as a Latina feminist and a geographer, asking, "How do you do research that is ethical and accountable to marginalized communities that you also belong to" (p. 1514)? Many feminist ethnographers have asked this question and although, as Cahuas pointed out, there is no easy answer, what is relevant is that it depends on the study and the researcher. Like Cahuas's findings, I also selected testimonio as a method for my research because although it is about respecting individual's stories, testimonio is also about community formation and a desire

for social justice (Cahuas, 2022, p. 1522). Thus, testimonio invites us to reflect on our research and be committed to social justice in the long haul as I write in the subsequent section about centering testimonios.

Geographers Catherine Nolin and Melissa Wright have contributed to questions of transnational ethnographic research based on marginalized subjects interconnected with migration and larger scales like global capitalism. However, questions about navigating this research as someone who lives in the Global North but is studying and conversing with the Global South surfaced throughout the research process. Feminist geographer like Zaragocin's (2020) study was bridging the South-North divide and contributing to research and ethnography about body territory with Indigenous women. Zaragocin is from Ecuador and grew up in the United States; due to her dual identities, the scholar has developed a hemispheric perspective and contributed to the growing research of embodiment, emotions, and body territory. In anglophone feminist geographical circles, the concept of embodiment—that is, how lived experiences are manifested in bodily sensations and emotions—is used to explore emotions in research and to incorporate individuals' embodied experiences of emotions in the research process (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020). Zaragocin's (2020) research and writing contribute to the co-production of knowledge with her research participants. She states, "In fact, coproducing knowledge with participants in a format that is more easily disseminated and understood by the wider public created pressure for politicians to enact affordable medication programs" (Zaragocin, 2020, p. 5). Her research prompted me to continue collaborating with my research participants and co-create projects and knowledge for popular education from the testimonios and body maps co-created in this dissertation.

Centering Testimonios

Traditionally, *testimonio* as a method has been used in court hearings and in campaigns to attain justice. Latin American scholars and Latinx studies (Huber, 2009) delved into testimonio to center marginalized communities' voices and highlight stories otherwise dismissed in the ivory tower. Stephen's (2018) work on memory, and emotion emphasized testimonio as a tool to reactivate not only past events but also the emotions linked to them. In this way, testimony attaches the tellers' past emotions to the listeners' present emotions (Stephen, 2018, p. 56). This is powerful because it transforms our ideas of time and space by engaging with narratives that combine past and present accounts. Testimony, therefore, is a form of knowledge production and part of the epistemologies that engage a mixture of forms of archiving, including oral, visual, and textual information (Stephen, 2013, p. 12). Huber (2009) defined *testimonio* as:

> Authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation. A verbal journey of one's life experiences with attention to injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one's life. (p. 643)

Latinx and Chicana studies have centered testimonio, and oral history approaches to rewrite, reclaim, and highlight the richness of marginalized communities whose accounts have been subordinated by a White supremacist system (Blackwell, 2011). While oral history as a methodology excavates and brings to light the silences of communities decentered by the dominant system, for my research project, testimonio appeared to be more adequate as the participants shared their lived experiences formulating their witness statements of gender-based violence and memory of the Guatemalan 36-year war.

For feminist geographers, Hanlon and Shankar (2000), the purpose of a *testimonio* is to connect to a solidarity activity and provide space and authority to women's voices as a way to walk with those who dare to speak out. Thus, I centered the experiences and emotions of people who remain at the margins of society but are agents of social change through their voices and stories. Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, shared a testimonial about her life. I*, Rigoberta Menchu*, the first contemporary testimonio by a Maya K'iche' woman, focused much-needed international attention on the atrocities perpetrated against Maya peoples in Guatemala. Her book-length statement turned critical attention to the plight of poor Guatemalans who were at the mercy of a brutal military and is viewed by many as having contributed significantly to the "peace" process and the resulting establishment of the truth commission (Hanlon & Shankar, 2000, p. 266). Through the years, Maya peoples have critiqued Rigoberta Menchu's testimony as it conveyed a homogenous perspective of all Maya peoples and their suffering during the war. In addition, Menchu has also become the sole representative for the Maya community in international matters when there are different stories and memories to be considered. However, testimonio is the notion of collective remembrance and although Menchu was sharing her own experiences, her testimony can connect to the stories of other women survivors. Voices in testimonios tend to speak of the collective experience and resist the Western obsession with individuality. As explained by Cahuas (2022), the purpose of a testimonio is to tell stories of experiencing or witnessing oppression to expose it, raise consciousness, build solidarity, and call people to action.

I primarily used the embodied *testimonios* of GuateMaya women for my project to contribute to the production of cultural memory but importantly to highlight the counter-narratives, stories, and perspectives of Guatemalan and Maya women as survivors of genocide.

From its inception, *testimonio* represented the voices of groups of people persecuted and marginalized for being women, Indigenous, Afro-Indigenous, Black, rural, working-class, and suspected of, or involved in, political activism and the raising of social consciousness (Alvarado et al., 2017). In addition, testimonio can contribute to the growing scholarship on critical race methodologies, which seeks to disrupt the apartheid of knowledge in academia, moving toward educational research, guided by racial and social justice for communities of color (Huber, 2009, p. 640). Survivors' testimonies have provided crucial evidence in trials for crimes against humanity; the evidence is ever more critical because, as time passes, some types of proof become harder to retrieve (Sutton, 2018, p. 15).

I conducted semi-structured interviews to gather the testimonios of Maya and Ladina[7] women who create cultural memory in Guatemala and Los Angeles. Some of them were members of student groups demanding justice in Guatemala for those who survived torture and are in exile in the U.S. I completed 23 semi-structured interviews in person and on Zoom to gather the testimonios of eight volunteers of *8 Tijax* and 15 participants of GMR-LA participants. In addition, I also gathered the embodied testimonios of GuateMaya feminist groups by facilitating two body-mapping workshops in which a total of 27 people participated. The first body mapping workshop took place in Los Angeles on October 3, 2021, with seven participants from GMR-LA. The second body mapping workshop took place in Guatemala on August 28, 2022, with 20mothers and family members of the 56 girls. I also used digital ethnography to examine the groups' posts and communication via digital platforms like Facebook and Instagram

[7] Ladina refers to a woman who is mixed from Indigenous and European hybridization. Scholars identify ladino and ladina as a place in between the elite Spanish-speaking state and the Indigenous communities (Harms 2020).

during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am grateful to the 50 participants in this research for sharing their oral and embodied *testimonios* of courage, love, and comradeship with me.

Methods

Informed by Smith's (2012) decolonizing methodologies, the methods for my study centered on the embodied voices lived experiences, and creative cultural production that reflected *mujeres* and groups displaced and otherwise affected by the Guatemalan 36-year (1960-1996) war. I used ethnographic-style interviews because my research placed me in conversation with women affected by war. My research lifts and centers Indigenous women's world views and concerns that will guide readers to new theoretical insights born out of lived experiences.

I carefully developed questions for the semi-structured interviews centering on the participant's lived experiences. The questions ranged from participant's occupation to migration story, to questions about the war in Guatemala and gender-based violence. For example, how did you get involved in the organization? When? What type of occupation do you hold right now? To questions like, what do you remember about the Guatemalan war? Were you involved in any groups? Did the war impact your family members (See Appendix A)? Most testimonios were gathered in Spanish at a community space or local coffee shop where the participants felt comfortable sharing their stories. I transcribed each interview and translated it into English for this dissertation. Once each of the testimonio was transcribed, I relied on a coding method (Saldana, 2016) to look for themes (place-based altars, public memory, cuerpo-territorio, embodied transformative memory, and cartographies of healing) to help me analyze each case study. I based the themes on Saldan's coding manual. Once the section I wanted to analyze was transcribed, I highlighted themes and patterns in the story on an Excel sheet. In addition to interviews, I also relied on participant observation and field notes for this study. The questions

initially opened the conversation, and I also had follow-up questions. At times, one question would take an hour of the interview, which made me aware of where the participant wanted to prioritize their story.

Testimonios

The original definition of testimonio centered on first-hand accounts that the witnesses wrote themselves or dictated to a transcriber. Smith (2010) contributed to a much broader understanding of testimonio, including eyewitness accounts and historical fiction. One of the more powerful attributes of testimonio is that, as a genre, it intentionally blurs the lines between fact and fiction. Moreover, this academic delineation becomes irrelevant compared to the powerful and candid content within testimonial works (Smith, 2010, p. 22). As explained by Huber (2019) and Cahuas (2020), Chicanx scholars and feminist geographers are pushing the limits of academic knowledge production with methods like testimonio to center the individual and collective efforts of marginalized groups. Cahuas (2020) used the concept of *disobedient relationality* to explore and situate testimonio as alternative ways of thinking about and approaching geographic research (p. 1517). In this spirit of disobedient relationality, I also employed methods centered on women's experiences and memories.

In the last half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, Latin American women have increasingly fought against authoritarian regimes and patriarchal control. In 2010, Ixil women provided testimonio in a courtroom about gender-based abuses during the Rios Montt regime in Guatemala. They denounced Montt as a dictator, shifting the hegemonic narrative about the war so that it would be currently identified as genocide. Testimonio, as a genre, is notoriously fluid and difficult to categorize because testimonio can describe anything written by a first-person witness who wishes to tell her/his/their story of trauma (Smith, 2010, p.

26). The form of testimony may vary, adopting narrative discourses such as autobiography, historical novel, interview, photographs, prison memoirs, diary, chronicle letter, newspaper, article, anthropological or social science documentary; it can be fiction or nonfiction (Smith, 2010, p. 27). I contribute to this list of testimonial categories with embodied testimonio, arguing that we can use the body to tell stories and be a source that holds memory from past experiences.

In individual interviews and body map workshops, the gathering of testimonio also transformed into a *platica* as we sat in a circle to discuss the body maps and shared our experiences. Chicana feminists (Morales et al., 2023) used platicas as a method, but the scholars were also connected to the growing testimonio method in Chicana/o Studies. Platicas, also have a long trajectory in the lives of Chicana/Latina feminists and other women of color feminist circles that have engaged in dialogue and community building as central to organizing and activist efforts (Morales et al., 2023). In bridging platicas to the world of research, they are both a methodology and method that challenge traditional approaches to qualitative research and require researchers to detach themselves from their work (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores & Morales, 2022; Flores Carmona et al., 2021), splitting their bodies, minds, and spirits (Morales et al., 2023). Both testimonios and platicas have a strong Chicana/Latina feminist foundation that provides a platform for elevating theories in the flesh (Anzaldua, 2015). Although both platicas and testimonios share this and other similarities, they differ. For example, by definition, *testimonios* are narratives of political urgency that center on a collective struggle. Platicas can yield these types of narratives but they can also be an exchange that offers *consejos*, everyday storytelling, joyful talk, gossip, mundane dialogue, or heart-to-heart conversations (Morales et al., 2023, p. 9).

Body-Mapping

Aside from the verbal testimonios, I was also interested in the embodied testimonios, and to gather the embodied testimonios of both case studies, as I relied on the popular education method of body mapping. Body mapping has been generally defined as "The process of creating body maps using drawing, painting, or other art-based techniques to visually represent aspects of people's lives, their bodies, and the world they live in" (Gastaldo et al., 2012 p. 5). For this method, I am borrowing from the methodological guide *Mapeando el Cuerpo-Territorio, Guia Metodologica Para Mujeres que Defienden Sus Territorios* (mapping body-territory, methodological guide for women who defend their territories) created by Ecuadorian colectivo miradas criticas del territorio desde el feminism (Cruz et al., 2017). The guide provides tools and step-by-step instructions for facilitating body mapping workshops with Indigenous women.

I used body mapping to ask participants about intergenerational trauma and healing from colonization, patriarchy, and memories of the war. Feminist geographers Zaragocin and Caretta (2020) co-facilitated body mapping workshops and shared participants' experiences and stated:

> Often women participants will stress the importance of the cuerpo-territorio methodology because it creates a collective narrative from their embodied experiences. For example, at the end of the cuerpo-territorio workshops all of the body maps were put together and participants circled around them, noting similarities and differences concerning their bodily experiences of the extractive industry. (p. 9).

As a critique of Eurocentric and imperialist academic practices, scholarship on decolonization has emphasized a new standpoint from which different narratives around bodies and minds can emerge. Despite the outstanding potential for adaptation, scholars have identified that across disciplines, body-map projects are intrinsically connected to emancipatory research

perspectives, social activism, and alternative media initiatives (Gastaldo et al., 2018). The potential of body mapping to decolonize knowledge production in the health sciences (and other social sciences) relates to its ability to create a greater range of voices through research but also to "engage participants as co-producers of knowledge" and disrupt "mechanisms that maintain hierarchies of exclusion." Even though mapping the body and the environment where one works or lives has long been used for data collection, the research activity (the life-size bodily depiction of a person) evolved from social and health sciences' multiple adaptations of advocacy and therapeutic uses. Since its origins, body maps have been used in various countries, contexts, and disciplines with different aims (Gastaldo et al., 2018). For example, body maps have been used for therapy with HIV clients and migrant children. As a social worker, I felt very inclined to use the method and to facilitate the workshops because it reminded me of the social support groups with HIV-positive women I organized when working as a social worker before academia.

Each body mapping workshop was very different, not only because of the location but also due to the themes we covered for each workshop and group. For GMR-LA, the group in Los Angeles, the questions pertained to the participants' migration experience or how they were perceived as Maya women in Los Angeles walking dressed in their *indumentaria* (Maya textiles). The main theme was diaspora and continuing to co-create a counter-memory of the war in Guatemala. The body mapping workshop in Guatemala took a bit longer to arrange as I was organizing it in Los Angeles. I discuss more about each body mapping workshop in Chapters 4 and 5 of this research. The workshop was with the mothers and family members of the 56 girls engaged with grief, trauma, anger, and disillusionment with the state. However, the mothers were able to draw all of those emotions carried in their bodies onto their body maps as a way of releasing them. This workshop resonated with what Chicana spiritual feminists (Anzaldua, 2015;

Lopez Garcia, 2019; Zepeda, 2023) spoke of as a *limpia* (cleansing), which in Maya spirituality is a way to cleanse all of the negative energies or *mal de ojo* (evil eye) caused by jealousy or negative energy from other people. The workshop was a cathartic experience as one of the mothers cried for thirty minutes, releasing and sharing how guilty she felt for taking her daughter to the shelter. Although it was very sad to see her crying, it was also beautiful to see the mothers hug and hold her in a space where they felt safe to release emotions. At the beginning of the workshop, Vianey Hernandez, who is recognized as the leader of the group, shared her testimony and discussed how *cargadas* (loaded) the mothers are and how the *cargas* build up onto their bodies from waiting to receive justice from the state which makes the mothers feel pain and anger as they are part of marginalized populations.

For each body map, blank poster paper and color markers were provided. Although my intention as a researcher was to obtain the final product, the body maps, each workshop focused on the group's emotions, grief, and *convivencia.* Having time with each other was prioritized over making the body maps. Going into the workshops, I knew that the individuals were emotionally burdened, but I also remembered that this activity would help them express and feel seen within a group environment. Before we got to do our body maps, we spent two hours prior introducing ourselves, eating a meal, talking about the altar, and doing body movements. I provided different questions for each group and poster paper to create their body maps. GMR-LA questions (see Figure 8) about memories of the war in Guatemala and feeling safe in Los Angeles were prompted for the body maps. For the mothers, questions (see Figure 9) about their daughters' memories and where they need healing were prompted.

Figure 8

White Board with Instructions and Questions for GMR-LA Body Maps

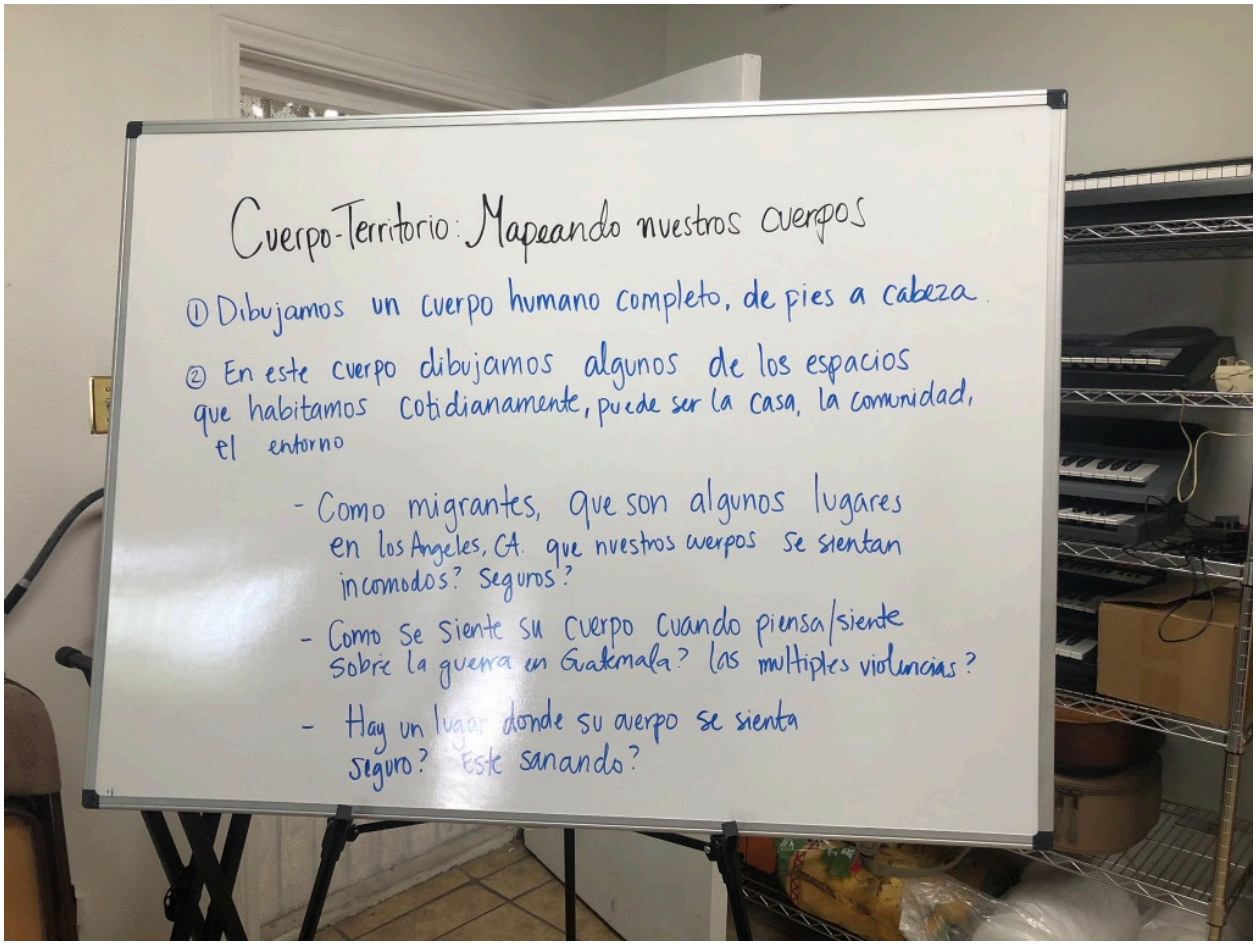
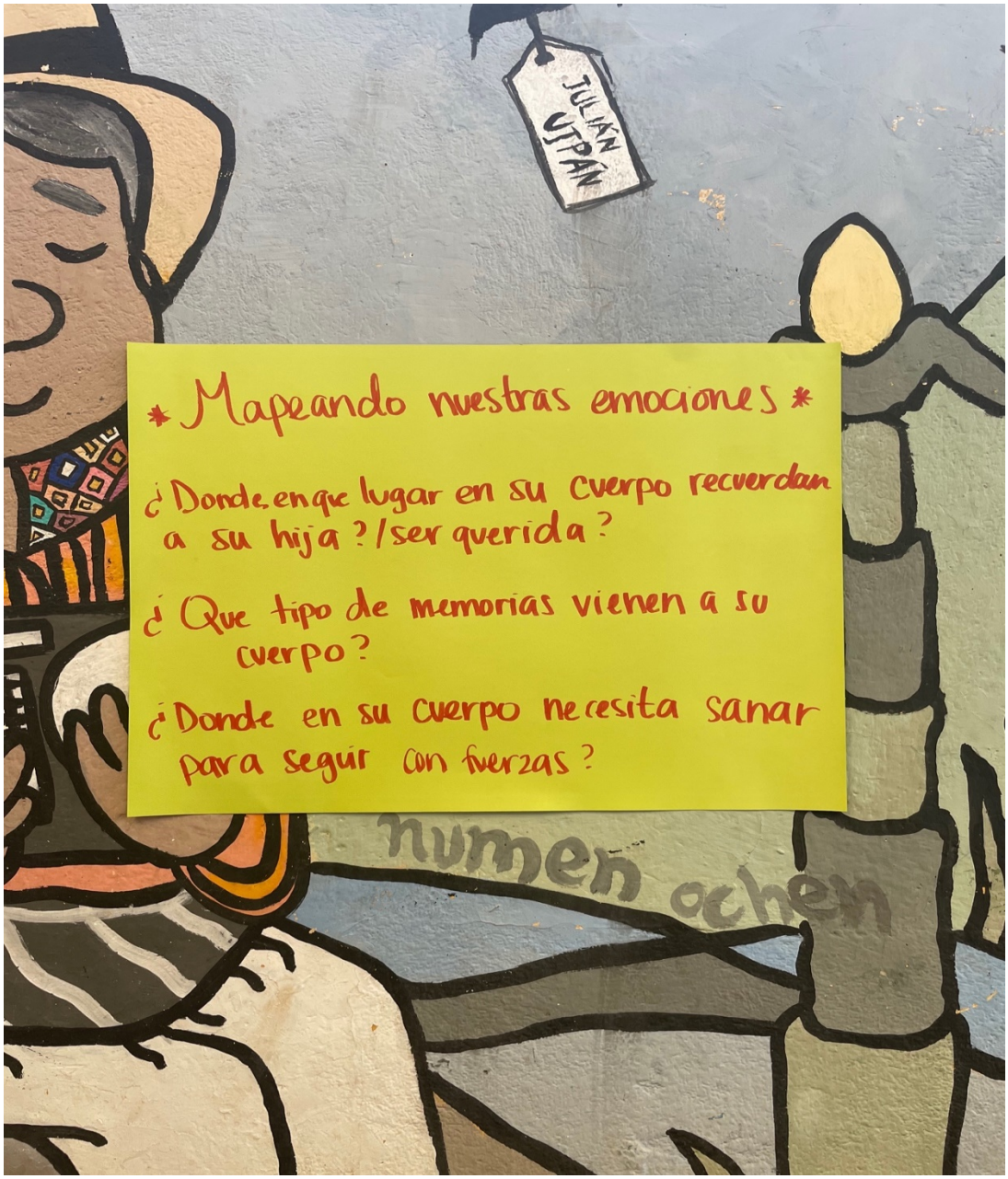


Figure 9

The Poster Paper I Wrote Questions for the Body Maps in Guatemala



Digital Ethnography

Digital ethnographic methods include observations and gathering research data via social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter (Foxen, 2021). Due to the recent

pandemic and the expansive digital interaction in modern social life, online methods are instrumental in studying different populations, groups, cultures, and individuals. For the past two years, I have used Facebook and Instagram as tools to communicate with the participants of *8 Tijax* and GMR-LA group. When the group created the global campaign *#NosDuelen56* in 2018 to bring awareness about each of the female victims of a fire at Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción, I followed it. I actively posted about the case and campaign on my social media. During the spring quarter of 2021, I attended a social media workshop organized by the American Association of Geographers (AAG). I received abundant resources and ethical background information about using online tools.

The synchronous class explained how Covid-19 was forcing geographers to reckon with social media as a potential research subject and as networked sites essential to answering various research questions (Faxon, 2021). During the course, we explored digital ethnography and mixed methods approaches to move from accidental to ethical online research. In addition, we were tasked with the following: outcomes to situate social media within geographic debates and questions of global justice, and critically reflect on the ethics and politics of using these tools as well as explore multiple methodologies for incorporating social media data into geographical analysis with an emphasis on qualitative and interpretive approaches.

As a Ph.D. student living through a global pandemic with a deep commitment to my research work and community, I needed to adapt to the current climate to finish the project. Therefore, I am also using digital ethnographies to connect with research participants and gather data from the social media platforms they are using. As Burrell (2009) said, “For ethnographers, defining the space is an important activity that traditionally takes place before and in the early stages of fieldwork; it involves identifying where the researcher should ideally be as a participant

observer" (p. 182). Both groups are active on social media, posting current information, but I am also gathering data from news articles, blogs, podcasts, and short documentaries. I communicated with each group about what information I was using. During the interviews, I asked for clarifications about the accuracy and authenticity of online data to be represented in my work.

Pink et al. (2016) explained that *digital ethnography* outlines an approach to ethnography in a contemporary world. It invites researchers to consider how we live and research in a digital, material, and sensory environment. This is not a static world or environment. Rather, it is one in which we need to know how to research and study as it develops and changes. It asks how digital environments, methods, and methodologies redefine ethnographic practice. It takes the novel step of acknowledging the role of digital ethnography in challenging the concepts that have traditionally defined the units of analysis that ethnography has been used to study. It goes beyond simply translating traditional concepts and methods into digital research environments by exploring the ethnographic—theoretical dialogues through which 'old' concepts are impacted by digital ethnography practice. Ethnographic writing might be replaced by video, photography, or blogging. To demonstrate the process of body mapping workshops in Los Angeles and Guatemala, I collaborated with a video editor in Guatemala to produce a *five-minute video* about the body mapping workshops. The video represented what scholars in the 21st century can produce using digital ethnography methods in our scholarship to disseminate information to a larger audience.

Figure 10

8 Tijax and GMR-LA Body Maps Transferred to Canva Tool for Translation Purposes

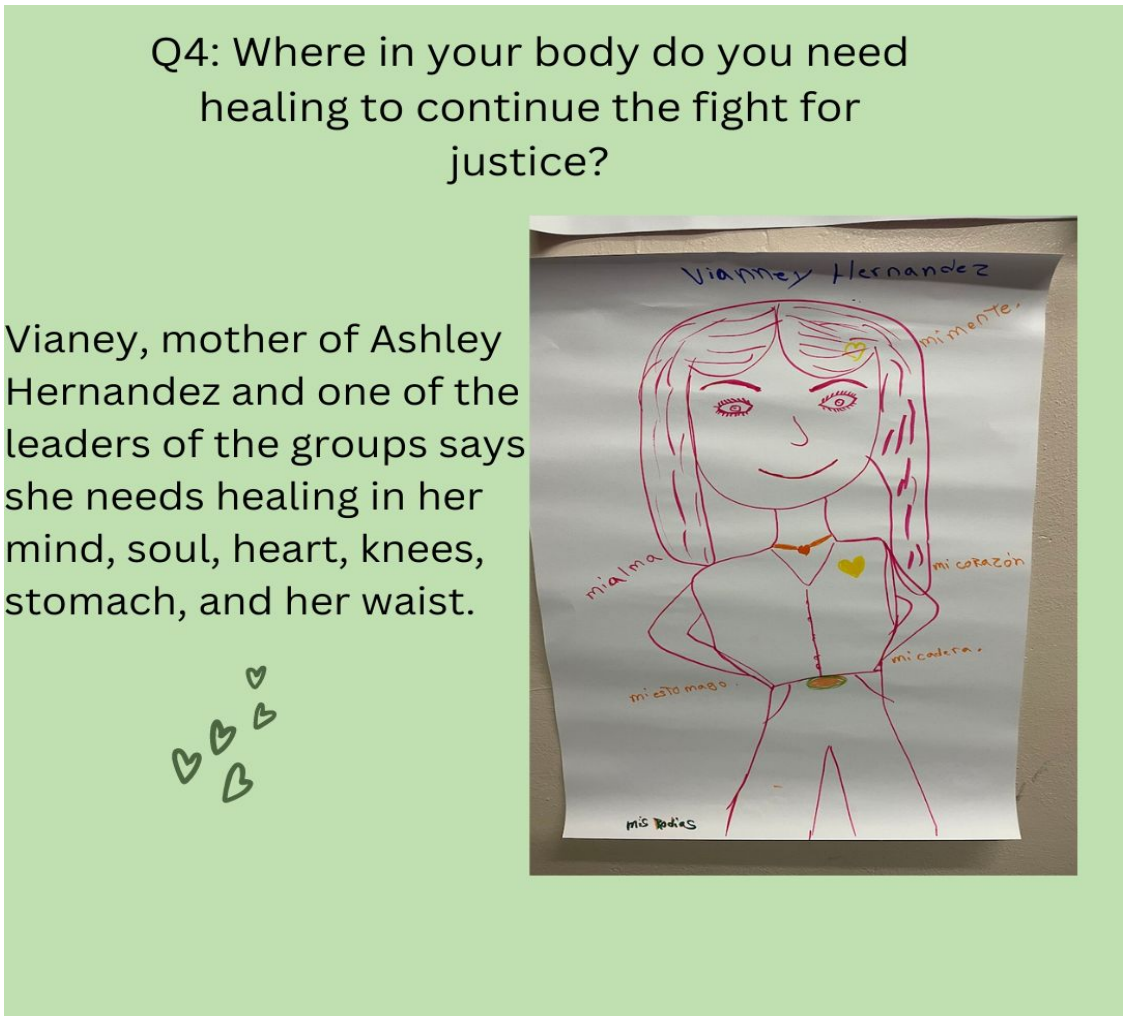
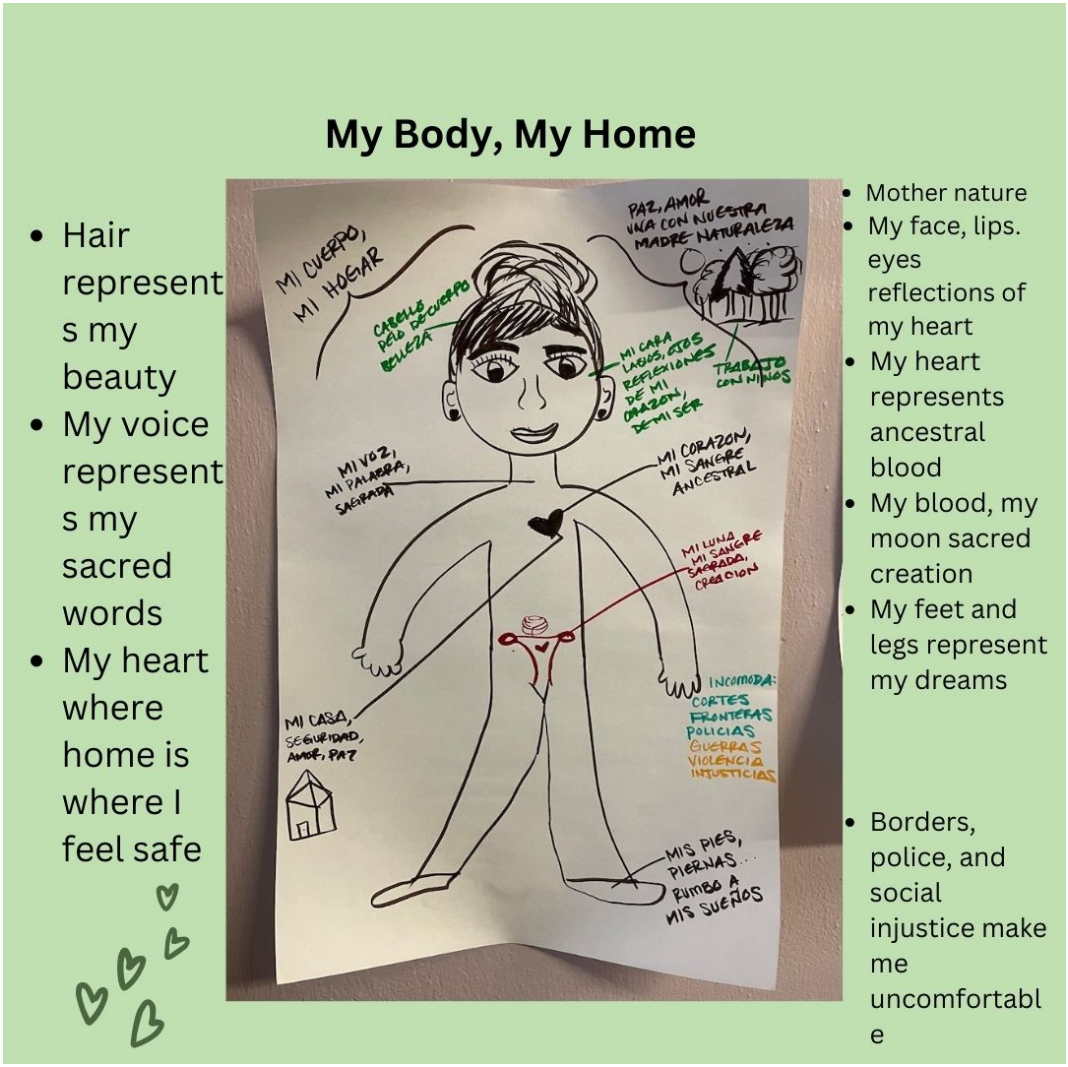


Figure 11

A Collage of Body Maps and Photos of Fieldwork on a Woman's Body



In addition to video editing, I also relied on the digital platform Canva[8] to summarize each of the body maps (see Figure 11). The body map workshops took a process of organizing because they went through different phases, including the art-making process of adding each

[8] Canva.com is an Australian global multi-national graphic design platform that is used to create social media graphics

body map to the Canva tool and translating each into English for this project. Once I had all the body maps from both groups, I collaborated with artist Marina Martinez to create a collage of body maps and photos of fieldwork on a woman's body (see Figure 12). In chapter 6, the conclusion of this dissertation, I discuss more about the collage body map, which represents what I termed as cartographies of healing. By creating a short video and a collage, the dissertation allowed me to be creative and see art as a transformative tool and process. As hooks (1995) wrote about art, "As we critically imagine new ways to think and write about visual art, we make spaces for dialogue across boundaries, we engage a process of cultural transformation that will ultimately create a revolution in vision" (p. xvi). Therefore, my dissertation project also went through a transformation, because I not only wrote the testimonios on paper but also on multiple visual tools like video and art collages to be appreciated and engaged with a diverse audience.

Figure 12

Body Maps Collage and Fieldwork Photo Chich is a Collaborative Project with Artist Marina Martinez from East Los Angeles.

Lastly, the methods I brought together allowed me to lift and center the voices, visions, and lived experiences of GuateMaya women across borders. Doing so can lift new perspectives

and stories to illuminate ways of knowing and being that might bring new understandings of cultural memory and collective healing.

Through this research, I believed I was making critical contributions to feminist geography, Latin American geography, memory studies, spirituality, critical indigenous studies, Ethnic Studies, and Feminist and Women of Color theorizing and studies. My research contributes to ongoing discussions of emotional geographies and the body as a place/landscape connected to subjective experiences of counter-cultural memory production. Feminist ethnographic research about two transnational GuateMaya feminist groups developed a nuanced understanding of the complexities of migrant Maya women in Los Angeles. The research also analyzed how Maya and Ladina women organized against gender-based violence and the emotional communities produced. In addition, the focus on emotions and the body conceptualized the different terrain and landscapes of the political and social issues.

Using the *cuerpo-territorio* framework invited me to understand the context of the lived experiences of the women on the ground who constantly support the holistic well-being of survivors and victims of gender-based violence. Furthermore, this research can generate opportunities for policy and political change and implement mental health support and social services for Maya women in Los Angeles and Guatemala.

CHAPTER III: GUATEMALA'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE PAST

Zona 1, located in Guatemala City, is a popular destination filled with art, stencils, graffiti, poetry, and images about the Guatemalan 36-years (1960-1996) war. The artwork ranges from photos of the disappeared to graffiti denouncing the corrupt government and impunity. As people walk toward the president's palace, images and protest slogans increase. At the end of my ethnographic fieldwork in Guatemala during the summer of 2022, two images identifying the war as genocide caught my attention: one had the slogan *Si Hubo Genocidio!* (There was a genocide) written in big letters across the photo of the disappeared and people who were murdered during the war years, and the second image depicted two feminine hands. One hand is putting nail polish on the hand, giving the middle finger, and the statement, on rebel bodies, "The state is not law," is printed on the image. The image provided the name of the group that stands behind the message, *H I J O S Guatemala* (see Figure 13). I have been following this group on social media because of their radical content and identification as the children of the disappeared, a symbolic representation of all the children who went missing during the war years. Both images demonstrate the relationship between the past that continues to permeate the collective geography of Guatemala. The images also allude to the counter-cultural memory youth and feminist groups create on street walls in response to Guatemala's denial of a genocide[9] committed against the Indigenous peoples.

[9] The concept of genocide is contested. I use Indigenous scholars' definitions of the term. Cooper and Driedger (2019) state that genocide occurs when outside perpetrators engage in actions with destructive intent against a group of people (p. 1). I was also informed by Greg Grandin's (2004) work in positioning Guatemala in the context of the

Figure 13

Images in Zona 1, Guatemala City with Photos of the Disappeared and Graffiti Demanding Justice Against Genocide

Geographers identify these landscapes as traumatic landscapes (Proudfoot, 2019) embedded with racial violence (Pulido, 2015) and fear (Henderson et al., 2014). Health researcher Proudfoot (2019) defined traumatic landscapes as places that harm people through physical violence and social dislocation, precarity, and hopelessness (p. 194). Geographer Pulido (2015) explored past U.S. racial violence by examining landscapes that obscure genocide,

Latin American Cold war which also perpetrated genocide in various Latin American countries, including Guatemala. I will discuss more about genocide in the section about the Guatemala's 36-year (1960-1996) war.

slavery, and conquest (p. 1). For example, Pulido revealed that Los Angeles' soil is soaked with blood as Indigenous Tongva peoples continue to be displaced from the land (p. 2). Landscapes of fear are subjective and are shaped based on the individual's memory and recollection of the distressing event(s) (Henderson et al., p. 98). As Geographer Sauer explained, "Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result" (Sauer, 1925, p. 46). Guatemala is a territory reflecting traumatic landscapes entrenched with memories of genocide, loss, and precarity. These landscapes affect women's health, socialization, and mobility, which are connected to racist legal processes and repression. Historical narratives downplay the emotional landscape of war and genocide. Geographer Pulido (2022) provocatively argued, "Historical places are sites of cultural memory and potential memory work; experiencing the connection between where something occurred and what happened there can produce a potentially transformative experience" (p. 289). Through the space women occupy in this history, we can access and discuss emotion as a determinant factor in how this [Guatemala's] history unfolds (Bemporad, 2018, p. 1).

From 2019 to 2022, I was immersed in fieldwork both in Guatemala and in Los Angeles to know and learn about the places the participants of my research live in, are in relationship with, and where their stories are connected. I was excited because I was born in Guatemala, and this opportunity made it easier for me to visit the motherland and simultaneously begin healing my intergenerational wounds. My relationship with Guatemala is connected to a past carrying an intergenerational connection, affect, and frustration against the silence (Abrego, 2017) my family keeps due to fear of facing and reliving the nightmare once again. Like many scholars of Guatemala and Latin American studies, we are drawn by questions, relationships, and curiosity to places we must confront to end pain cycles. Guatemalan scholars (Galeano, 1997; Grandin,

2004; Jonas, 1991; Lovell, 1995) understood that Guatemala is a complex country, full of contradictions, with a complicated history and culture produced by Western hegemony.

Maya scholars (Batz' 2014; Boj-Lopez, 2017; Nimatuj, 2021) were writing for an anglophone audience and from a Maya Indigenous perspective about the country's social-political conditions. For example, Maya K'iche' scholar and activist Bat'z (2022) discussed the four invasions the country has faced, and this is a story told in consultation with his Indigenous elders in the Ixil region. The first is the Spanish colonization, the second is capitalist transitions, the third is the 36-year (1960-1996) war, and the fourth consists of the extractive industry building megaprojects in Guatemala's Indigenous territories. Batz's contributions to understanding Guatemala's cycles of violence and pain problematized Western discourses of Guatemala's social and economic problems rooted in a post-World War II period, especially around the Cold War years (1947-1991) (Escobar, 1995; Robinson, 2000). Western discourses center on supporting Guatemala's and almost all Central American countries' military governments to bolster an anti-communist front.

During the Cold War, the United States as an empire positioned Guatemala on the world map as an ally in Western geopolitics in supporting defying the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. These years disrupted the Guatemalan social fabric as an internal war was produced, bringing terror to every geographical corner of Guatemalan society, especially to the highland areas with many Indigenous populations. Historian Chomsky (2021) wrote about these unequal relations of power between the U.S. and Guatemala by stating:

> In the summer of 1953, the CIA's operation PBSUCCESS was launched with little internal debate and a heartening unanimity among the few policymakers involved.

> President Eisenhower appointed the fervent anti-communist John Peurifoy as his new ambassador to Guatemala. Peurifoy and the CIA launched an anti-communist propaganda campaign and began to recruit allies in Guatemala's military. The US press and Congress eagerly joined the hysterical chorus, as did Guatemala's archbishop. The CIA began to train an exile force in Honduras and Nicaragua. (p. 51)

Feminist political geographers (Gilmartin & Kofman, 2004; Staeheli & Kofman, year, p. 11) demonstrated how colonialism rests on a feminized colonial subject that is dependent on a masculine imperial rule, bringing order and rationality to an otherwise irrational native. The constructions of "developed" and "less developed" nations rely on similar ideas that justify the imposition of order in the form of structural adjustment policies from institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (Staheli & Kofman, 2004, p. 11). My research transcended time and space as I made the argument that the current feminicide violence and the death of the 41 girls conducted with impunity, are a continuation of the ongoing state violence stemming from the 36-year (1960-1996) war and a product of the gender coloniality of power (Lugones, 2008) and settler colonialism (Speed & Stephen, 2021). Speed's (2019), argument about settler colonialism in Latin America was cautious of accepting both the basic premise of independence and settlement: that the settler has settled and is now *from here*. For example, *Mestizaje* was a racial ideology consciously put forward by *criollo* elites seeking to consolidate the national identity of newly "independent" states characterized by the presence of large and diverse populations who did not identify as "Mexican" or "Central American" and who had been dispossessed of their lands to make way for these states and their *criollo* rulers—the settlers (Speed, 2019, p. 23). The words of Monsignor Juan Gerardi, who was murdered by the state of Guatemala in 1998 for shedding light on the truth, inspired me, as stated by REMHI, (1999)

“Discovering the truth is painful, but it is, without doubt, a healthy and liberating action” (p. xxv). Confronting the pain of the past hurts, but as Gerardi noted, it is better to face it to liberate ourselves to build a healthy relationship.

This chapter examined the place of Guatemala (known by its Indigenous name Iximulew). Guatemala (see Figure 13) is a country in Central America home to an estimated 19.094 million people, including 21 different Maya communities (Census, 2020). The chapter responded to research question two: What are the connections between territory, relational bodies, and Maya spirituality and healing practices? My contribution to this dissertation was to understand the connections between embodiment and transformative memory production of GuateMaya feminist groups. In that case, I needed to situate the bodies to their territory (location) and the landscape that has formed and normalized violence towards Indigenous women’s bodies.

Figure 14

Contemporary map of Guatemala

Note: Adapted from United Nations, 2004

Why is place important? Humanistic geographers regarded the place as the phenomenological ground for geography and a fundamental component of human experience, without which human experience itself could not be constituted and interpreted. Such experiences included perceptions of place, senses of place, and human dwelling in and memories of place (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 539). In geography, a place is defined as "a geographical locale of any size or configuration, comparable to equally generic meanings of area, region or location" (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 539). Feminist geographers (Geobrujas, 2021; Silvey, 2004, 2021)

contested place as a site of holding memory, affect, and power dynamics. With the rise of feminist geographies and new cultural geography in the 1980s, place was understood less through the notion of a self-adequate, intentional human subject and more, through the lens of power-laden social relations whereby human subjects were once constituted and decentered. For Massey (1994), the place is not constituted by what is internal to it but by its distinct lines of connection to other parts of the world. Massey's global sense of place has the added virtue of a politics that looks towards the outside rather than towards a defensive localism based on embattled, threatened traditions (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 541).

That inherently geographical activity that a place stores and evokes personal and collective memories is what interested me when exploring the connection between territory and bodies together. Memories emerge as bodily experiences of being in and moving through space. Memories shape imaginative and material geographies of homes, neighborhoods, cities, nations, and empires (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 453). Geographer Herrera weaved in place and memory in his research about activists in Oakland, California. Their memories created intricate mappings of the organizations and new community spaces their work helped to construct. In other words, memory served as a central device to materialize and bring into focus the transformative and experimental aspects of the Chicano movement (Herrera, 2022, p. 13).

To delve deeper into the memory of a place, specifically in connection to the counter-narratives of the feminist groups studied in this dissertation, this chapter provides a detailed history of what is now known as Guatemala. Although the dissertation maps out Guatemala and Los Angeles as specific places with the GuateMaya feminist groups, I decided to center a chapter on just Guatemala as the primary place the women in this dissertation were from and were in a relationship with. The subsequent section details Guatemala's history, beginning with Spanish

colonization in 1524 to Guatemala's independence from Spain. The 36-year (1960-1996) Guatemalan war sections were woven in with the *testimonios* from women participants of GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-LA (GMR-LA) because most of them identified themselves as survivors of Guatemala's genocide. Their narratives, stories, experiences, and testimonies enriched the dissertation by providing a gender lens to the war and by centering the *testimonios* of women survivors and current activists.

Therefore, to deeply understand the intricate dimensions of the relationship to Guatemala in connection to the *testimonios* of the women in this dissertation, I provided the following four sections to examine Guatemala's relationship to the past. These are: (a) Guatemala's history documenting Spanish colonization to capitalist transitions, (b) Guatemala's 36-year (1960-1996) war to understand who was responsible for committing genocide against the Indigenous population and creating terror across the country, (c) Women's bodies as a weapon of war to analyze the relationship between women's bodies and genocide to the conditions the war created for femicide cases to continue today, and (d) I Post-War Guatemala to discuss the ongoing violence post the "Peace-Accords."

Guatemala's History

Spanish Colonization (1524)

Salazar, 2012 noted as follows:

> The European invasion, using physical, religious, and cultural weapons, organized not only the implementation of the physical genocide of millions of Indigenous Peoples but also the persecution and destruction of their knowledge, which had been preserved and transmitted by teachers, spiritual leaders, women healers, and midwives. It was a

> knowledge embedded in ceremonial and educational centers, temples in living museums, and written books and documents, particularly Codices by some experts. (p. 32)

The Americas went through a political, economic, and social transformation in the 16th century with its violent insertion into the world economy at the hands of Spain. The Spanish ruled most of the world, flourished during "the golden ages," and invaded and colonized what we know today as Guatemala with bloodshed to extract resources and institute a hierarchical political-economic system. In 1523, Pedro de Alvarado journeyed with his soldiers into Mexico, before landing in Guatemala. Many Indigenous soldiers from Oaxaca accompanied Alvarado. Matthews (2012) explained the intricacies of the Spanish invasion of Guatemala by complicating the landscape and by analyzing the motives of native people from Mexico as allies to the colonizers and stated:

> To defend their position, they chose not only to conform to colonialism but also, perhaps incidentally, to bolster it. Being Mexicano in Ciudad Vieja meant claiming a conquistador heritage increasingly defined by Europeans and their descendants in America, not by Mesoamericans. (p. 5)

In 1524, the conquest of Guatemala was met with resistance by the Kaqchikeles against the occupation. When the Kaqchikeles were ultimately defeated, the Spaniards transitioned from waging war to establishing economic relations and terms (Pelaez, 2009).

The Spanish invasion of Guatemala in 1524 began the first genocide suffered by Indigenous Peoples in the America. The genocide was implemented by destroying bodies, cultures, epistemologies, and spirits. It set the pace for the institutionalized terror that persists today and has been one of the hallmarks of Guatemala's history, even if transformed in ideology and practice. The conquest/colonial experience was not only an imperial economic project but

also an identity and cultural one in which *Otherness* was created through a system of classification of peoples and lands as either civilized (conquerors) or primitive (Indigenous Peoples) (Salazar, 2012, p. 31). Castro and Picq (2017) further explained that the land grab of Maya territories initiated by Spanish colonizers never ceased. It evolved, perpetuated in times of war and peace by governments across the political spectrum. Therefore, the stealing of Maya lands is not a historical episode linked to the Spanish invasion but a defining structure of Guatemala's modern state (Castro and Picq, 2017, p. 792).

Europeans invented the term "Indians" to identify people in the Americas and saw them as, "barbaric," "primitive," and soulless. As Federici (2014) recounted, "This was the time of mass baptisms when much zeal was deployed in convincing the 'Indians' to change their names and abandon their gods and sexual customs, especially polygamy and homosexuality" (p. 221). The Spanish Crown envisioned the colony as a source of wealth extraction rather than an economy to be developed. While it did not deny the local population access to land outright, Spanish Crown appropriated the best grounds for the production of export agriculture (Gauster & Isakson, 2007). Spain ultimately sought economic dominance by controlling the region and subjugating the Indigenous peoples with Christianity. Although the conversion of the Indigenous population was not a priority, it helped ideologically and militarily in extracting resources (Manz, 2004; Palaez, 2009). Sociologist Salazar (2012) examined how the Spanish Crown designed a structure to main control over the Indigenous peoples, calling it *Pueblos de Indios*. After genocidal "pacification" in the mid-1520s in what Central America is now, priests, especially the Dominicans, came up with the plan, following the Crown's authorities and other colonizers, of creating *Pueblos de Indios* as enclosed places to control Indigenous peoples' labor, taxation, and spiritual and religious practices. The rationale of the Dominicans was to convert

Indigenous peoples to Christianity and thereby to upgrade their existence into the realm of humanity and "civilization." *Pueblos de Indios* were also created as opposites to cities. The creation of cities defined as *lugar de los españoles* (places of the Spanish, i.e., the conquerors and colonizers) implied the violent destruction of the remaining Indigenous cities and towns and the forceful displacement of Indigenous peoples (Salazar, 2012, p. 37).

To centralize power, the Spanish Crown created two key colonial economic institutions: the encomienda and the repartimiento (forced and free Indigenous labor). These economic and colonial institutions worked as incentives to "amass fortunes as quickly as possible" (Palaez, 2009, p. 37) and to justify a system of slavery by spreading out Indians to work the lands. In 1543, African slaves arrived in Guatemala, and 20 years later, the crown authorized their sale and resale. Criollos, descendants of European settlers and conquistadors, frequently recommended that Black workers replace Indian in the mines. Colby (2011) explained how racialized labor was produced for corporate colonialism and stated:

> Black bodies became not only commodified themselves but also inscribed with the ability to withstand the tropical diseases and the harsh conditions such labor entailed. These racial assumptions gained force in the early nineteenth century as cotton grown on the expanding Southwestern frontier topped the U.S. exports and fed Northern textile mills. (p. 5)

This subjugation of Indigenous and African people led to the formation of a class and caste system through racialized hierarchies. In addition, economic and colonial institutions were not only used to subjugate but also to convert Indigenous peoples to Christianity by use of a contract known as *Requirimiento* The contract called on Spaniards to read aloud a document imploring Indians to surrender peacefully to the forces of the Crown or, by refusal, be defeated and

enslaved in “just war” (Grandin, 2000, p. 81; Palaez, 2009, p. 39). Ultimately, these economic processes enabled the Spanish Crown to take control of the land, colonize, and annihilate the Indigenous people.

The criollos of Spanish descent born in Guatemala were a semi-dominant class that eventually became a privileged group in Guatemala. The criollo class prospered through the economic incentive of the *encomienda,* because once the conquest was achieved, the Crown guaranteed land and settlement in the New World. Because Guatemala was comparatively poor in precious metals, privileges accorded to settlers centered principally on grants of land and rights over Indigenous people to cultivate it. Ultimately, it created a society with a core group of highly privileged and influential people who enjoyed their dominance (Gauster & Isakson, 2007; Palaez, 2009). Another Crown policy was the creation of the *ejido* that reserved land for Indigenous people to live and grow their crops. The establishment of *ejidos* was requested directly to the Crown from the reign of Philip II (1556 to 1598) by the colonial government, in the case of Guatemala, by the General Captain and authorized utilizing royal decree (Rodas, 2008, p. 4). The *ejido* lands and their extension were established with the sufficient area not only to cover the space necessary for housing (of the settlers), public services, and their construction but also for the future growth of the city, for the pasture of cattle (pastures) and the recreation of its inhabitants. Given the extent of the *ejidos* owned by the municipalities, it generated land businesses, favoring the oligarchy, which dominated the city government through the city council where the transfers of land ownership were made (Rodas, 2008, p. 5).

Under the coercive *repartimiento* labor system, the Indigenous peoples were only allowed to farm their land during their time off from working on the *haciendas*. For the remainder of the year, they were required to labor on the vast estates of the criollo class,

producing crops like cacao and indigo for export (Gauster & Isakson, 2007, p. 3). While both caste and class systems are status systems, the former is hereditary and encompasses ritualistic legitimation, while the latter is about social relationships rather than economic position.

Colonization created these status groups in Guatemala to control most of the land and wealth and to secure the empire's expansion. In addition to racial and class hierarchies, the social institution of patriarchy (including sexual relationships) was fundamental to European military conquest, colonization, and economic exploitation of Indigenous people (Mohanty, 2004; Nagar, 2011). For instance, patriarchy undermined Indigenous women's power sources by limiting them to the domestic sphere, exploiting and classifying their unpaid domestic labor as "unskilled," and denying them land rights (Spenzer-Wood, 2016, p. 478). Indigenous Xinca feminist Cabnal (2010) argued that before colonization, previous oppressive conditions existed against native women from what she identified as ancestral patriarchy. Ancestral patriarchy establishes a heteronormative reality for the life of women and men and their relationship with the cosmos (Cabal, 2010). However, colonization intensified patriarchal relationships, creating gender roles justifying a division of labor between the public and private spheres. These patriarchal relationships also normalized the hybridization between European colonizers and Indigenous women in Guatemala.

Cultural hybridization between colonizers and Indigenous people exacerbated a racialized and class system by instituting other economic incentives: haciendas and *latifundismo* in Guatemala. This hybridization is what Palaez (2009) named as the birth of the Mestizo or Ladino class in Guatemala and all the colonized territories of the Americas. Until the 17th century, all mixed people were known as Mestizos, not Ladinos. Conquerors occasionally used the term Ladino to name those Spaniards who had become impoverished. Sochtig et al. (2015) explained

that the Ladino population in Guatemala is officially recognized by the *Ministerio de Educacion* as a heterogenous population, which expresses itself in Spanish as a maternal language and possesses specific cultural traits of "Hispanic" origin mixed with Indigenous cultural elements. In 1690, the chronicler Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman described the 'Ladinos' as 'mestizos, mulatos and negros' (p. 2). Some of the participants in this study identified as Ladina. However, not from an economic perspective, they identified as Ladina being part of a cultural term that separates Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups in Guatemala. Anthropologist Carol A. Smith noted that "Ladino" remains unique in Guatemala. What distinguishes "Ladina" from "Indigenous" is based upon "a changing system of social classification, based on ideologies of race, class, language, and culture," created during the emergence of the coffee economy in the Western highlands" (Harms, 2020, p. 5).

Colonization to Capitalist Transitions

Feudal relations continued to operate, but the development of capitalism was well underway, and core countries continued to extract raw materials from countries on the periphery through commerce, businesses, and transnational relations. Latin American countries pertained to a periphery economic role and exported raw materials (cacao and indigo) to the core countries in the European market. The collapse of the natural dye market in the 19th century stimulated interest in other crops, such as coffee and bananas (Gauster& Isakson, 2007, p. 3). This marked the beginning of private corporations' interest in Central America's extractive industry for coffee, bananas, and palm oil.

In 1821, Central America gained independence from Spain. While the federal republic initially included Guatemala (with a separate state of Los Altos, contemporary Quetzaltenango, and parts of Chiapas), El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica split into individual countries

(Pelaez, 2009, p. xlix; Ybarra, 2018, p. 26). Guatemala's independence marked the end of an era economically dominated by Spain. Still, this transition opened doors to economically engage with and allow other imperialists like U.S. corporations and even British businesses to operate in the country. As Jason Colby (2011) stated, "The Caribbean coast of Central America had become a contact zone between the Hispanic and British Caribbean long before U.S. business interest appeared" (p. 21). Since the 17th century, Spain was not the only European nation economically controlling the Isthmus. Still, English merchants had dominated trade along the coast by establishing ties to local Black and Indigenous communities.

The Europeans introduced a crop other than the banana that had a vast influence in Guatemala and other Central American countries: The crop was coffee. Guatemala's varied landscapes provide various microclimatic variations and altitudes that produce distinct coffees (Fisher & Victor, 2014). The U.S., England, and Spain benefitted by creating a transnational business with Guatemala and appropriating land and cheap labor. Justo Rufino Barrios, who served as Guatemalan president from 1835-1885, initiated agrarian liberal reforms. One of these reforms was Decree 170, also known as "Indian Land" in Guatemala, to benefit the upper classes and expand Guatemala's emerging coffee sector. Coffee required far larger expanses of land and much larger concentrations of cheap labor than had been necessary for previous export crops. These new reforms disposed of Indigenous people's land to grow more coffee and exploit them (Gauster & Isakson, 2007). During this time, social and economic relations shifted to benefit coffee entrepreneurs with the 1877 decree, which allowed coffee planters to purchase the rented land for a percentage of its estimated value; this rented property was thus converted into private holdings (Grandin, 2000, p. 113).

A forced labor law known as *mandamiento* was instituted in 1877 to meet the needs of coffee planters. Under the revised law, pueblos were required to supply coffee plantation work gangs of up to 60 people for 15 to 30 days, as requested by the department's *jefe politico* (Grandin, 2000, p. 119). As Eduardo Galeano (1973) stated, "Central America was transformed by 1880. Its newborn plantations were raising almost one-sixth of the world's coffee production; coffee locked the region firmly into the world market" (p. 105). This meant that even though Guatemala was producing coffee and could compete with other countries, it was still very much dependent on the global North's economic relations to sustain its economy through export and the business of cheap labor. In 1878, Jorge Ubico became president, another dictator increasing liberalism and militarism in Guatemala. Ubico forced Guatemala's massive population of landless Mayans to work on government projects instead of paying taxes. He made all Indians carry passbooks and used *vagrancy laws* to compel them to work for the big landowners. As for Ubico's penchant for jailing opponents and stamping out dissent, Washington ignored it so long as U.S. investment in the country flourished (Gonzalez, 2000). Argentinian economist Raul Prebish's thesis on Latin American stages of economic development argued that Latin America needed to achieve financial independence but still with some protection from the core countries and states that the resulting status would ultimately lead to, "free trade with more equal conditions" (Frankenhoff, 1962). Prebish's thesis was based on the laissez-faire political-economic logic of success and development from a top-bottom approach and security from wealthy nations.

By this point, inequality was institutionalized through formalizing a rule of law that granted formal equality to all. At the same time, in practice, social relations of domination were reinforced, especially against Indigenous peoples and impoverished Mestizo women and men.

Sociologist Salazar (2012) said that independence Guatemala from the Spanish Crown did not improve the socioeconomic status of most poor Mestizos and Indigenous Peoples. It opened up a political and cultural terrain for reconfiguring the dominant classes, who reinvented themselves through economic restructuring and a new discourse of citizenship: the liberal rule of law and order, which instituted the liberal nation-building project (p. 45). The 1871 Liberal Reform, also known as the Liberal Revolution, used bureaucratic logic to appropriate land. Land demarcation was a vital tool of state modernization. In 1871, Guatemala created the first national Registry of Property. Land titles had to be registered with the state as private property. Maya peoples who sought to protect their land titles by registering them were forced to give up communal land titles to accept private property titles (Castro & Picq, 2017, p. 793). As Castro and Picq (2017) eloquently argued, "The history of Indigenous dispossession in Guatemala explains the bureaucratic mechanism of the landscapes of state violence; colonial and settler colonial states crafted evolving tools to appropriate Indigenous territories" (p. 798).

U.S. Capitalist Interventions: United Fruit Company (1901)

Another crop that gained popularity among U.S. corporations and was monopolized by the United Fruit Company (UFC) was the banana. Banana enclaves became popular in Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica early in the 20th century. The UFC had become Central America's most powerful economic force and the largest agricultural enterprise in the world that depended heavily on Black immigrant labor and Indigenous people's land (Colby, 2011; Galeano, 1973). The multimillion-dollar company enjoyed this wealth throughout the early 20th century. However, while the UFC monopolized the crop and accumulated wealth political shifts developed in Guatemala.

In October 1944, the people of Guatemala overthrew Jorge Ubico's dictatorship in an act known as the "October Revolution." 1944-1952 are known as the 'Democratic Spring' as Guatemala enacted democratic reforms. In 1945, newly elected president Jose Arevalo wrote a new constitution that was based on protecting private property but also established the principle of the social function of property, "Allowing for the expropriation of large idle landholdings as a means for the betterment of Guatemalan society" (Gauster & Isakson, 2007, p. 4). This land reform planted the seeds for reforming Guatemala's uneven land distribution. In 1952, democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz instituted land reform decree 900, which provided for the expropriation and redistribution of idle lands on holdings over 223 acres and expropriated land from approximately 1,300 private farms and redistributed to some 137, 500 families. This was also a mandate to replace the "feudalist modes and relations of production with capitalist ones" (Gauster & Isakson, 2007, p. 4). The reform was criticized for prioritizing capitalist development over socialist reform; however, the decree fundamentally shifted Guatemala's power relations (Grandin, 2000). The reform ultimately threatened the landed bourgeoisie class and UFC, which lost 70 percent of its 550, 000 acres (Gauster & Isakson, 2007, p. 4).

According to Grandin (2004), the United Fruit Company played only a peripheral role in Eisenhower's decision to act against Arbenz. According to this perspective, the United States was neither contemptuous of the third-world nationalism represented by Arbenz nor fearful of a more democratic distribution of political power nor mobilized to defend private economic interests. Instead, Cold War anti-communism and an accurate evaluation of PGT's (Guatemala's Labor Party) strength drove U.S. agents to unseat Arbenz (Grandin, 2004, p. 52). However, Castro and Picq (2017) problematized Arben's and the PGT's enthusiasm by pointing out, "The

communist government forcefully assimilated Maya peoples into its bureaucratic structures. The communist government not only grabbed land titles, to force Maya lands into the jurisdictional control of the state but also it dismantled indigenous municipalities" (793). Therefore, democratic distribution of political power was not meant for everyone, and Indigenous peoples continued to be marginalized by state policies.

Renatta, a member of GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-LA (GMR-LA) shared her testimony about her feelings toward the violent attacks against President Jacobo Arbenz and stated:

> In Guatemala, a problem began in 1954 when they forcibly removed the only good president, Arbenz. Since that day, our people have shed blood unnecessarily, and Indigenous people were evicted from their lands only to end up dead at the border. It has been horrible, so I have communicated with my family there, and nothing has changed. It has gotten worse.

The U.S. viewed Arbenz's agrarian reforms as a communist threat and intervened with military occupation in the region. Following the US-sponsored overthrow of democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, successive military governments in Guatemala fought against "the enemy within," as defined by the United States Cold War era anti-communist national security doctrine. The Guatemalan government applied the doctrine to justify eliminating any person who challenged the regime by working to bring sociopolitical change to the nation (Grandin, 2004; Sanford et al., 2018). As Speed (2019) discussed, "The years following the coup would see the emergence of guerrilla organizing, provoking further elite anxieties in which ostensible communist threat combined with fears of Maya organizing and involvement with the guerrilla forces" (p. 38). The perceived communist threat led to a 36-year war (1960-1996),

funded and supervised by U.S. forces through the School of America's training paramilitary soldiers. This resulted in the torturing, murdering, and disappearing of people. One of the war's most violent crimes against women was the rape of Indigenous women and girls. The army systematically deployed sexual violence as a counterinsurgency weapon to instill fear into villages. Still, additionally, "gender violence was used en masse against Indigenous Maya women who the Guatemalan Army saw as the progenitors of future guerrillas and future rebel Indians" (LeDuc, 2018, p. 163; Sanford et al., 2018). These atrocities were lived by the *Ixil* Maya women in Sepur Zarco, who witnessed their husbands and sons killed by death squads and had to wash and cook for the military, which raped them.

Victoria, who identified as a genocide survivor, stated the following about the war years, specifically the violence experienced by Indigenous women and translated into English:

> *Todo lo que hicieron, violar los cuerpos de las mujeres, una forma de tortura, actos terribles cometidos contra las mujeres, aparte de las violaciones durante la guerra y el robo de niños, creo que eso fue lo que causó horror. Más de 5,000 niños están desaparecidos, y ha habido algunas reuniones, pero finalmente la separación de familias, el salvajismo de abrir el vientre de las mujeres embarazadas y sacar fetos, o estrellar a los niños recién nacidos en piedras, todo esto está documentado. Las mujeres de Sepur Zarco que durante muchos años fueron esclavas obligadas a servir a los militares, no solo como esclavas sexuales sino como sirvientas para los militares.*
>
> Everything they did, violating women's bodies, a form of torture, terrible acts committed to women, apart from rapes during the war, and the theft of children, I think that was what caused horror. More than 5,000 children are missing, and there have been some reunions. Still, finally, the separation of families, the savagery of opening the womb of pregnant women and taking out fetuses, or crashing newborn children into stones is all documented. The women of Sepur Zarco, who for many years were slaves, were forced to serve the military, not only as sex slaves but as servants for the military men.

In the U.S., President Nixon celebrated the overthrow of President Arbenz in Guatemala and proclaimed the country as exemplary in the fight against communism. Economist Milton Friedman did the same thing about Chile after Pinochet and his allies overthrew Allende (Salazar, 2012, p. 104). One of the consequences of the imposition of coloniality, the violent side of modernity, for the colonized and excluded is the profound sociological and psychological wounds. Fanon (1963) was one of the earliest scholars to notice the complex and very often intangible effects of the daily racist acts of humiliation and insults on those construed as negatively different. He called these people the damnes (the cursed, the damned, the wretched). The former sections have detailed economic interests and exploitation in Guatemala. These Western geopolitical decisions created pain, intergenerational trauma, and internal colonialism among the victims and survivors starting in the first half of the 20th century. The subsequent sections provide information about the Guatemalan 36-year war (1960-1996), a war that some of the participants in my research lived through. The war also affected my family because it displaced many of us to the point that my great-grandfather Juan Macal disappeared.

Guatemala's 36-Year War (1960-1996)

Magda, GMR-LA member stated the following during the interview and translated into English:

> *La realidad de pensar en eso es que no tenías la libertad de caminar libremente por las calles sin pensar que alguien podría venir y robar tu vida y tu existencia. Entonces, lo que viene a la mente son esas famosas camionetas blancas conducidas por organizaciones militares.* Eran como la muerte persiguiéndote y nada más importaba. *Recuerdo la sensación de no ser libre, la persecución, el miedo y la soledad. Creo que algo que Guatemala y su gobierno hicieron con éxito fue hacer creer a la gente que los activistas que estaban tratando de ayudar a la gente estaban haciendo algo mal. Así que esto hizo que las familias y amigos tuvieran miedo de ayudar a estas personas porque pensaban que pondrían su vida en riesgo (Magda, miembra de GMR-LA).*

> The reality of thinking back to that is that you didn't have the liberty to walk freely in the streets without having the thought that somebody could come and rob your life and your existence. So, what comes to mind are those famous white vans driven by military organizations. They were like death chasing you and nothing else mattered. I remember the sensation of not being free, persecution, fear, and loneliness. I believe that something that Guatemala and its government did successfully was to make people believe that activists who were trying to help the people were doing something wrong. So this made families and friends scared of helping these individuals because they thought they would put their lives at risk.

Central American scholar Abrego (2017) wrote about the intergenerational trauma Indigenous and Diasporic communities have and continue to suffer due to the wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Many communities have stayed silent due to the fear of political persecution and live a life of denial and collective pain (Abrego, 2017). As Magda stated, the war, the military, and violence created an environment that felt like death was always in pursuit, and up until this day, many Central American families and individuals remain silent due to the fear of persecution and death. The Guatemalan war years (1960-1996) were interwoven with the global political era of the Cold War years (1947-1991). It was an era of many economic transitions, from state markets to global economic markets and the rise of neoliberalism (Robinson, 2000). The Cold War in Latin America represented a protracted revolution, dispersed through time and space, yet entailing a coherent and legible logic of insurgency, violence, and transformation (Grandin, 2004, p. 174).

Grandin (2004) described a decisive step in radicalizing the continent with the 1966 policy operation cleanup. According to Grandin (2004), this policy bolstered an intelligence

system that, during Guatemala's civil war, metastasized throughout the body politic, able and resolved to conduct perhaps the cruelest campaign of state repression during 20th in Latin America. Governments murdered 200,000 people in Guatemala, 30,000 in Argentina, 50,000 in El Salvador, and at least 3,000 in Chile. During the Guatemala War (1960-1996), the United States, a significant economic power, encouraged Latin American governments to establish and fortify central intelligence agencies through financing and training. Its agents encouraged local officials to forgo self-interested, criminal behavior and adopt more professional attitudes (Grandin, 2004, p. 74). The structure of genocide in Guatemala operated with the full support of Western powers, especially the United States. While the United States had been more blatant in its support of militarized democracies, other authorities like Canada and institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund also supported genocide and other crimes against humanity by proxy (Salazar, 2012, p. 122).

From the 1970s to the mid-1990s, genocide was perpetrated against the Maya people in Guatemala. They were represented as "culturally unfit for a modern country's advancement to modernity" and as "politically undesirable" because of their long-standing anti-colonial/decolonial, anti-capitalist resistance and being Maya. According to Salazar (2012), systemic and day-to-day racism was reactivated in extremely violent forms and played a central role, though not directly expressed, in the conceptualization of Mayas as potentially violent and as wanting to destroy the "Christian and democratic" Guatemalan nation (Salazar, 2012, p. 101). These examples demonstrate that the genocidal campaigns sought to destroy Maya's sociopolitical agency through several military and political movements, divided into plans such as Operation Ixil 1981, Victoria 82; Firmness 83, and Security, Development, and Stability. The plans were implemented in three national programs: (a) pacification (1981-1982), (b) security

and development (1993-1992), and (c) stability, development, and democracy (1993-1996). Each national program was carried out through several military and intelligence operations, which combined intense psychological warfare with the annihilation of human and animal lives and the para-militarization of most Maya men, who were forced to participate in the killings of other Mayas (Salazar, 2012, p. 112). Some of the plans were carried out by dictator Efrain Rios Montt, one of the individuals responsible for committing crimes against humanity during the Guatemalan war years (1960-1966).

Efrain Rios Montt (1950-1977)

General Rios Montt, who overthrew President Lucas Garcia through a coup d'état in March 1982, established civil self-defense patrols (PACs) as a national counterinsurgent tool, refined and expanded the development poles and created special military tribunals. Development poles were settlements often called "Model Villages," which were part of the counterinsurgency program. In this scheme, villagers were displaced by the violence and forced to live in these concentrated areas. Montt identified the Maya and their communities as potential collaborators and members of guerrilla groups stating, "Naturally if a subversive operation exists in which the Indians are involved with the guerrillas, the Indians are also going to die." However, the army's philosophy was not to kill the Indians but to win them back, to help them. Rios Montt brought another element to ongoing genocide: blaming the Mayas for being against God, especially the communities that had been organizing resistance projects (Salazar, 2004, p. 113).

Educator, author, and activist Lucrecia Molina Theissen notes that:

> Rios Montt, who named himself God's anointed, launched an apocalyptic war between good and evil, under which rebellion was a sin and misery was the product of the absence of values…And in this black-and-white world, a world of sin and submission, of deep

> authoritarianism, blind, irrational, and non-critical obedience was the correct behavior. (Salazar, 2004, p. 113)

In addition to the PACs, Rios Montt established *Plan Sofia*, an operational military log documenting genocide against Mayas in some areas of El K'iche', especially the Ixil region, during a military offensive launched on July 16, 1982. The *Plan Sofia* (a project the army was forced to disclose in 2009) was part of the campaign Victoria 82, and it documented, using carefully coded language: The destruction of the Maya was indeed the true objective of the national security apparatus (Salazar, 2004, p. 117; Grandin, 2004). These racist operations directed intentionally against the Maya community affirm what anthropologist Nimatuj (2021) discussed:

> Racism as oppression has been constantly documented and denounced by Indigenous women and men, individually and collectively. However, the laws in Guatemala have not typified this oppression as a crime, partly because the same justice system has been utilized to legitimize or deny racism. (p. 115)

Guatemala's four-decade-long war, one of the bloodiest in the20th century American history, is composed of many stories, as majority are individuals, families, and communities that lived through it, and each story has a different turning point and climax (Grandin, 2004, p. 3). Judge Yasmin Barrios and her tribunal made history on May 10, 2013, when they found former Guatemalan dictator Jose Efrain Rios Montt guilty of crimes against humanity and genocide—the first time that a head of state has been convicted of these crimes in a national court. The 80-year prison sentence was the just conclusion of a court process nearly derailed by threats to witness, presidential declarations denouncing the trial, and over 100 appeals by the defense team. Perseverance, courage, and a commitment to the rule of law on the part of the survivors,

prosecutors, and tribunal judges repeatedly pushed the case back on track. Although 10 days later a corrupt constitutional court annulled the verdict on technical grounds, Rios Montt's genocide conviction is an unforgettable moment in the historic struggle for justice in Guatemala. It was also the first time a Guatemalan court recognized the systematic rape and torture that Maya women were subjected to during Rios Montt's reign of terror (Sanford et al., 2018, p. 207). During the Rios Montt regime, the systematized rape of Maya women was a weapon of genocide used to accomplish multiple ends, all supporting the singular, operational goal—breaking apart Maya communities.

Genocide

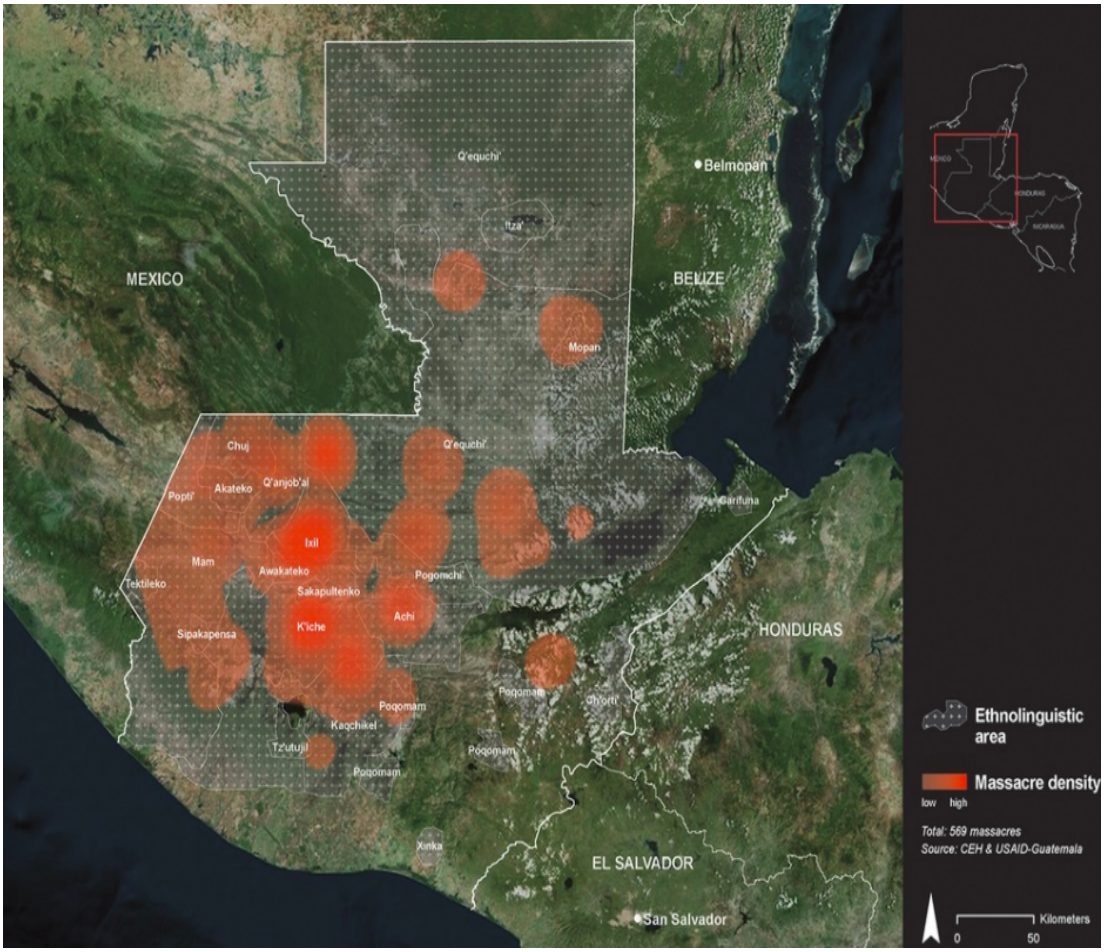
Under the current convention, genocide means the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, national, ethnic, radical, or religious groups by: (a) killing members of the group; b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting conditions to bring about physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (Salazar, 2012, p. 108; UN Convention 1948). Genocide does not only result in massive numbers of deaths, it is also a social reorganizing process that involves "re-educating" survivors and people in targeted communities who for centuries had been considered as not capable of assimilation. Guatemala is not an isolated case, as there are numerous countries and cultures affected by genocide and the annihilation of marginalized groups of people. The Holocaust (1933-1945) highlights the blatant and brutal actions human beings can inflict on others due to constructions of race and religion. In another example, the American-Indian genocide occurred when Europeans began colonizing what is now the United States, and many native groups

believe that it is not over due to settler colonialism's covert tactics to erase culture, language, traditions, and assimilation (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

The Guatemalan case clearly shows that genocide is a process that does not necessarily start with mass killings but rather with the teaching of a mentality that denies humanity to groups whose humanity has already been questioned for centuries, if not overtly denied (Grandin, 2004, p. 108). To carry out genocide, it was necessary to organize it—to plan it as a process. This process began with the kidnappings, torture, and killing of key leaders of community organizations and social movements. Guatemala became a geographical space divided into so-called "conflict zones" (see Figure 15) in which the level of "dangerous communities" was represented through color coding. Areas marked "red" were the most dangerous; these just happened to be areas that the most impoverished Mayas populated, and they were the most brutally attacked (Salazar, 2012, p. 111). For the United States, the Guatemalan army was truthful regarding their assertions that the Mayas were subversive communists. This was a truth that the powers within the United States accepted because it served imperial and geopolitical purposes, as well as the protection of corporate capital.

Figure 15

The map Shows the Conflict Zones and the Areas Marked in red Were the Most Dangerous



Note Adapted from Central American Atories http://www.centralamericanstories.com/characters/sebastian/

In her testimony, Victoria, who participated with GMR-LA, shared the following about the war years and translated into English:

> *Me considero un sobreviviente del genocidio. Sobreviví físicamente, pero sigo sufriendo esos abusos. Afortunadamente, con otros compañeros, escapamos, o no estaría aquí compartiendo mi testimonio. Yo estaba en la lista de los desaparecidos, pero por las cosas que sucedieron, podíamos retirarnos antes de que llegara el ejército. La pérdida de familiares me toca muy de cerca. En 15 casos, 13 siguen desaparecidos. Mi primo mayor era un líder sindical, y cuando fue arrestado, no estaba organizando. Mi otro primo estaba en la guerrilla. Pero hay niños desaparecidos dentro de mi familia,*

> *pudimos ver los cadáveres y la población masacrada y recoger testimonios después de masacres. Todavía estoy emocionalmente marcada.*
>
> I consider myself a genocide survivor. I physically survived but continue to suffer those abuses. Fortunately, with other comrades, we escaped, or I would not be here sharing my testimony. I was on the list of those to be disappeared, but for things that happened, we could withdraw before the army arrived. The loss of relatives very closely touches me. In 15 cases, 13 are still missing. My older cousin was a Union leader, and when he was arrested, he was not organizing; my other cousin was in the guerrilla. But there are missing children within my family, we could see the dead bodies and the massacred population and collect testimonies after massacres. I am still emotionally scarred.

Gender-based violence during the war enabled the perpetration of racialized feminicide, the torture, rape, and killing of Maya women to target Maya womanhood and motherhood as reproducers of "communist guerrillas" (Salazar, 2004, p. 101). The final section of this chapter discusses how women's bodies were used as a weapon of war and continued to be abused and subjugated by a misogynist culture after the conflict had ceased. As Bemporad (2018, p. 2) stated, "Mass rape often becomes the first stage for the destruction of the enemy group. Women's bodies are turned into the space where the genocidal project of eradicating the 'social pollution' produced by the alleged enemy group is implemented."

Women's Bodies as a Weapon of War

Malkex, a participant in GMR-LA shared the following and translated into English

> *El ejército era más agresivo. Un día eran las 10 de la mañana todos decían que estaban matando gente. Teníamos miedo, si pasaba algo, mi mamá nos decía que no gritáramos si sabíamos algo. Empezamos a marchar y el ejército nos dio un arma. Yo era muy joven alrededor de los diez años. Identificaríamos al ejército como el ejército de los ricos, del gobierno. Luego nos llevaban a un lugar de pie. Empezaron a dispararnos, a entrenar a*

los soldados, había niños menores de edad, y observé cómo el ejército ponía sus manos sobre las niñas. Los maestros no podían hacer nada.
Esta información permanece en la historia, la guardamos en nuestra memoria, y nos sentimos tristes y apenados de decir lo que nos sucedió. Los militares nos manipularon psicológicamente diciéndonos que no habláramos. Recuerdo un momento en que un soldado puso una pistola entre mis piernas de una manera muy sexual. El miedo te domina, y tu instinto de supervivencia es hacer lo que dicen para que no te maten. Entras en un conflicto que te confunde. Nos entrenaron para estar frente al enemigo y nos dijeron que los guerrilleros eran nuestros enemigos

The army was more aggressive. One day it was 10 a.m, everyone was saying they were killing people. We were scared, if something happened, my mom would tell us not to shout if we knew anything. We started marching, and the army gave us a gun. I was very young, around 10 years old. We would identify the army as the army of the rich, of the government. Then they would take us to a standing place. They started shooting at us, training the soldiers. There were minor children, and I watched as the army got their hands on the girls; the teachers could not do anything.

This information remains in history; we keep it in our memories, and we feel sad and sorry to say what happened to us. The military psychologically manipulated us telling us, not to speak. I remember a time when a soldier put a pistol between my legs in a very sexual way. Fear dominates you, and your survival instinct is to do what they say so they don't kill you. You enter a conflict that confuses you. They trained us to be in the face of the enemy and told us that the guerrillas were our enemies.

The embodied violence suffered by Indigenous women in the Americas is a product of colonization. Speed and Stephen (2021) explained that, “The gendered violence of colonization was constitutive of the modern settler state, and the state is structured on that violence, at once generating it and normalizing it” (p. 11). The colonial state gender violence has affected women

of color throughout the hemisphere; however, this study focused on the colonial state gender violence produced in Central America, specifically in the Guatemalan context.

One of the most violent crimes against Indigenous women during colonization and the 36-year war (1960-1996) in Guatemala was rape. Indeed, Native scholar Deer (2015) stated, "The damage to self and spirit that rapists cause has some of the same features that colonial governments perpetrated against entire nations" (p. xvii). Using this premise, decolonial Xinca feminist Cabnal (2010) analyzed how colonial violence against Indigenous land was connected to the violence against Indigenous women's bodies and spirits. During the war in Guatemala, the army systematically deployed sexual violence as a counterinsurgency weapon to instill fear among villages. Additionally, "gender violence was used en masse against Indigenous Maya women who were seen by the Guatemalan army as the progenitors of future guerrillas and future rebel Indians" (Deluc, 2018, p. 163; Sanford et al., 2018).

Nimatuj (2021), a Maya K'iche's anthropologist and educator, actively supported Indigenous women survivors of the Sepur Zarco case. In her investigation, she identified continuous acts of sexual violence against women in their communities in 1982-1986. Nimatuj (2021) stated:

> However, justice for the survivors, for their children, and for the memory of those who died, has yet to be achieved within a state that is criminal, racist, and patriarchal, and that refuses to heal the historical wound that has not stopped bleeding. (p. 119

In addition, Velasquez-Nimatuj analyzes the racialized violence the war produced while protecting White women, Ladinas, and daughters of the elite because they did not have to face those atrocious crimes (p. 118). Therefore, these forms of violence were gendered and racialized under a settler colonial matrix of power (Stephen & Speed, 2021).

In a 2009 report, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women reported that studies of wartime rape "conclusively demonstrate that sexual violence is not an outcome of the war, but that women's bodies are an important site of war, which makes sexual violence an integral part of wartime strategy" (Bemporad & Warren, 2018; Sanford et al., 2018). A report by *Consorcio Actoras de Cambio: La Lucha de las Mujeres por la Justicia* (2006), explained that sexual violence was directed mainly against Indigenous women during the war years (1960-1996). Thus, 88.7% of the victims of sexual violation identified by the CEH (Historical Clarification Commission) were Mayan, 10.3% were mestizo, and 1% belonged to other groups. The most affected ethnic groups were the K'iche', Q'anjoba'l, Mam, Q'eqchi', Ixils, Chuj, and K'aqchikeles (p.16). Women were raped, abused, tortured, left naked with sexual mutilation and hemorrhage; others were executed and disappeared. The girls and boys were transferred to other towns, lost in the mountains, or given up for adoption illegally. At other times, they exterminated babies outside and inside the mother's womb (p. 17).

In May 2008, Guatemala passed a law against femicide entitled, *Law against Femicide and other forms of Violence against Women*. This special law is specific to and affirmative of women's rights. Under the state's obligation, this law provides legal support to non-governmental institutions involved in preventing healing and eradicating violence against women. The state must also provide victims of violence with quality care through state-identified women's organizations (*Ley Contra el Femicidio y Otras Formas*, 2008). Stephen (2019) argued that the 2008 femicide law provided an avenue to justice for gender violence; however, these courts are handling a minuscule part of the violence cases (p. 230). The legal system in Guatemala does not prioritize Indigenous communities and still holds racist and classist views, undermining this population. Overlapping structures of violence include heteropatriarchal

kinship in which the father maintains power over familial matters, military security regimes imposed after the civil war, and civil patrols' retaliation against families and communities, preventing women from reporting abuse (Stephen, 2019, p. 232). The law promised structural changes to protect women from gender-based abuses, but in reality, it has been the interpersonal efforts of small-scale groups that have succeeded in providing care and emotional support to victims and survivors of femicide.

In Guatemala, girls' and women's bodies face multiple levels of violence, from rape, domestic violence, and poverty to—on the extreme—feminicide. Alarming statistics demonstrated that a woman was killed every 12 hours in Guatemala. Indeed, 7,272 femicides were recorded from November 2008 to November 2017 (Stephen, 2019, p. 234). Latin American feminists define feminicide as the murder of women and girls based on a gender power structure (Chazaro et al., 2010). Feminicide is gender-based violence that is both public and private, implicating both the state (directly or indirectly) and individual perpetrators (private or state actors); it thus encompasses systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence (De Los Rios, 2010, p. 5).

Therefore, gender-based violence in Guatemala is a primary factor that forces women to flee and migrate to North (Stephen 2019). Stephen (2021) coined the concept of gendered embodied structures of violence to denote historical and structural violence with embodied experience to understand gender-based violence. Interrelated forms of violence in places like Guatemala constitute domestic violence, militarized, para-militarized, kinship, and masculinized governance and justice onto feminized bodies (Stephen, 2021, p. 131). For instance, in their migration to Mexico or the U.S., women experience a higher vulnerability to sexual violence than men and disproportionately die at the Mexico/U.S. border. For example, women were 2.67

times more likely to die of exposure in the desert than men (Speed, 2019, p. 13). Settlement in metropolitan cities like Los Angeles comes with its challenges as well.

The ongoing colonial state violence against Indigenous and non-White women in Guatemala continues, and the case of the 56 girls is symptomatic of the neglect and absence of the state (Reyes-Foster, 2019). Argentine feminist philosopher Lugones (2010) explained that the ongoing violence against women in Latin America stems from a coloniality of gender. Using Quijano's (2007) analysis of the coloniality of power, Lugones (2010) built on the concept by asserting the connections between race/class/gender in the coloniality of power. In using the term coloniality, Lugones encouraged to name not just as a classification of people in terms of the coloniality of power and gender but also the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the process of subjectification, and the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings (Lugones, 2010, p. 743).

Feminist geographer Zaragocin (2018) further explained that Latin American decolonial feminism built on postcolonial feminism to emphasize the coloniality of gender defined by the fact that gender relations, like race, were created in and by the colonial encounter and are still present at the very intersections of gender/class/race in contemporary Latin American societies characterized by postcolonial intersectional hierarchies (Zaragocin, 2018, p. 203). Racialized sexuality and gender are not sided subjects but part of a larger history that conditions contemporary forms of coloniality (Zaragocin, 2018, p. 204). However, the coloniality of gender needs to be emphasized with an analysis of settler colonialism, which is instrumental in better understanding relations based on power and processes of eliminating gendered geographies (Wolfe, 1994; Zaragocin, 2019). In addition, affirming the decolonization of spirit requires exploration of the contemporary colonial conditions of everyday life that are naturalized under

settler colonialism (Zaragocin, 2018). Although the explorations of the contemporary colonial conditions can be a burden on the body and spirit, the GuateMaya feminist groups in this dissertation were producing a transformative memory with the ancestral practices of cosmovision, altars, art, and performance to heal from the war's intergenerational trauma and contemporary gender-based violence.

Post-War Guatemala

Guatemala's 36-year (1960-1996) war was funded with aid from the United States and implemented through a 'scorched earth" policy. The army's brutality was unprecedented. Supported by the U.S., covertly from 1977, but more openly from 1982 on, the governments of General Romeo Lucas Garcia (1978-1982) and General Efrain Rios Montt (1982-83) unleashed a vicious war that aimed literally to depopulate Mayan areas where the guerrillas were operating (Costello 1997; Manz, 2008; Salazar, 2012). Understanding the aftermath requires exploring the dialectical relation between the planned outcomes and the unintended consequences of war. To be clear, many of the effects of violence, terror, community disintegration, murders of elders, and alienation were products of counterinsurgency doctrine (McAllister & Nelson, 2013, p. 19). According to Nelson (2013), the Guatemalan government's National Reparations Program (PNR), founded in 2004, was supposed to compensate for war losses. Activists first imagined it as holistic, including material restitution, psychosocial rehabilitation and therapy, memorials, communal health projects, scholarships, and government support for exhumations of clandestine cemeteries and the punishment of perpetrators. However, a payment of Q24, 000 (about $3,200) per lost family member per household was being offered. However, it was limited to compensating only two people per household regardless of how many were killed (Nelson, 2013, p. 295).

The genocidal war killed at least 200,000 people, most of whom were Mayan-Quiche (Gomez-Barris, 2010, p. 411). A visual archive exists in multiple forms, including the forensic evidence of common graves and documentary films, but also in artistic interventions and actions, which are politically motivated to interrupt the normalizing tendencies of forgetting. Most of the atrocities committed in Guatemala were far from the public eye in remote highland communities and only emphasized the absence of evidence and the tendency for atrocities to disappear all too quickly from historical memory (Gomez-Barris, 2010, p. 411). The following section is about post-war Guatemala and agreements and clarification documents that were published to document the war atrocities from the *testimonios* of hundreds of individuals. To understand the war against women's bodies and the tragedy of the 56 girls' connections to the 36-year-war, the two must be linked to argue that the past is not being forgotten, but instead, the past continues to repeat because of the continuous denial of the colonial violence against subaltern groups.

1996 "Peace Accords"

In Guatemala, a comprehensive peace agreement was signed in December 1996, which formally ended the 36-year (1960-1996) war (Armon et al., 1997). The agreement was supported by the United Nations and was signed by the Peace Commission of the Government of Guatemala (COPAZ) and the General Command of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) on December 29, 1996. On the United Nations website[10], there is a summary of the agreement stating:

[10] https://peacemaker.un.org/guatemala-firmlastingpeace96

> This agreement reflects the national consensus to put an effective end to the armed conflict in Guatemala. The agreement also brings into effect all the previous agreements encompassing military, political, social, economic, and environmental issues and binds them into a comprehensive nationwide agenda for peace.

The word "binds" in this summary stood out to me because it suggested all the social issues were collected and put away in a cabinet file to be forgotten and dismissed, adhering to a social silence about the war years and tucked away to avoid speaking about the horror and terror experienced by many Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. However, through their peace process, Guatemalans have gained important rights and freedoms denied them for centuries. Above all, the relatively participatory nature of the process and the liberal spirit of the accords themselves have brought up a whole range of previously repressed aspirations for negotiation (Armon, 199, p. 8).

Guatemalan scholar Beatriz Manz (2008) stated, "Signing a peace accord and ending the armed conflict have proven far different from achieving stability and a semblance of peace" (p. 152). The fabric of society, even of small communities, was shredded during the ferocious internal armed conflict. The legacy of state terror was everywhere. The militarization of daily life, especially in rural communities, deformed previous human relations (Manz, 2008). Moreover, impunity and the freedom of the press have been curtailed in recent years, promoting a repressive government administered by the Guatemalan elite class.

After the Guatemalan Peace Accords were signed in 1996, two publications were released documenting the most comprehensive history of the war to date. The purpose of the publications was to build national unity and reconciliation in Guatemalan society. The Guatemalan state and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity agreed to form the Commission for the Clarification of History (CEH) to relate the history of the previous 36 years

of “internal armed conflict.” Due to a lack of finance, the CEH began its work seven months behind schedule in August 1997 (Hatcher, 2009). During this extended delay, three commissioners were chosen to head the organization. Two of them, labor lawyer Balsells Tojo and Indigenous educational expert Otilia Lux de Coti were Guatemalans, but neither of them had a particularly high human rights profile. The third commissioner and overall director was Professor Christian Tomuschat, a German who had been a UN independent human rights expert in Guatemala in the late 1980s (Armon et al., 1997). The CEH documented the following regarding the war years:

> Impunity permeated the country to such an extent that it took control of the very structure of the state and became both a means and an end. As a means, it sheltered and protected the repressive acts of the state and those committed by individuals who shared similar objectives; whilst as an end, it was a consequence of the methods used to repress and eliminate political and social opponents.
>
> The CEH’s investigation has revealed that approximately a quarter of the direct victims of human rights violations and acts of violence were women. They were killed, tortured, and raped, sometimes because of their ideals and political or social participation, sometimes in massacres or other indiscriminate actions. (The Commission for Historical Clarification, 1999, p. 19 and 23)

The Catholic Church, seeking to complement the work of the official commission, published the Recuperation of Historical Memory Project (REMHI) to investigate the events of the conflict. The REMHI program has been financially backed by international aid agencies and has amassed a wealth of information through the Catholic Church’s extensive rural networks (Armon et al., 1997). *Memoria del Silencio* and *Nunca Mas*, the products of the two

commissions' months of work, were published in 1998 and 1999 (Hatcher, 2009, p. 131). Both publications collected more than 6,500 testimonios of Guatemalan survivors of the 36-year war. One of the main goals of the project was to be committed to the people who provided their testimony and demands (REMHI, 1999, pg. xxx). Many people who shared their testimony said that finding the truth did not end with a report. The goal of the REMHI project consisted of sharing testimonies to communities in the following three aspects: (a) Testimonies about the war to be remembered in a collaborative form and expressed in ceremonies and monuments, (2), the testimonies can help to clarify what happened during the war years, extracting lessons and conclusions for the present, and (3) the testimonies should not recreate horror or stigmatize the population; they should support the victim's dignity and collective identity. Hatcher (2009, p. 134) argued, "The CEH and REMHI attempt to shape how people remember the war, and especially how future Guatemalans will remember it, to help rebuild the nation and pave the way to a democratic and peaceful future." The following is a testimonio from the RHEMI report emphasizing grieving and loss during the war years:

> We saw how they killed people, young people, young women. So many people were left grieving–wives for their husbands; people who were poor and couldn't provide for their children. We grieved for all those things. Case 2230 (massacre), Jolomhuitz, Huehuetenango, 1981

These commissions were linked to the United Nations and the Catholic Church, whose goal was to create a common memory from which a new national identity and unity can be forged. Although their attempt to collect the testimonies and assemble material about the war was victorious, Hatcher (2002, p. 139) critiqued how the commissions glossed over the complexity of memory and attempted to fit diverse memories into an overarching framework of

reconciliation and national unity. However, after more than two decades since these documents were published, a high level of collective distress and mourning in contemporary GuateMaya communities continues as people have continued to experience physical, biological, and cultural genocide. Genocide occurs when outside or [inside] perpetrators engage in actions with destructive intent against a group of people (Michaels, 2010). Through the *testimonios* of Ixil women survivors of genocide and rape, in 2013, the Guatemalan highest Supreme Court identified the Guatemalan war as a conflict that committed genocide against Indigenous peoples (Burt & Estrada, 2017).

On April 26, 1998, two days after presenting the Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI), the Guatemalan Catholic Church's report recounted the atrocities committed by the Guatemalan Army during its 36-year armed conflict. Bishop Juan Gerardi was savagely murdered. The 78-year-old bishop, who led the unprecedented effort of collecting war testimonies, was bludgeoned in the head and face with a concrete slab outside his parish home in Guatemala City, Zona 1. A grief-stricken nation mourned his loss as a direct affront to an incipient democracy still unfamiliar with justice after a blanket amnesty left all those involved in civil war-era crimes unpunished (Masek, 2020). Bishop Gerardi's assassination confirmed that the war was not over in Guatemala as the seeds of the armed conflict continued to devastate Guatemala's social fabric through militarization, feminicide, and class and racial divisions.

Concluding Thoughts

History is important; if you don't know history it is as if you were born yesterday. And if you were born yesterday, anybody in a position of power can tell you anything. -Howard Zinn

As I wrote this dissertation, I knew this would be the hardest chapter to write. Learning about my roots and history has not been easy because it is combined with the contradictions of a country used as a political experiment by Western powers. At the same time, Guatemala is a

place that should be honored for its roots in mathematics, architecture, science, and cosmovisions[11]. The juxtaposition of Guatemala makes it a place for interesting stories, and what I was trying to work on in this dissertation is that for the past 530 years, it has been centered on the story of the oppressors and lacks details about the people that make Guatemala what it is. I have faced writing blockages when writing these pages because I have cried several times learning about systematic genocide and how, up to now, the present people continue to disappear and children stolen and raised by the military. Central American migrants continue to be criminalized by a nation that funded the genocide. However, the *testimonios* and spiritual energy of the women in my dissertation enriched me with joy, perseverance, and hope to use our imagination and creativity to build a transformative memory and justice for everyone.

From an embodied experience, I deeply agreed with Nimatuj (2021) as she wrote:

> How do I confront the emotions, the sense of conscience, and the courage that overlap when I document crimes against humanity, crimes perpetrated against people with whom I share a racial identity? With each woman I interviewed, I ended up emotionally beaten; each trip I made dragged me into internal silence and permanent irritation, provoking anger and even hatred for the state and its elites. (p. 121).

Her words and experience resonated and reflected some of my experiences while doing this research. But what is powerful is to document our stories and celebrate the courage, strength, and *cariño* Indigenous women continue to demonstrate amidst state injustices. During this time, *Ixil* women celebrated victory in testifying against the state of Guatemala about the sexual abuses they faced during the war years. In addition, the mothers of the 56 girls continue to demand a fair

[11] Cosmovision is the Maya people's form of spirituality. It is a process that allows us to experience life and be part of the whole. The connection to the world and cosmos are the basis of the action, thoughts, and sentiments in life and of life (Mayan League, 2023).

legal hearing even as three hearings have been canceled, postponing all efforts to hold the state accountable for the murder of 41 girls at the state shelter *Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion* on March 7, 2017. These examples demonstrate the tenacity of women survivors and their perseverance to gain justice and reparations in post-conflict Guatemala.

CHAPTER IV: 8 TIJAX: EMBODIED TRANSFORMATIVE MEMORY

Vianey Hernandez's, oral testimony at body mapping workshop, in Guatemala, in 2022 stated as follows and translated into English:

Como madres sabemos que duele, pero tenemos que aguantarnos
Y estar siempre en la mira de nuestra lucha y justicia
Y eso es lo mas importante para todas
Sabemos que nuestras hijas ya no estan, pero son nuestros angeles
y estan a lado de nosotras
Un dia vamos a estar bien, por que vamos a encontrar la justicia que merecemos
Gracias por todo, espero esta reunion se de beneficio para nosotras
Nuestras almas estan muy cargadas, por todo lo que esta pasando
Hay muchos problemas en nuestros hogares, pero hay que seguir adelante.

As mothers, we know it hurts, but we must put up with it.

And always be in between our struggle and justice.

And that's the most important thing for everyone.

We know our daughters are gone, but they are our angels and are with us.

One day we'll be better off because we will find the justice we deserve.

Thank you for everything; I hope this meeting will benefit us.

Our souls are very burdened by everything that is happening.

There are many problems in our homes, but we must move forward.

Vianey Hernandez, one of the mothers of the 56 girls and the spokesperson of 8 Tijax shared her oral testimony during the body mapping workshop on August 28, 2022, in Guatemala City. Her message was directed to the other 19 mothers who participated in the workshop and were seeing each other after a year. Every year on March 8 the mothers get together to honor their daughters by materializing their daughter's memory with photos, spiritual altars, and protests. During the body mapping workshop, we sat down in a circle. Vianey initiated the gathering with a hopeful message and also reminded us how the mother's souls are burdened, *nuestras almas estan cargadas,* she affirmed, sounding emotionally and physically exhausted. For example, Carga means the weight of something or the load on a truck. Colloquially, *carga* also means the burden of social issues on one's body, carrying unwanted weight from personal or systemic problems.

The Vianey's explanation of the mother's souls being burdened is felt through the constant suffering the state has inflicted on the mother's bodies. Despite the burden, Vianey urged the group to look for justice because that is essential for everyone. Vianey's opening testimony was exemplary to what I called *embodied transformative memory*—the recollection of memory from the mothers who are grieving the loss of their daughters and the pain and anger stored in their bodies. Embodied transformative memory also provided nuance to the memory process as flexible, fluid, and expansive to initiate a process to honor and memorialize loved ones taken away by the state. This chapter provided evidence of how the mothers and families of the 56 girls built embodied transformative memory through the method of body mapping. The embodied and visual memory honors the story of the 56 girls who were unfairly taken by the state of Guatemala.

Latin American sociologist Sutton (2017) wrote about Argentinian women's bodies during the economic collapse of 2001 and the common expression in some activist circles: *poner el cuerpo*. This phrase means "to put the body," which does not quite translate from Argentine Spanish to English. *Poner el cuerpo* overlaps somewhat with "to put the body on the line" and to "give the body," but transcends both notions. With respect to political agency, *poner el cuerpo* means not just to talk, think, or desire but to be present and involved; to put the whole (embodied) being into action, to be committed to a social cause, and to assume the bodily risks, work, and demands of such a commitment (Sutton, 2017, p. 135). Similarly, for the mothers of the 56 girls *cargas* and *poner el cuerpo* are synonymous with embodied action and mourning. Grieving is non-linear, and mourning for their daughters has been exemplified during court hearings by creating a public altar and organizing various events on March 8th to remember them. In addition, Sutton (2007) discussed embodied sacrifice to describe the process of when

women survivors of Argentina's dictatorship relive that history it hurts, but it is also good to express those emotions by speaking up, and withstanding the pain associated with those memories (p. 146). Embodied sacrifice can be related to the *cargas* that Vianey was expressing in her testimony about how not only do the mothers have to show up to meetings, vigils, court hearings, but they're also sacrificing their bodies to get a glimpse of justice.

This section is about the group in Guatemala, *8 Tijax,* which has been emotionally involved in the case of the 56 girls and acts as a supportive care network to the mothers. The chapter is divided into three sections: (a) The Hogar Seguro section provides history and description of the shelter with an examination of the state's negligence against the 56 girls, (b), the feminicide section defines feminicide using Latin American decolonial scholars' definitions and thought processes about the concept, and (c) transformative embodied memory focusing on the data and analysis of the dissertation explaining public memory with *La Plaza de las Niña*s and embodied memory with the body maps *8 Tijax* and the mothers create. The Chapter weaves in the oral and embodied *testimonios* of *8 Tijax* collective members and the mothers of the 56 girls and reflects on the following research questions: How are transformative memories specifically inscribed in the body, public space, and other symbolic and material geographies? And what are the connections between territory, relational bodies, Maya spirituality, and healing practices?

Following a feminist ethnographic process (Davis and Craven, 2016; Cahuas, 2022), I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight members of 8 Tijax in Spanish and two members of Colectiva 8 de Marzo[12] with IRB approval. I also organized a body mapping

[12] Colectiva 8 de Marzo is a lesbian autonomous group based in Guatemala whom with the mothers of the girls created the altar in front of the Palacio Nacional in Zona 1.

workshop with 20 girls' mothers on August 28, 2022, in Guatemala City to gather data for my study about embodied transformative memory.

Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion

Mayra, 8 Tijax co-founder, interview in Guatemala 2019 stated as follows and translated into English:

El incendio comenzó a las 8:45 PM. Una oficial de policía llamada Lucinda Marroquín supervisó la habitación, dijo en su declaración. Según el comunicado de la policía, le dijeron: jefe jefe las niñas están ardiendo. Dijo que si eran buenas para escapar ahora que aguanten, e insistieron de nuevo, porque las niñas estaban gritando, estaban ardiendo, dijo que esas perras deberían morir, las dejó 9 minutos allí, dos murieron en el área administrativa y 19 murieron en hospitales. Fueron llevadas al hospital, y fueron muriendo una a una, algunas salieron de la ambulancia caminando, como Rosemary por ejemplo ella salió, cuando la madre fue a verla, ella ya había muerto, lo que inhalaron, los gases tóxicos a muchos las mataron, no tanto las quemaduras sino lo que respiraron, murieron una tras otra. El número fue creciendo, dijeron que hay 22 muertos, hay 24, hay 35, hasta llegar a 41 niñas. Así que eso fue lo que pasó y así es como ocurrieron los hechos dentro del refugio "seguro", así fue como ocurrió el incendio, la policía, los funcionarios, que estaban allí son parte del estado de Guatemala tuvieron que preservar la vida de las niñas y no lo hicieron. Y debido a ellos las niñas murieron, hasta hoy, el proceso legal ha sido un proceso lento, deficiente, con una mala investigación.

The fire started at 8:45 PM. A police officer named Lucinda Marroquin oversaw the room, she said in her statement. According to the statement from the police, they told her: chief chief the girls are burning. She said if they were good to escape now that they endure, and they insisted again, because the girls were screaming, they were burning, she said that those bitches should die, she left them 9 minutes there, two died in the administrative area, and 19 died in hospitals. They were taken to the hospital, and they were dying one by one, some left the ambulance walking, like Rosemary for example she walked out, when the mother went to see her, she had already died, what they inhaled, the toxic gases to many killed them, not so much the burns but what they breathed, they died one after another. The number was growing, they said there are 22 dead, there are 24, there are 35, until reaching 41 girls. So that's what happened and that's how the facts occurred inside the "safe" shelter, that's how the

> fire happened, the police, the officials, who were there are part of the state of Guatemala had to preserve the lives of the girls and they didn't. And because of them the girls died, until today, the legal process has been a slow, deficient process, with a bad investigation.

On March 8, 2017, the tragic incident of the *Virgen de la Asunción* Safe Home fire killed 41 girls between the ages of 13 and 17 years. This was not an isolated event. It was the "chronicle of a death foretold" because the shortcomings of the system had been denounced several times before (Barrios-Klee & Mazariegos, 2020, p. 123). Mayra Jimenes one of the co-founders of *8 Tijax* shared the above testimonio. As she narrated what happened the day of the fire at Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion, her voice trembled with outrage and resistance against the state and the authorities, who did not do anything to save the lives of 41 girls. Among Mayra, the mothers, and *8 Tijax* collectively, there is a mutual agreement that the shelter was not safe despite the name of the shelter and what the state claimed as safe.

According to the government, 600 boys and girls were detained at the Hogar Seguro facility, although previous reports indicated that this number could have been as high as 800 (Rodriguez et al., 2021, p. 4). A few months after the fire, a 16-year-old teenager who had been detained in Virgen de la Asunción was murdered, allegedly by criminal gangs. Instead of providing support to ensure that the former detainees were given the help they needed for their emotional safety and healthy development, the state allowed 160 former detainees to be placed in other congregate facilities all over Guatemala. Girls, boys, and teenagers with disabilities have been disproportionately institutionalized, given the lack of alternatives and support in the community (Rodriguez et al., 2021, p. 4). The state has also failed the families who lost their daughters in the fire at the institution. Families have received no support and face tremendous risks as they seek justice for their girls. Two mothers were murdered after their daughters were

killed by the fire at Virgen de la Asuncion. Another mother, along with her children, received threats and was physically abused. Ultimately, Vianey Hernandez, who appointed herself as the group's spokeswoman, decided to migrate to the North and found herself close to the U.S.-Mexico border with two of her children. The story of the 56 girls and their families reflects Guatemala's violent conditions and cruel punishment in facilities like Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion. This specific shelter had been flagged by the state and even the United Nations as unsafe for youth. The question arising is: why did the state continue to administrate the shelter?

When I started my research and fieldwork in Guatemala, I did not envision the shelter as a prison. Still, my perspective drastically changed when I visited *Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion* (see Figure 16) in August 2022. The shelter is two hours away from San Jose Pinula, Guatemala, and getting to the location is difficult because the streets are narrow and there is heavy traffic. When one imagines a shelter, we envision a welcoming atmosphere, but this shelter is surrounded by barbed wire. No other buildings or businesses are next to the shelter, but a large green field is in front of it. This is the field where the girls ran to when escaping the shelter's insecure conditions. Five years after the massacre, this shelter did have some welcoming murals of young girls playing and even a memorial with the names of the 41 girls in front of the shelter. However, what was interesting was that the name of the shelter had been removed. The murals, memorial, and the removal of the shelter's name disclosed the denial of what occurred on March 7 and 8, 2017, at *Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion*. The state of Guatemala and conservative politicians continued to blame the girls. In March 2023, Lucinda Marroquin, the woman who did not open the doors to the girls, was declared free from house arrest while the mothers and survivors of this terror continue to seek justice.

Figure 16

The Hogar Seguro Shelter

During one of the semi-structured interviews with another *8 Tijax* member, Maria Pena, she shared how some of them went to the safe home to find out more information after the fire and to help the families reunite with their daughters. She shared that it took a lot of work to get information from the social workers at the shelter. Still, she began building a relationship with

one of the shelter's workers, and through speaking to her, she kept insisting on getting the names of the girls who were no longer inside the shelter. With Mayra, they created a communication line from Mayra giving in a small piece of paper with the girls' names to Maria. Maria gave the paper to the social worker inside the shelter to determine if the girl remained inside the shelter or was taken to other shelters or the hospital. Maria shared as follows and translated into English:

> *Yo me puse en la puerta y me pasaban papelitos con nombres para buscar a los ninos y yo se lo pasaba a la trabajadora social que estaba adentro del hogar. Entonces era un canal, el nombre lo apuntaban, y yo tocaba la puerta y se lo daba, entonces alli fue cuando tambien todas empezamos a relacionar la problematica que existia, cuando la trabajadora social recibia el papelito en muchas ocaciones me decia: ella no evadio proceso, como asi? Que no se habia escapado un dia antes (Marzo 7). El 7 arman la revuelta y se escapan, entonces no era parte de ese grupo que se habia escapado, me hacia comentario o que ella si estaba alli pero si se habia ido en los buses, estaban transladando a los ninos, a otros hogares, mirabamo ninas y ninas en las ventanas de los buses y todo eso no se lo dijeron a sus familias. Sus familias no sabian donde estaban, no solo la situacion critica de incendio si no tambien que todas las personas que estaban alli las trasladaron a otros hogares sin el consentimiendo de los familiares.*
>
> *Nos quedamos alli a largas horas de la noche y pude establecer una relacion con la trabajadora social, me pudo dar su numero, llamame cualquier cosa, ahorita no te puedo dar toda la info. Con mayra, ya todas las familias se habian ido y ahora era la busqueda en la morgue. Nos fuimos a la morgue, y Stef estaba hacienda trabajo desde los hospitals, y alli fue que empezamos a coordinar, y nosotras teniamos el contacto con las familias y llamamos a steff y ella nos daba informacion de las que ya estaban en el hospitales.*
>
> *Researcher (me): cuando la trabajadora social decia no evadio proceso? Que crees que significa?*
>
> *Maria: En terminos normales es: Ella no fue rebelde entonces no las encerramos por eso estan vivas, no las castigamos, ellas estan bien.*
>
> *C: Entonces fue un castigo grave.*
>
> *Maria: Si se puede comparar a la guerra como ellos no apoyaron a los guerrilleros entonces ellos estan bien, los que si alimentaban a los guerrilleros entonces si matenlos. Desde alli viene una cuestion enraizadas, culturalmente, desde alli se ve, el professional que estan poniendo acargo de un menor, por que mentalmente tener esas ideas y estar acargo de un menor es un encierro condiciones nefastas.*

I stood at the door, and they passed me pieces of paper with names to look for the children, and I passed it to the social worker inside the home. Then it was a channel, the name was pointed out, and I knocked on the door and gave it to her, so that was when we also all began to relate the problem that existed when the social worker received the paper on many occasions, she told me: she did not evade process, as well? That she had not escaped a day before (March 7). On the 7th, they set up the revolt and escaped, so she was not part of that group that had escaped; she made a comment to me that she was there,but if she had gone on the buses, they were transferring the children, to other homes, I looked at girls and girls in the windows of the buses and all that they did not tell their families. Their families did not know where they were; we were not only dealing with the critical fire situation but also that all the people there moved them to other homes without the consent of the relatives.

We stayed there forlong hours of the night, and I was able to establish a relationship with the social worker. She could give me her number, call me anything, right now I cannot give you all the info. With Mayra, all the families had already left; now it was the search at the morgue. We went to the morgue, and Stef was doing work from the hospitals, and that's when we started coordinating and we had contact with the families, and we called Steff and she gave us information about those who were already in the hospital.

In her description, Maria explained that building trust with the social worker was crucial to working collaboratively to get the girls' names. As Mayra stated in her testimony, on the day of the fire and days afterward, the state was nowhere to be found, meaning that the institutions responsible for the well-being of youth in Guatemala were not taking any immediate actions to support them during the aftermath of the tragedy. Instead, community members like Mayra,

Steph, and Maria, who became *8 Tijax* colectiva, had to step up to support the families in the terror. Therefore, after describing the intense process of getting information from the social worker about which girls had been transferred from the social worker, the women searched the morgue and the hospitals for the status of the other girls. They were documenting a kind of horrific sorting process. The conversation then turned to how the girls were categorized, which ultimately resulted in their being alive or dead. Those deemed "rebellious" were locked up and were among those who died. Those who were obedient were treated differently and lived. Maria compared the punishment for those who rebelled to the treatment the Guatemalan army gave the civilian population as punishment for helping the guerilla movement. The conversation between the researcher and Maria was as follows:

> *Researcher (I): When did the social worker say she did not evade the process? What do you think it means?*
> *Maria: In everyday terms, it is: She was not rebellious, so we did not lock them up, so they are alive, we did not punish them, they are fine.*
> *Researcher: So, it was a serious punishment.*
> *Maria: If you can compare to the war as they did not support the guerrillas then they are fine, those who fed the guerrillas, were killed. From there comes a deep-rooted question, culturally, from there you see, the professional who is put to oversee a minor, because mentally having those ideas and overseeing a minor in a confinement is disastrous.*

The Hogar Seguro began to operate in 2010 under a different name. The name was Hogar Solidario Virgen de la Esperanza during President Alvaro Colom. The name changed to Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion (HSVA) d in 2012, but the shelter never lived up to its name of being a safe place for youth (Ventas, 2017). "Unfortunately, the staff there has many years, butthey neither have the proper training to work with youth nor follows human rights focus that its needed" (Grupo de Apoya Mutuo). Before the fire in 2016, BBC Mundo (Ventas, 2017) documented cases of youth trying to escape the abuse at the shelter. For example, a youth aged 15 years entered the shelter due to experiencing family problems at home. Once he was

welcomed to the shelter, he was placed in a small room and shared that he could only go outside once or twice a week. By “welcoming,” he referred to having about 18 youths kicking him all over his body. The vigilant workers noticed him getting beaten but did not speak (Ventas, 2017). According to Naciones Unidas Derechos Humanos Oficina del Alto Comisionado (OACNUDH, 2018), The HSVA was a "macro-institution" for the reception of children and adolescents, housing many of them with different profiles and needs. In the days following the fire, the state institutions in charge of protecting children and adolescents, including HSVA itself, could not provide clear and concise information on the exact number of children and adolescents present at the scene at the time of the tragedy.

Through my research about HSVA in Guatemala, I have found two main reports by Naciones Unidas Derechos Humanos Oficina del Alto Comisionado (OACNUDH, 2018) and Disability Rights International (2021) documenting the atrocity lived by the young girls and a list of immediate measures that the state of Guatemala needs to take (See Figure 17) to improve the situation of children and adolescents in Guatemala.

Figure 17

Screenshot from Disability Rights International Report about HSVA

III. IMMEDIATE MEASURES THAT THE STATE OF GUATEMALA NEEDS TO TAKE

As presented in this report, the rights of the children that were detained in Virgen de la Asunción are still being violated, and they are still at risk. It is imperative that the State takes immediate action to:

1. **Guarantee the safety of the families searching for justice for their daughters who were killed in the fire.** The State must take immediate actions to stop the threats against family members seeking justice and fully investigate the murders and threats of family members to hold those responsible accountable.
2. **Locate survivors to ensure their immediate safety,** housing, and medical needs, family re-unification and support, ensuring they can gain access to funds set aside for their support, offering them psychological counselling and emotional support, and providing protections against further abuse and exploitation at the hands of their former abusers and traffickers.
3. **Create emergency, supported foster care** (substitute families) for any children who do not have families or who cannot safely return to their original family due to a history of child abuse, trafficking, or other immediate dangers.
4. **Interview survivors to learn of and protect against immediate threats** – women and girls who have been trafficked and abuses are likely to be abused by the same individuals again or others who are interested in covering-up previous human rights violations; advocacy and legal representation is needed to ensure their rights and identify threats that the government can take action to counter these immediate threats.
5. **Investigate recent deaths and hold abusers accountable** – until the investigation is complete and abusers have been held accountable, all survivors remain at risk.
6. **Independently review and create accountability for the trafficking and fire at the Hogar Virgen de la Asunción**. Human rights advocates in Guatemala have taken the position that the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the original fire and trafficking of girls at the facility was incomplete. The continuing high rate of deaths suggests that there may be ongoing efforts by cover-up their role in the previous tragedy. Given the historic role of government and service system authorities in those abuses, and further inquiry by authorities of the United Nations or the Inter-American human rights system is needed.

Gibran Cruz-Martinez (2014) wrote about the history of the development of social welfare in Latin America. Welfare state development refers to the progress and institutionalization of welfare programs that address social risks of the population to ensure common well-being. Referring to the process of institutionalizing welfare programs to ensure a basic minimum of entitled social protection to the population (1297), Cruz-Martinez analyzed that many social welfare programs continue to be in transition or are emerging compared to counterparts in Europe and other industrialized countries. This is not to justify the state's negligence over the terror the girls experienced not just during the fire but through sexual assault, eating rotten food, and physical abuse inside the shelter. However, from a macro perspective,

Guatemala's social assistance spending is 0.3% as defined by the World Bank determined by the Human Capital Index (2020). According to the report, Guatemala spends 0.3% of its GDP on social assistance. This is lower than the regional average (1.4%) and the average for its income group (4.7%). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Canadian Government funded the human capital project, positioning Guatemala to be dependent on institutional social welfare programs through neoliberal processes of maintaining a subordinate position in global politics.

Although, the case of the 56 Guatemalan girls is connected to global structural issues, it is also not a new strategy of criminalizing, punishing, suppressing, and marginalizing subaltern subjects. As previously mentioned, the state-operated shelter did not resemble a safe home; instead, it was structured to be operated like a prison for youth. In Guatemala, the institutionalization of minors is punitive, so its effects have nothing to do with prevention, protection, recovery, reintegration, or resocialization of behavior (Barrios-Klee & Mazariegos, 2021). The punitive aspect not only exists within Guatemala's social culture but also in the family because many of the youth are identified as "mareros" (gangsters), and to discipline them, families end up institutionalizing them at shelters like HSVA as stated by Vianey, who was afraid of Ashley's involvement with *mareros*,

> *Vianey: Ella (Ashley) empezo agarrar amistad con los patojos[13], nosotros les llamamos patojos especiales, no les llamamos mareros, por que es algo que a nosotros ni nos conviene hablar de ese tema como lideres de ahi. Entonces ella se empezo a involucrar con situaciones. Cuando ella se me fue, yo no sabia, yo trataba de que ella no se saliera de la casa por que era muy inquieta.*
>
> Vianey: She (Ashley) began to make friends with the patojos, we call them special patojos, we don't call them gang members, because it's something that we don't even want to talk about that issue as leaders there. Then, she started to get involved with situations.

[13] Patojo or Patoja is used in Guatemala to refer to a boy or a girl.

> When she left me, I didn't know; I tried not to let her leave the house because she was very restless.

The term *marero* is racialized in Central America to mainly refer to urban youth who have tattoos and are involved in "gang" activity. Sociologist and Central American scholar Osuna (2020) argued:

> The common-sense argument concerning the rise of street gangs in El Salvador describes how youth and young adults involved in gangs in the US were deported to El Salvador where they then met other youth and young adults involved in homegrown gangs in the country and joined forces. This argument usually considers deportations, family separation and extreme poverty as reasons for the rise of street gangs in the country. (p. 6).

In addition, the criminalization of youth transcends borders as the rise of prisons and immigration enforcement has been strengthened through state hegemonic narratives of anti-gang policies. The US involvement in this transnational moral panic included both domestic and transnational efforts. Nationally, the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement developed an anti-gang initiative titled 'Operation Community Shield' that targeted both MS-13 and Mara 18 members (Osuna, 2020, p. 16).

As Foucault (1977) demonstrated, the reformation of the prison structure premised on the prison's function as a subject formation and social control technique, materially and ideologically hewed to the emergent ontologies of citizenship, individualism, and the market within the new republic. The prison emerged in service to a transforming industrial capitalist economy not simply as a humane alternative to beatings and executions but through its very production of docile, individuated, and disciplined subjects. Story (2019) examined the prison

system as a set of relationships. These relations include property, work, gender, and race, enacted and expressed across various landscapes (Story, 2019, p. 9). Maria compared the conditions of the safe home to when the Maya peoples were also punished by the military for feeding the guerrillas, pointing out that particular social relations and conditions have not changed. These forms of punishment transcend time and space as a continuum of violence (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010), reprimanding subjects whom the state identifies as criminals and need to be excluded from the larger society. The effect of punishment was discussed by Michel Foucault (1977) as:

> It was the effect, in the rites of punishment, of a certain mechanism of power: of a power that not only did not hesitate to exert itself directly on bodies but was exalted and strengthened by its visible manifestations; of a power that asserted itself as an armed power whose functions of maintaining order were not entirely unconnected with the functions of war; of a power that presented rules and obligations as personal bonds. (p. 57)

These structures are not new but continue to be used by the state as they follow colonial and settler-colonial logic of hierarchy and dehumanization. Latin American scholar Mignolo (2005) used the coloniality of power to analyze the division of power in Latin America stating, "In the sixteenth century, the colonial difference was in space. 'People without history' were in a time 'before' the 'present': People with history could write the history of those people without it" (p. 1). This determined who qualified as being fully human and who qualified for full citizenship, a ranking that was part of a violent, deeply racist, and gendered process that resulted in the preeminence of citizenship over humanity through the power of sovereignty and, more specifically, state sovereignty. This hierarchical ranking of humanity was made possible by the introduction of the ideas of race and gender as classificatory strategies to evict non-Western and

non-White peoples from humanity by creating systems that determined who counted as human, whose lives deserved "protection" and whose deaths deserved to be mourned (Lugones, 2008; Quijano, 2000; Salazar, 2012). Geographer Pulido (2023) discussed racial hierarchies by analyzing the belief that "Whites are of greater value." As she stated, "I choose to focus on value because not only is it the minimum threshold required to create and maintain a racially unjust landscape, but it reminds us that racism is an ideology rooted in power with material consequences" (p. 5). In the context of Latin America, *blanqueamiento* was a social, economic, and cultural process to "better the race" and preserve the purity of Whiteness (Hernandez, 2013). Therefore, punitive systems like schooling and prisons, ideas of *blanqueamiento,* and assimilation bolster the argument that "Whites are of greater value" and violently marginalizes others non-White subjects.

The 200,000 deaths and 45,000 disappeared during the 36-year (1960-1996) war were ranked in that classification system and deemed unworthy of citizenship by the state of Guatemala. The 56 Guatemalan girls are mourned by their families and feminist groups, but the state continues to repress their demands and search for dignified justice. Therefore, as GuateMaya feminist groups said, "It was not the fire, it was the state" that murdered 41 girls and believed that it was not a fire at a shelter, but at a prison, as the youth were treated like criminals and punished for escaping physical and sexual abuse. Families and advocacy groups identified the case of 56 girls as feminicide. The subsequent section discusses feminicide and gender-based violence in Guatemala, which I argued were symptoms of post-war in Guatemala, and what the GuateMaya feminist groups in this study struggled against by challenging state hegemonic narratives regarding feminicide.

Feminicide in Guatemala

The following was an interview with Vianey Hernandez in Guatemala in 2019 and translated into English.

> *Vianey: Entonces ella (Ashley) me dijo, es que mama vos no sabes nada, de lo que a uno le pasa ahi, es el infierno, vos me metes ahi, y yo me voy a matar. Pero por que? Que te hiceron? Que paso?*
> *Es que ahi le pegan a uno, mira como yo no me dejo ni de vos, ya te imaginas, lo que me pasa ahi. Yo soy de las ninas que no me quedo callada. Y hay una monitora que yo no les caigo bien. Y no quiero, como yo les contesto a las monitoras, ponen a otras ninas que se miran como hombresitos, machitos, a que me peguen.*
>
> Vianey: So she (Ashley) told me you don't know anything it mom; what happens to you there, it's hell. You put me there, and I'm going to kill myself. But why? What did they do to you? What happened? They hit you there, look since I do not put up with you, you can imagine what happens to me there. I am one of the girls who does not remain silent. And there's a monitor (vigilant worker) that does not like me. If I answer back, they put other girls who look like little men, machitos, to hit me.

The story of the 56 girls left open wounds in Guatemalan society, leaving the families with many questions. Vianey Hernandez shared in her *testimonio* that when she got her daughter's autopsy report, she discovered that Ashley had been raped and was pregnant. Hogar Seguro shelter had been flagged since 2018 because incidents of rape and sexual trafficking were reported by the staff (Canel, 2022). The death of the 41 girls and 15 injured left a clear and loud message: *Guatemala's social fabric continues to shed blood, especially the blood of young girls and women's bodies* (Rosa, Colectiva 8 de Marzo co-founder). Chapter 3 discussed the topic of women as a weapon of war, from colonial violence to the 36-year war of sexually violating Indigenous women in Guatemala. This section focuses on the contemporary issues of feminicide in Guatemala. It discusses statistics, state programs, and laws that went into effect in 2008 to denounce violence against women.

Violence against women pervades all sectors of Guatemalan society. The violence takes many forms, including intra-familial (or domestic) violence, sexual violence, incest, human trafficking, and, at the extreme end of the spectrum, femicide (Najera, 2012). The numbers are high and on the rise. In 2011, 20,398 complaints of violence against women under the 2008 Law against femicide in Guatemala were filed with the courts, up from 19,277 registered cases in 2010 (CENADOJ, 2012). According to the Mutual Support Group (GAM), between January and May of 2021, 254 women were murdered in Guatemala, but in the fifth month of 2022 the figure increased to 376. These complaints involved femicide and other physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. In comparison, Paraguay, which is like Guatemala in many respects and where violence against women is seen as an increasingly serious problem, recorded only 2,424 cases of violence against women in 2011 (Ministerio de la Mujer, 2012). Adjusting for differences in population size, Paraguay's rate of cases of violence against women is about one-third that of Guatemala (Musalo & Bookey, 2014, p. 107). The proliferation of organized crime, trafficking, and gang violence in the last 15 years has compounded the state's structural inattention to violence against women and particularly impacted borderland, urban marginal communities, and Indigenous women (Torres, 2018; Stephen, 2022)

In 2016, Guatemala created a reporting system known as *Alerta Isabel-Claudina* as a response to the feminicide of Claudina Isabel Velasquez Paiz. Claudina, disappeared and was murdered at the age of 19 in 2005. In her case, like many, the authorities did absolutely nothing to help find her. Claudina was deemed "a victim whose murder should not be investigated." The crime scene was not properly preserved, the police failed to collect evidence properly, and forensic tests were cursory. Despite being identified by her parents the morning after the murder, the police categorized Claudina as a Jane Doe for months. When Claudina's parents asked why

the crime scene was treated so negligently, the authorities responded that she seemed a "nobody" because she wore a belly button ring and "good girls don't have piercings." But the deeper reason was that Claudina was a woman in Guatemala, one of the countries with the highest levels of violence against women in America (Perez, 2021). Anthropologist Sanford (2023) investigated the case of Claudina Isabel through the careful and respectful process of valuing the father's efforts to bring her murderer(s) to justice, providing an up-close appraisal of the inner workings of the Guatemalan criminal justice system and its role in the maintenance of inequality, patriarchy, power, and impunity (p. 15).

The Alerta Isabel-Claudina Law created and regulated the operation of a mechanism for the immediate search for disappeared women to guarantee them life, liberty, security, integrity, and dignity and to have a mechanism that allows their prompt location and protection. This quick location of disappeared women may prevent them from being subjected to other types of harassment and violence or transferred to other communities or countries (Argueta, 2018). Despite the progress of having a law in place, Guatemala, as a small nation, has the fourth highest femicide rate in the world: A woman is killed every 12 hours in Guatemala, and 7, 272 femicides were recorded in the decade between November 2008 and November 2017 (Speed & Stephen, 2021, p. 3).

Feminicide refers to the murder of women by men because they are women and points to the state's responsibility for these murders, whether through the commission of the actual killing, toleration of the perpetrators' acts of violence, or omission of State responsibility to ensure the safety of its female citizens (Sanford, 2023, p. 14). A whole set of violent misogynists constitutes acts against women that involve a violation of their human rights, represent an attack on their safety, and endanger their lives. It culminates in the murder of girls and women. Feminicide can

occur because the authorities are omissive, negligent, or act in collusion with the assailants, perpetuate institutional violence against women, and block their access to justice, thereby contributing to impunity (Suarez Val, 2022, p. 2001). Feminicide names the gender-related violent death of women the tip of the iceberg in a continuum of violence that is "terrorizing women" in the Americas (Suarez Val, 2022, p. 164).

Critical geographers of violence draw out how interpretations of violence unfold through representations of embodiment and discourses inscribing spatialities within disparate sociocultural registers (Alves, 2013; Caldeira, 2001). Space, in other words, is no less saturated with gender, racial, and class meanings than the bodies represented within and through those spaces (McKittrick, 2006). Fuentes (2020) argued that "public" feminicide victims are de-legitimized through socio-spatial logics that circulate within media representations and sociopolitical discourses around violence, whereby references to a body found in a non-domestic site mobilize a host of gendered, racialized, and classed assumptions about these victims' low social status and undesirable social circles (p. 1670). To understand how or why the bodies left over by femicidal violence matter (or fail to matter), it is necessary to center the settler dynamics through which space, land, and territory have been racialized in Guatemala in ways that situate poor women, and particularly indigenous Mayan women "at the bottom ring of the colonial-patriarchal chain" (Cumes, 2012, p. 10). Indeed, connecting poor and Mayan women's bodies to land is key for understanding the production of gendered disposability (Fuentes, 2020, p. 1672). Moreover, feminist geographer Zaragocin (2019) argued that gendered geographies of elimination are a direct result of settler colonialism and the regulation of space and bodies, which are intimately linked (p. 376).

Gendered violence has always been a part of the genocidal and assimilationist projects of settler colonialism. In the U.S. and Canada, there are missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) and Indian women who disappear because they have been deemed killable, rapeable, and expendable. Their bodies have historically been rendered less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous kinship, and governance, an alternative to heteropatriarchal and Victorian rules of descent (Simpson, 2016; Stephen & Speed, 2021, p.11). Rape is experienced at such high rates in some tribal communities that it becomes "normalized." Native women know there is a high likelihood of experiencing rape at some point in their lives, and preparing for this inevitable violence resembles a full-time job. Native women talk to their daughters about what to do *when* they are sexually assaulted, not *if* they are sexually assaulted, but when (it is likely to happen) (Deer, 2015, p. 5)

The endless oppression against women's bodies is also met with an urgent wave of resistance from feminist groups. Through my digital ethnographic research, I have connected with various groups and individuals resisting feminicide and all forms of violence against women and girls in Guatemala and across the hemisphere. One of them is the feminist journalist social media group Ruda (Rue), named after a term that can mean the herb rue but can also mean tough. This group uses infographics, zines, and visuals to communicate the social issues facing feminine bodies, solidarity, and mutual aid efforts. The group has also connected with 8 Tijax and has posted on their social media (see Figure 18) about the case of the 56 girls, reaching an audience of 27,000 followers. In Uruguay, feminists are creating digital records and cartographies of feminicide as a form of research-creation. Data about violence becomes public displays of feminist activists' emotional, affective, and political responses to feminicide (Suarez

Val, 2020, p. 163). Feminist activists protesting feminicide operate within a charged affective atmosphere that implicates emotions and affects, producing various political effects worldwide.

Figure 18

Screenshot Image of Ruda's Instagram Post in Support of the 56 girls' Case

Embodied Transformative Memory

The following is an Interview with Rosa, Co-founder of Colectiva 8 de Marzo, in 2023 and translated in English.

> *Lamentablemente el 8 de Marzo, 2017 fue un crimen de estado, fue una barabaridad. Yo y otro companero de la diversidad sexual, parte del arcoiris, nosotros dos juntamos para coincidir en la plaza central para hacer algo con unas velas que llevamos. Los dos temenos acendencia indigena y aparte de eso creemos en nuestra cosmovision maya, nosotros coincidimos en encender una luz, para la tranciscion de las abuelas (las ninas- que ahora ya son abuelas) en nuestro caminar, y en ese entonces fueron 56 ninas que caian en un hogar estatal murieron 41 de diferentes edades.*

> Unfortunately, March 8, 2017, was a state crime, it was a barbarity. Me and another companero of sexual diversity, part of the rainbow, the two of us got together to coincide in the central plaza to do something with some candles that we carried. The two of us have Indigenous ancestry and are part of that we believe in our Mayan cosmovision; we agreed to turn on a light for the transition of the grandmothers (the girls-who are now grandmothers) in our walk, 56 girls fell into a state home, and 41 girls of different ages died.

The search for justice has not been easy for the mothers of the 56 girls and for GuateMaya feminist groups accompanying them. It has been met with many barriers and psychological and emotional violence to derail the momentum, preventing the mothers from speaking up about their daughters. However, groups like *8 Tijax* and Colectiva 8 de Marzo have supported the families with artistic activities to honor the 56 girls' memory and emotionally uplift the families. The following sections are about La Plaza de las Niñas, which has become a space in Zona 1 (see Figure 19), not only honoring the 56 girls but a space to be in ceremony. It is also what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) identifies as a contact zone. “Contact zones” are places where difference is used to negotiate various power relations. To write about La Plaza de las Niñas, I interviewed co-founder Rosa of La Colectiva 8 de Marzo, a small collective of queer people who created the altar on March 8, 2017. During the interview with Rosa, who is one of the co-founders of Colectiva 8 de Marzo, she shared how the altar was formed through centering a Maya cosmology and honoring the 41 girls transition to the spiritual world. In addition, members of the *colectiva* are part of the LGBTQ+ community and view the girls as ancestors. I ended this chapter by writing about the body mapping workshop and the transformative embodied memory the mothers produced through their personal and collective body maps.

Figure 19

Plaza de las Niñas in Zona 1 map, Guatemala City

Note: Photo provided by Colectiva 8 de Marzo and map created in collaboration with Ph.D. candidate Sophia Ford

La Plaza de las Niñas

On the evening of International Women's Day (IWD) on March 8th, 2017, in Guatemala City, feminist groups like Ruda, Centro Q'anil, Colectiva 8 de Marzo, and MAIX N'oj gathered in front of the national palace to protest the recent deaths of 41 girls who were staying at Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion, a state-operated youth shelter (interview 8 Tijax, 2019). During

the protest, people would cry out the total number of those who had perished each time they learned that another girl had passed away. People screamed out "33," "34," and "35" until they reached 41, the total number of girls who were reported dead from the shelter's fire. To mourn the tragedy, the groups placed 41 candles with flowers on an altar in the middle of the plaza in front of the national palace. The altar is next to a display of "45,000" and a collection of photos that commemorate the men and women who disappeared during Guatemala's 36-year war (1960-1996).

The photos have the message *Ni Olvido, Ni Perdon* (Can't forget, and can't forgive), denouncing the effects of the war on Guatemala's citizens. Since 2017, the altar has gone through different iterations because state authorities and citizens opposing it have destroyed it 15 times. A group known as *Colectiva 8 de Marzo* has committed to rebuilding the altar and has even formalized it with a plaque (see Figure 20) that reads, "Justice for the Guatemalan girls. In memory of the 41 girls murdered at Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion, we renamed this space as Plaza de las Niñas de Guatemala on March 8. We do not forget them. The state was responsible. Kimmy de Leon a member of *8 Tijax,* shared her testimony on the altar and translated into English:

> *El palacio presidencial se convierte en un lugar de encuentro. Tomamos fotos, flores y velas. En el altar, se colocó una placa en recuerdo de las 41 niñas, y se coloca en el centro del parque, y las familias deciden poner algunas cruces pero luego fueron destruidas bajo el gobierno de Jimmy Morales. El monumento representa la justicia, pero es por eso que han visto muchos ataques contra el monumento. Las cruces han sido atacadas muchas veces, el espacio quemado, las cruces destruidas, es un ataque al memorial de las niñas. Se convirtió en un fuerte espacio de lucha, para gritar, reclamar derechos, para buscar justicia en el caso de crímenes contra las mujeres.*
>
> The presidential palace becomes a meeting place. We take photos, flowers, and candles. On the altar, a plaque was placed in remembrance of the 41 girls, and it is placed in the center of the park, and the families decide to put some crosses but then they were

destroyed under the government of Jimmy Morales. The monument represents justice but that is why they have seen many attacks against the monument. The crosses have been attacked many times, space burned, crosses destroyed, it is an attack on the memorial of the girls. It became a strong space of struggle to shout, claim rights, to seek justice in the case of crimes against women.

Figure 20

In front of the Altar There is a Plaque in Memory of the 41 Girls

The importance of public memory has been recognized by scholars in multiple disciplines and by many in the popular press. Although memory's significance is manifold, public memory is often the battleground upon which issues of contemporary concern are fought (Blair and Michel, 2007). Feminist geographers have deployed concepts such as "situated difference," "grounded knowledge," and "spatialized politics" to produce rich analytical frameworks that

explore the material and symbolic constructions of identity, power, and difference in space and place (Nagar, 2004, p. 31). Women's agency is critical in negotiating and altering these articulations within and against historically and geographically specific cultural constraints (Nagar, 2004, p. 33). Geographer Gade (1976) wrote about the history of Latin American Central Plazas as a functional space. In the colonial period, the main square was generally known as the plaza mayor or real; after Independence, it was often renamed for a patriotic figure, event, or date. In parts of Mexico, plaza mayor is still used to designate the central square; zocalo is also used. Parque Central is found in Central America. In the Northern Andean countries, Plaza Bolivar prevails as a common term in the larger towns and cities of Peru and Chile, plaza de armas is most common (p. 16). The stereotype of the Latin American central plaza ensemble is that of a flat, rectangular open space faced by the largest church, which in the case of capital cities and most sizeable urban centers, is the cathedral. Government buildings, imposing, and perhaps a school cluster elsewhere on the plaza margin. Zona 1 is culturally known as the central place in Guatemala city, and it is where the central park is located where citizens and tourists congregate to walk to museums, the central market, restaurants, or sit by the park and enjoy Guatemalan street food. The plaza is also where political events happen and where the ceremonial altar for the 41 girls is situated at reclaiming and shifting the environment for gender-based issues. Magana (2020), in his book about cartographies of youth resistance, argued:

> Through public and often illicit art, artists challenge regimes of police surveillance, private property, and tourism-based development. This battle is another manifestation of the ongoing tension explored on the state's authority to shape and intervene on the existing architecture of the city and the right of "inhabitants" and "users" to alter their environment. (p. 125)

The counter-cultural memory the GuateMaya feminist groups produced by rebuilding and renaming the Plaza Constitucional to Plaza de las Niñas and by centering a ceremonial altar is shifting public social memory and contesting the state's narratives of events in Guatemala City.

Commemorative measures of naming are embedded into the political geography of the city and the cultural geographies of public memory and everyday life (Maoz Azaryahu, 2011). Azaryahu (2011) explained that renaming streets [or in this case plazas] introduced the transformation of the political order and the ideology into mundane spheres of urban experience and even intimate levels of everyday life. When conducted in the context of a regime change, 'renaming history' and rewriting the history inscribed on street signs was a powerful demonstration of ideological control over public urban space that resonates with the notion of a new beginning in political history (Azaryahu, 2011, p. 491). In the case of the Plaza de las Niñas, renaming also encouraged other social and cultural groups to feel safe to gather at the Plaza to engage in social and political activities. The altar honoring the 41 girls transcends the case of Hogar Seguro. It welcomes other immediate social issues the Guatemalan population is also concerned about, such as abortion rights, voter registration, memory for the disappeared, and overall women and girls' rights just like in other plazas in Latin America like El Zocalo in Mexico City and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. These counter-spaces provide a spatiotemporal meaning to political projects brought to life by the common people reclaiming power and autonomy.

O'Reilly (2023) discussed the (geo)politics of naming a place and the history of toponymy in the sciences. Place names derived from human geographical processes in specific contexts and histories often pertain to socio-cultural constructivism that over time, may be less evident, more intangible, or even existential to a person in "that place" now. Unquestionably,

changing linguistics and languages and cultural succession with new arrivals of settlers all impact original names and renaming over time (O'Reilly, 2023, p. 4). Therefore, place naming and renaming must be read with a certain understanding of 'the spirit of the time' (i.e., defining the spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time). On another level, issues regarding place naming came sharply into focus in the USA and worldwide on May 25, 2020, occasioned by the killing of George Floyd, an African American citizen by a White policeman in Minneapolis, when global audiences were reminded of the legacies and systemic wrongs of the colonial project. Protesters demanded the removal of historical place names and monuments associated with colonial supremacist projects (O'Reilly, 2023; Pulido, 2023).

Furthermore, Indigenous scholar Blackwell (2023) wrote about scales of resistance that Indigenous women produce, stating, "Indigenous women activists developed a strategy of weaving in and between multiple scales of power to create new spaces of participation and new forms of consciousness and discourse and how their organizing conjures, reimagines, and rethinks scale" (p. 4). This shift of power also remaps Zona 1 by situating women's agency and marking it as a contact zone (Pratt, 1992) for feminist groups as a meeting place for March 8 International Women's Day march. A contact zone (Torre, 2005, p. 253) allows for a more textured analysis across power and difference. More specifically, it creates an opening for an analysis that lingers in the "space between." Informed by Native scholar Goeman (2013), I analyzed Plaza de las Niñas in Zona 1 as a counter-map inviting readers to rethink maps centering on Native and other women's stories. In this vein, (re)mapping is not just about regaining what was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, it is also about understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities to sustain vibrant Native

futures (Goeman, 2013, p. 3). The Plaza de Las Niñas and the 56 girl's altar are producing decolonized spatial knowledge and attendant geographies that acknowledge the colonial spatial process as ongoing but imbued with power struggles.

Chicana spiritual activist Zepeda (2022) examined altars as a methodological pathway to remembering what was central to Gloria Anzaldua's *curandera* (healer) knowledge. She refers to the *curandera* spirit practice of building, creating, and raising altars to set intentions for transformation, connect with self and the cosmos, and importantly, be in community with all relations through intentional prayer (Zepeda, 2022, p. 71). The altar installation and related art forms have inspired Chicana artists to be more precisely connected to the search for and expression of alternative spiritualities and alternative art practices, particularly those that are visionary concerning social justice and transformation (Perez, 2007). In many cultural traditions, altars have been created and used to honor and remember family members in the spiritual realm. Altars function not only as powerful places for ritual and spellcasting but also as foundations for offering gratitude, symbols of the season, shrines to deities or nature spirits, and places to capture intentional stillness and quiet focus (Kiernan, 2020, p. 10). Zepeda (2023) explained that an altar could include tools, methodologies, and energies, usually with a tangible representation of the four sacred elements of air, water, land, and fire and set up in alignment with the four cardinal directions.

In Maya cosmology, altars usually have tools like candles with different colors representing the four directions: Red for East, Black for West, White for North, and Yellow for South. Mayan league[14] a group of Maya elders and professionals in Washington D.C. express that, "The four colors of the corn represent the four nations, the diversity of all people on earth,

[14] https://www.mayanleague.org/maya-cosmovision

and the white bones represent the ancestors, that they are grounding us and always with us." Therefore, ceremony and remembering are forms of activism. Visual storytelling serves as a vital form of spiritual consciousness or spirit work, where medicine and prayer are offered as a visual and visceral protest. Visual storytelling and oral traditions are part of Indigenous histories (Zepeda, 2023, p. 89). The altar honoring the 56 girls is visual storytelling that also connects to all gender-based violence in Guatemala and stories that are not allowed to be told or be public due to a system rooted in patriarchal ideology. Rosa shared how the altar was always created with a spiritual connection and intention and translated in English:

> *El 8 de Marzo del 2017, empezamos el fuego, sin saber que hiba ser un altar. A la semana se convierte en un altar, las cruzitas las hicimos a mano, con donaciones con cemento, una companera dono su cama de madera para las cruzes. Alli estuvimos dia y noche 30 dias, durmiendo en la plaza. En ese entonces eramos 5, fue una accion politica, me quedo yo con otra compa, alli dormiamos, comiamos, para mantener el altar que ahora es un lugar para mantener la memoria, por que alli es para todas las luchas historicas y mas que todo sobre la resistencia del pueblo Indigena campesino y popular. Nosotras vimos la necesidad y convocamos el altar con el fuego hasta que se hizo el altar en el dia 9 IX y Tambien eramos solo mujeres, ancestras, y lucha actual tiene la energia feminina, la fuerza, la valentia y la conexion atravez del fuego, creemos en la cosmovision maya y nos comunicamos con el mas alla con nuestras muertas y muertos.*
>
> We started the fire on March 8, 2017, not knowing it would be an altar. A week later, it becomes an altar. The crosses were made by hand, with donations with cement, a compa donated her wooden bed for the crosses. There we were day and night 30 days, sleeping in the plaza. At that time, we were five, it was a political action; I stayed with another compa,and there we slept, we ate, to maintain the altar that is now a place to keep the memory, the memory for all the historical struggles and more than everything about the resistance of the Indigenous people. We saw the need and summoned the altar with the fire until the altar was made on the 9th day Ix and we were also only women, ancestors,

and current struggle has the feminine energy, strength, courage, and connection through fire, we believe in the Mayan cosmovision, and we communicate with our dead.

Ix is the Maya nawal of the feminine energy thus, for the colectiva it was significant because the altar honors the girls. As Rosa mentioned, the altar is also a place for the collective resistance against gender-based violence. Alter is a place that provides strength and hope to keep the girls' memory alive and of the disappeared and murdered during the Guatemalan 36-year (1960-1996) war.

I was able to visit the altar several times every time I traveled to Guatemala for fieldwork. The first time I encountered the altar, I felt powerful because it redefines the colonial space that has been intact for more than 100 years since Guatemala's Independence that preserves the colonial roots. To me, an altar was for ceremonial and spiritual manifestations. Still, as I spoke to Rosa and Mari (participants of Colectiva 8 de Marzo), they clarified that not only is the altar for ceremonies but also for community building, accountability, and educational purposes. The second time I visited the altar, I bought some red roses and put them at the center of the altar. I closed my eyes and thought about the girls and how their memory travels many distances, unearthing truths, stories, and narratives never told. The altar is an invitation to unearth intergenerational silences and connect to Maya cosmology, affirming it and creating a safe space for people interested in learning about their Indigenous roots. We can liberate ourselves from our collective grief by visiting the altar or at least feel in the community having a monument in the middle of the plaza that reminds us of all the multiple atrocities the state of Guatemala has committed, countering hegemonic narratives of forgetting.

Body Mapping

The Plaza de las Niñas symbolizes embodied transformative memory as the families' stories and memories of the girls remain on the altar for visual storytelling. Another aspect of transformative embodied memory came about through the personal and collective body maps of *8 Tijax* and the girls' family members. I organized a body mapping workshop in Guatemala in August 2022 with financial support from a graduate research grant from the University of Oregon's Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies. I could go back to Guatemala for a second time to complete my fieldwork and reconnect with *8 Tijax* and the mothers for this workshop that took us two months to organize. Twenty mothers, along with four members of 8 Tijax participated in the body mapping workshop.

To do the work of healing from intergenerational traumas of *susto* (soul loss) that have been internalized over generations due to colonial state logics of racism and projects of de-indigenization, a focus on creating spaces of ceremony is necessary (Medina & Gonzalez, 2019; Zepeda, 2022) Throughout the Americas, women's bodies, specifically Indigenous women's bodies, have been brutally oppressed. Cabnal (2010) passionately insisted that our bodies are our first territories, and to reclaim our bodies and territory, transformative healing work must start inward and move outward. Goeman (2013) articulated as follows:

> Colonialism is not just about conquering Native lands through mapping new ownerships, but also about the conquest of bodies, particularly women's bodies through sexual violence, and about recreating gendered relationships. Thus, making Indian land and territory required a colonial restructuring of spaces on various scales. (p. 33)

The mothers of the 56 girls and members of 8 Tijax confront intergenerational trauma through historical patriarchal violence and now through carrying the emotional loss of the Guatemalan

girls by the state. To organize the body mapping workshop, intimate relationships were built to foster a sense of trust, accountability, and reciprocity among everyone involved in the process.

Indigenous scholars contend that relationships and relational accountability are key notions in Indigenous ontologies and research paradigms (Leeuw et al., 2012; Smith, 2002; Wilson, 2009). As such, decolonial geographers emphasize the need to situate their embodied positions about the spaces they inhabit through an accountable practice committed to decolonization and liberation struggles (Daigle & Sundberg, 2017; Daigle, 2018; Ramírez, 2018). As Leeuw et al. (2012, p. 188) suggested, nurturing relational accountability must go beyond researchers and research participants or institutional spaces of research evaluation to include friendships, networks of relationships, and other spaces where research and researchers "are themselves constituted." Decoloniality is thus an unfinished interactive project. To decolonize is to look within and undo/rework the colonizing oppressive structures from the inside out and then look again from the outside in (Segalo et al., 2015, p. 343)

Body mapping as a method has been utilized in disciplines like social work, psychology, anthropology, and geography to examine the body as a unit of analysis about external phenomena affecting and influencing the body (Gastaldo et al., 2018). For my study, I used body mapping in connection to the theoretical emancipatory framework of cuerpo-territorio to guide my methodological approach and workshops. To ensure that *Cuerpo-Territorio* remained relevant and attuned to the new political possibilities arising from the new context, I paid careful consideration to the new dynamics at play. As a result, I was traveling and moving with the cuerpo-territorio framework transnationally from Los Angeles to Guatemala and vis-a-vis bridging the South-North relationships and knowledge.

Organizing Body Mapping Workshop

The body mapping workshop in Guatemala was the second workshop I organized because the first body mapping workshop took place in Los Angeles with GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-LA the previous year, which I discuss in the following chapter. I was aware this workshop would be different, not only because of the different location, which I was not as familiar with, but also because it would be my first time meeting the family members of the 56 girls. However, with the help and support of *8 Tijax,* the process turned out to be collaborative by collectively approaching the workshop. We had three Zoom meetings to check in and organize the workshop, which entailed choosing a location, calling the mothers, and getting recommendations about the structure of the workshop. I also had to keep in mind that some of the mothers were disappointed, exhausted, and frustrated carrying heavy *cargas* that they did not want anything to do with the case anymore. But, other mothers are interested in receiving healing through talking about their concerns.

To invite the mothers to the workshop, *8 Tijax* created a flyer in Spanish with its details. When I arrived in Guatemala, I visited where the workshop would take place—Casa Cultural Q'anil is in Zona 1, close to the Plaza de las Niñas. It is a familiar location for the mothers because they usually meet there for International Women's Day, and is a community space. I was able to find herbs at Guatemala's Central Market, like rue, rosemary, and eucalyptus, that, from my herbalist knowledge, I know are for energy, cleansing, and welcoming new beginnings. I also bought sunflowers and roses, as sunflowers have become a symbol representing the 56 girls. The herbs and the flowers would be placed on an altar in the middle of the workshop.

On the workshop day, 20 family members who brought their children were in attendance. Two psychologists supervised the children in a separate room where they would play and do arts

and crafts while the family members were involved in the body mapping workshop. The families travelled from outside the capital. They traveled from Escuintla, Chimaltenango, Villa Nueva, Jutiapa, and Esquipulas. These regions are about two hours from the capital. Still, for many families, this workshop meant an *encuentro* (gathering) to meet again and activate energy to continue their search for justice.

The body mapping workshops have become a sacred space for participants. A sacred space was created by lighting a candle, burning some sage and copal to cleanse the space and energy, and doing breathing exercises to initiate the workshop. Creating a space where suffering can be heard and shared is essential for the self to be reclaimed. As Chicana feminist, Lopes (2019) said:

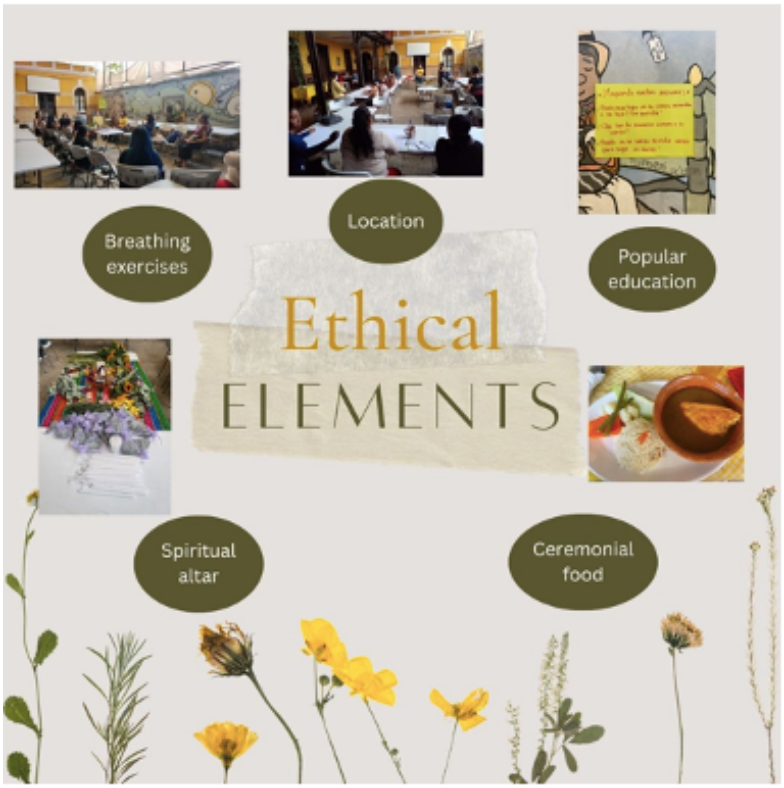
> For those who carry in their bodies, minds, and spirits the visceral pain of knowing that their own story is viewed as unworthy of description or attention, such narrative spaces can be sacred, as listening and responding is central to the power of narrative. (p. 10)

I also borrowed from Sweet and Escalante (2017) as they created a protocol of ethics and safety when conducting the body mapping workshops. In my workshops, I integrated "ethical elements" (see Figure 21) that together have created a safe and holistic environment. These elements are: Placing a spiritual altar in the middle of the circle, doing breathing exercises and body movements, intentionally choosing a community-based location, popular education providing questions and materials for the participants, and ceremonial food. For this workshop, we ate a traditional Maya dish known as pepian. Pepian is one of the oldest dishes in the Guatemalan cuisine. Ingredients include Roma tomatoes, chiles, sesame and pumpkin seeds, cilantro, corn tortillas, onions, achiote, and cinnamos. I was instructed that pepian is usually eaten during family gatherings and parties. Combining all the elements reminded me of

Indigenous philosophy based on the web of life. They were all interconnected with land, natural elements, animals, and nature, which also integrates the relationship with cuerpo-territorio.

Figure 21

Ethical Elements for Body Mapping Workshop



Individual Body Maps

I asked the participants the following questions to help them draw their bodies and places they felt safe and unsafe:

i. In what part of your body do you remember your daughter or loved one?

ii. What types of memories come to your body?

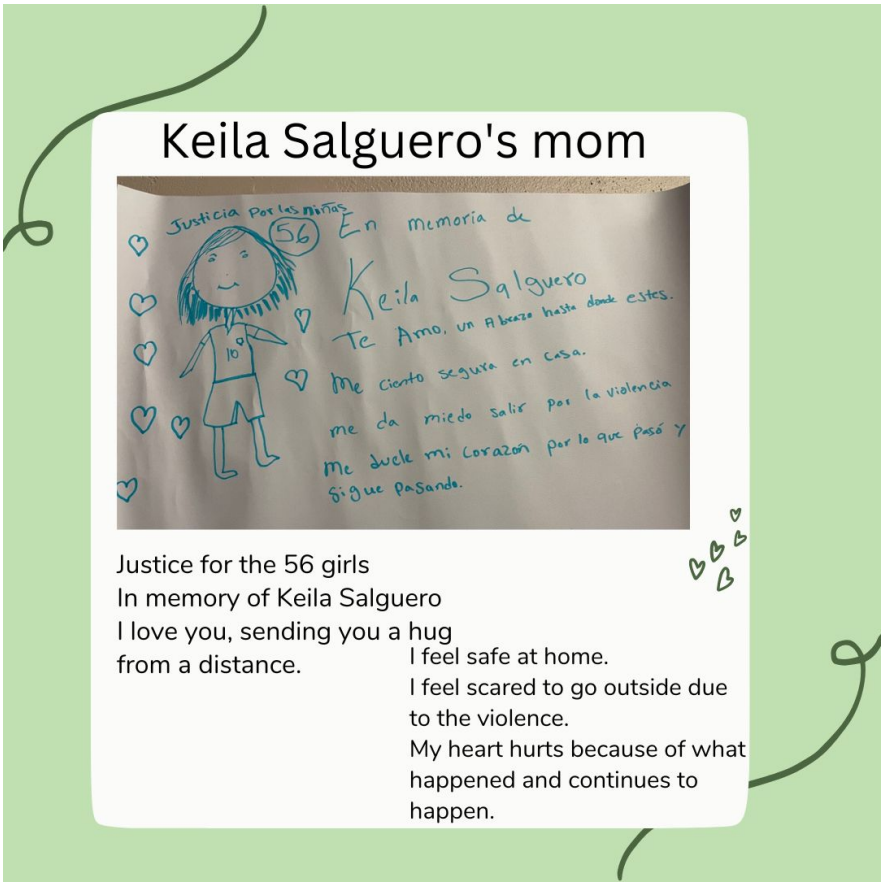
iii. And where in your body do you need to heal to continue the search for justice?

Maps have been used as tools of colonization for exercising power and violence. However, maps can also be tools of transformation and resistance. Inspired by Sweet and Escalante (2017), who also used body and community mapping with immigrant women from Mexico, they said, “Maps as storytelling tools reinforce the collectivity among those involved in their making: Body and community mapping can be used as practices of transformation, self-consciousness, and decolonization” (p. 599).

This workshop was different because we dealt with trauma and heavy emotions. However, the space created for the families invited them to express their feelings, cry, laugh, and talk about their daughters. Instead of drawing their bodies, many of the mothers drew their daughter’s bodies to reconnect and remember their daughter’s favorite colors, personalities, favorite food, etc. The following are individual body maps (see Figures 22, 23, 24, and 25) reflecting embodied memory, territory, and healing questions and themes. I analyzed these body maps because the mothers and family members elaborated on their responses. Compared to the body maps of GMR-LA, the body maps of the mothers were not as detailed, and this can be due to educational levels or even feeling uncomfortable expressing themselves on a piece of blank paper. Therefore, this workshop consisted more of sitting in a circle and having a *platica* (Morales et al., 2023) to discuss their emotions and get to know each other. However, themes their body maps reflected were being scared to go out due to increased violence against women and remembering their daughters and their pain.

Figure 22

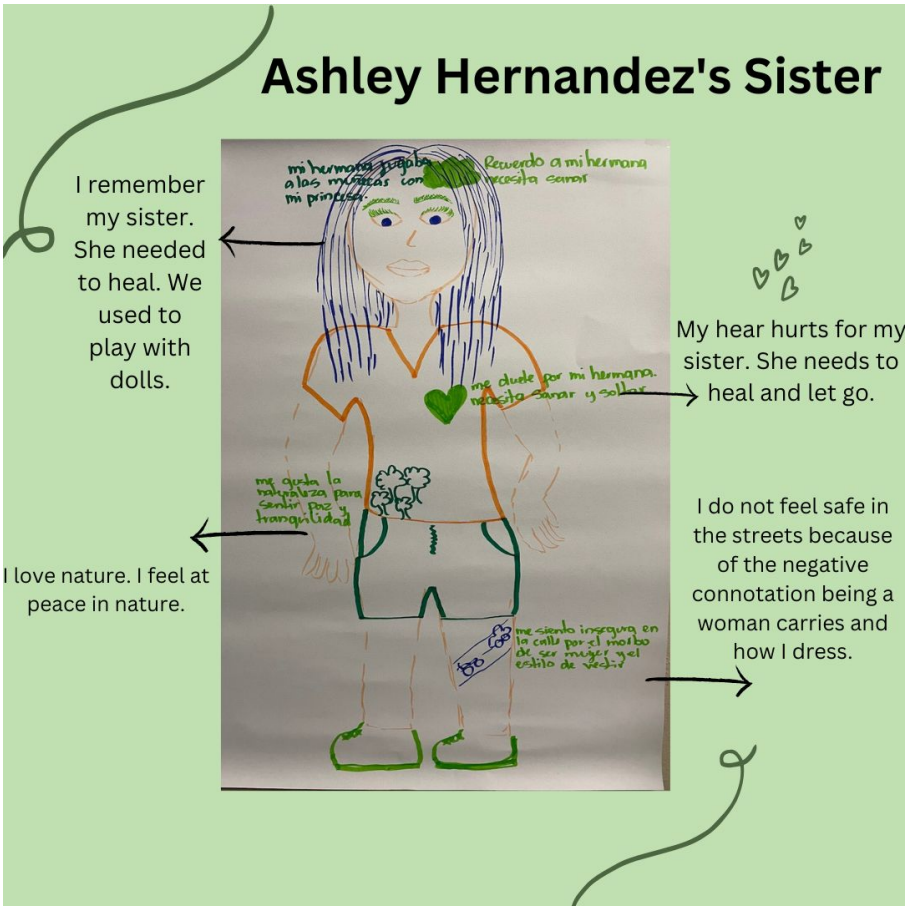
Keila Salguero's Mom Body map



For example, in this body map, the mother of Keila Salguero drew a young girl who, from the number in her t-shirt, seems that she was 10 years old. Instead of drawing her body, the mother chose to draw her daughter's body, and many of the body maps posters looked like letters to their daughters. The mother wrote, "Justice for the 56 girls. In memory of Keila Salguero. I love you, sending you a hug from a distance." The mother's suffering is related to her daughter but also to a collective grief as she added "Justice for the 56 girls" and that her heart was in pain because of what continues to happen.

Figure 23

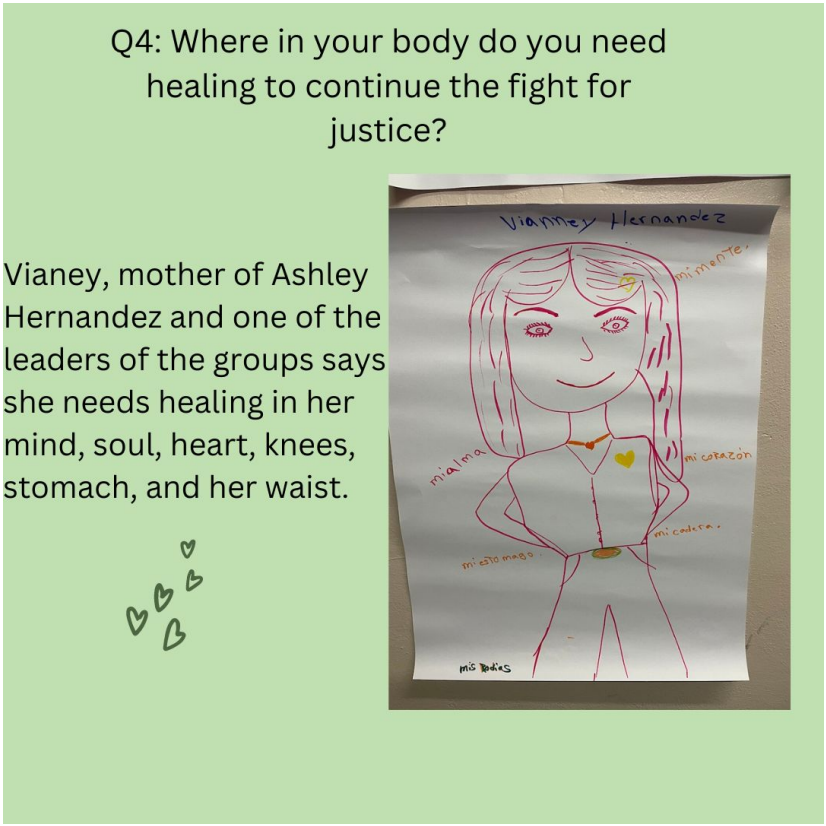
Asheley Harnandes's Sister Body map



Everyone's individual body map looked different, and many wrote letters, and drew their daughters, but others like, this body map, drew their complete body, demonstrating the places in her body that store memory or hurt because of the pain of losing her sister. Her legs had a drawing of the streets saying, "I do not feel safe in the streets because of the negative connotation being a woman carries and how I dress." The participant used the word *morbo*, a word in Spanish to denote an illness, something unattractive; in this case, for her, the streets are plagued with *morbosidad*, negativity against the women's bodies. One of the questions for the body maps was, where do you feel unsafe? Many drew the streets, hospitals, the police, and even Hogar Seguro as a place where they dislike visiting and brings them horrible memories.

Figure 24

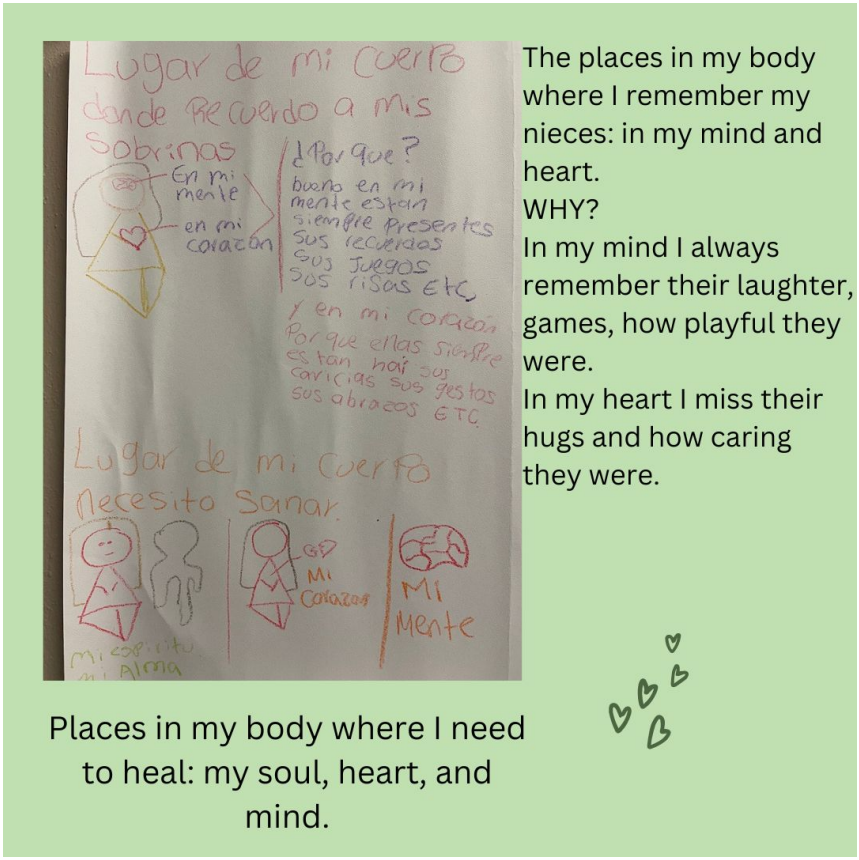
Individual body maps Reflecting Embodied Memory, Territory, and Healing Questions and Themes



The last question I posed to the group was, where in your body do you need healing to continue the fight for justice? Vianey Hernandez's body map was very interesting in the way the body is standing, very proud and looking forward. But she wrote that she needed healing in many body parts like her mind, heart, knees, stomach, and waist. Carrying individual and collective grief for Vianey has been painful in the past five years as she is also the spokeswoman of the group and is one of the mothers who is persistent, committed, and attends the court hearings and all the activities related to the 56 girls' case.

Figure 25

Individual Body maps Created at the Body map Workshop in Guatemala in August 2022



The workshop was intergenerational in the sense that the participants represented different generations. The younger generations completed the body maps that reflected the questions with a focus on their own body. Compared to the mothers' body maps that drew their daughter's bodies to reconnect to them, the body maps of others mothers carried pain, sorrow, and memory, illustrating their emotional pain and anguish. Some body maps also resembled a love letter to their daughters, expressing words of love and care; words that perhaps the mothers could not express to their daughters in the material realm, but now they can express it.

Collective Body Map

In addition to their maps, the group created a collective body map (see Figure 26) representing the group's identity. I asked the group to share words representing them as a collective, such as memory, intergenerational, justice, etc. However, it was interesting to observe how the group also focused on how the state identified them, and they wrote words on the body like: "Guilty Mothers" and "Prostitutes" and how they felt about the state: "*Repudio al Estado*" which would translate as a rejection towards the state. The state has created a homogenous image of the mothers, stereotyping them and the girls as criminals. As Cacho (2012) said, "Stereotypes are degrading because they link race to other categories of devaluation, just as race is redeemed when linked to other properties of personhood universalized as socially valuable" (p. 3). By writing the words on the body, the group experienced some type of purging and cleansing, acknowledging their feelings towards the state. They remapped who theywere by expressing words like liberation, solidarity, and strength.

Figure 26

Collective Body map Created at the Body Mapping Workshop in Guatemala in August 2022

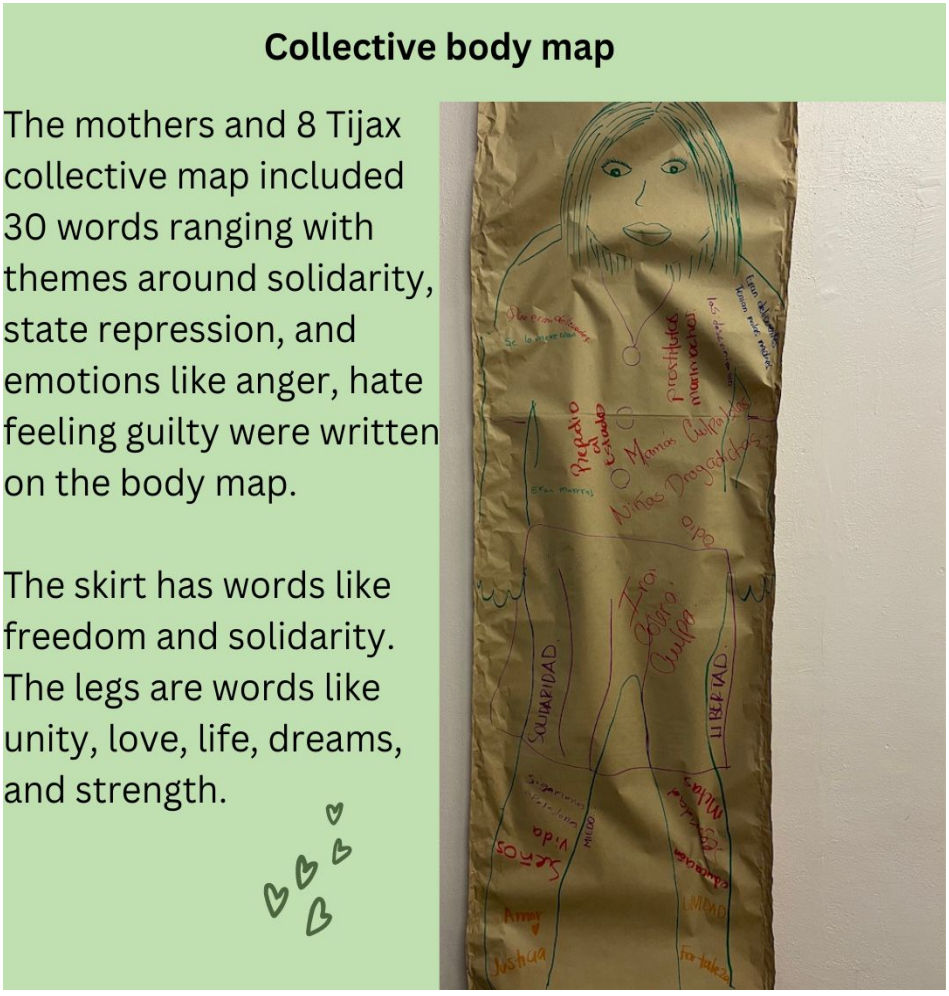


Table 1

List of Words Connected to Themes of State Narratives Towards Mothers and Girls, Collective Identifications, and Positive Affirmations on the Collective Body map

Collective body map phrases	English translation	Theme & Body Part
Ninas drogadictas	Drug addicts	**State narratives against the girls and mothers/ Chest**
Delincuentes	Criminals	
Mareras	Gang members	
Mamas culpables	Guilty mothers	
Se lo merecian	They deserved it	
Prostitutas	Prostitutes	
Tenian malas madres	The girls had bad mothers	
		Collective emotions/Stomach and Pelvis areas
Odio al estado	Hate the state	
Colera	Anger	
Culpa	Guilt	
Solidaridad	Solidarity	
Libertad	Freedom	
Miedo	Fear	
		Positive affirmations/legs
Sigamos apoyando	Let's support each other	
Amor	Love	
Suenos	Dreams	
Educacion	Education	
Unidad	Unity	
Fortaleza	Strength	
Justicia	Justice	

I divided the words and themes into three categories (State narratives, collective emotions, and positive affirmations), including the body parts (chest, stomach and pelvis area, and legs) the words were written on. The state narratives against the mothers and girls included words like, "drug addicts," "criminals," and "they deserved it." These are words/phrases written by the group demonstrating the messages the state and the media have constructed about the mothers and the case. It also felt like a purge the family members were doing, taking out all the

cargas, as Vianey mentioned, to feel lighter and with less stress. On the stomach and pelvis area collective emotions like, “hate the state,” “guilt,” and “solidarity” were written, identifying how, they felt about the state but also how they felt as mothers, and “guilt” was written twice on state narratives and on the collective emotions. Lastly, the category of positive affirmations written on the legs has words like, “love,” “dreams,” and “strength,” emphasizing that these are affirmations they need to continue in their search for justice. The collective body did not have feet, which to me was interesting because feet symbolize journey, path, and moving forward, but as the mothers demonstrated in this workshop, they all feel exhausted. They were not getting any answers from the state.

Getting a volunteer to lie on the floor to have their silhouette traced to represent a body was harder than drawing their body maps sitting down. In the end, a younger generation member volunteered, which made her feel confident and proud for volunteering for the collective. Comparing the collective body map to the individual maps, it was interesting to observe that the group’s body map empowered the participants while the individual body maps represented grief and fear of violence and the state. Focusing on the collective body map and bringing the group together made it significant to finalize the retreat with a radical energy to move forward and continue the search for justice. At the end of the workshop, everyone held hands in a circle and was very grateful as they released many emotions. They also shared how the type of workshop helped them to come together as they know the search for justice is not easy, and it will be a long process.

AIDS Memorial Quilts: Body maps as memorials

The intention of the body mapping workshops was to create a sacred space for the mothers to feel comfortable expressing and reclaiming themselves to allow space for

remembrance. The body map workshop lightens up the *cargas* the mothers hold and the work they continue to do to never forget. The body maps created by family members of the 41 girls reminded me of the AIDS memorial quilts. Sturken (1997) delved into a discussion about the AIDS memorial quilts as an analytic to the conversation around the nation's cultural memory, stating:

> The quilt has facilitated and inspired the production of cultural memory, the sharing of personal memories to establish a collectivity; it has also brought the politics of identity, gender, race, and sexuality to the surface and spurred debate over contested notions of morality and responsibility. (p.185)

At the onset of the AIDS epidemic and the struggle for gay public spaces in the 1980s, people began creating quilts to honor the life and journey of friends and family members dying of AIDS. The quilt has been exhibited throughout the world and includes more than 40,000 panels from 29 countries, yet it represents a mere fraction of those who have died of AIDS. In its epic size, it attempted to create a visual image of the enormous proportions of the AIDS epidemic and it's potential to kill millions of people worldwide (Sturken, 1997, p. 183). Although the body maps are not of epic size and scale, the maps are also unique and have also created a particular kind of community among the families in which loss and memory are actively shared.

What stands out about each quilt are the stories, testimonies, and creations family and friends created to remember their loved ones. The body maps function as testimony stating quite simply that this person was here (Sturken, 1997, p. 189). In addition, many of the families did not accept their loved ones, and creating a quilt transformed their relationship, and it was a sense of guilt cleansing and rebuilding the relationship. The mothers had also stated being angry at

their daughters for running away from home, and as a punishment, they placed them at the shelter. By creating the body map it was also a way of reconnecting with their daughter and naming them by remembering their special interests. As Sturken (1997) noted the quilt [and body maps] connote continuity of life, which, in the case of Guatemala, the state truncated the girls' lives. The AIDS memorial quilts and body maps are part of a transformative memory of reclaiming the selves of victims through memory, storytelling, and creativity.

Concluding Thoughts

Coyoxaulhqui: Geographies of Selves

> Coyolxauhqui is a symbol for both the process of emotional psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of revisioning and remembering. (Zepeda, 2022, p. 63)

Doing memory work is being in between the spaces of life and death. Not only was I in contact with individuals who were fighting for justice for their loved ones, but I was also in constant thought and reflection about the 41 girls. Approaching and engaging with this research of remembering and spiritual altars made me realize that I was inviting the spiritual realm to be close to me and my spirit. The transformative memory is also about allowing ourselves to reconnect with our bodies, land, and all our relations. The body maps also connected to Chicana feminism spiritual, activism, and analysis of the Aztec moon goddess Coyolxauhqui. Coyolxauhqui, as a symbol, represents our fragmented selves, and I saw it with the body maps of how the Guatemalan state, even after the girl's death, continues to inflict emotional violence on the families. Coyolxauhqui medicine affirms our existence in time, and as broken as we are, we can go through a transformation and recreate ourselves. The image of Coyolxauqhi (see Figure

27) today has been used by Chicana feminist scholars (first developed by Gloria Anzaldua) to speak about the ongoing lifelong process of healing from traumatic tragedies that fragment, dismember, or wound the self. The concept has been used in various contexts where healing is necessary, such as identity, cultural, educational, and even historical, making Coyolxauhqui as important and relevant as it was centuries ago (Anzaldua, 2015; Zepeda, 2022).

Figure 27

Image of Coyolxauhqui Aztec Moon Goddess

Coyolxauhqi energy and medicine invite us to come back to ourselves as marginalized or fragmented as we are so that we can still heal. As Gloria Anzaldua theorizes in Geographies of Selves:

> For racialized people, managing losses, the trauma of racism, and other colonial abuses affect our self-conceptions, our very identity, fragmenting our psyches and pitching us into states of nepantla. During or after any trauma (including individual and group racist

> acts), you lose parts of your soul as an immediate strategy to minimize the pain and cope. (Zepeda, 2022, p. 87)

Therefore, the altars and body maps transform into a spiritual ceremony weaving in care, love, and harmony for a temporal moment of healing ourselves and our community. Chicana spiritual feminist Zepeda (2022) examined Indigenous ceremonies stating:

> Ceremony and the formation of artwork as queer decolonial archives as methods of decolonization, ways to guide us home: Remembering through visual storytelling as a form of transformation. Creating a path toward decolonizing knowledge and critically regaining ancestral memory by acknowledging the traumas that have separated people from who they are and led to disconnection with the land and all their relations. (p. 86)

Iwas aware that the body map workshop won't bring justice to the mothers of the 41 girls, but it brought them care and moments of peace to gain strength to continue the search for justice. By naming the girls and creating a ceremony, we can continue the work for a permanent memory through counter-narratives and cartographies of healing.

CHAPTER V: GUATEMAYA MUJERES EN RESISTENCIA-LOS ANGELES (GMR-LA): BUILDING GENDERED MEMORY THROUGH A FEMINIST PRAXIS OF CARE

It was Saturday, March 4th, 2023, at 8:30 am, and I arrived at the First Unitarian Church on 8th and Westmoreland in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Grassroots collective *GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia- Los Angeles* (GMR-LA) was hosting their first two-day event, *Jornadas de Formacion Colectiva*, based on political education for the volunteers of the group and new potential members. The group invited four participants (Ruth del Valle, Victoria Cumes, Emma Chirix, Ph.D., and Numa Davila) based in Guatemala who identify as Maya, Ladina, and Queer and who play a community-based political role in Guatemala's culture. Magda, who identified as a Guatemalan political refugee, was one of the co-founders of the group. She was standing next to Diana, who was a new member, and they were setting up the technological devices to access Zoom because the meeting would be hybrid. Xuana, who identified as Maya K'iche', arrived after me, and I helped her set up our spiritual altar with candles, bay leaves, and photos of martyrs like Berta Caceres, who was a Lenca environmentalist from Honduras, and of the 41 Guatemalan girls to honor their names and continue building cultural memory in the diaspora. As we set up, others walked into the room, and we greeted one another while still wearing masks. This was GMR-LA's first hybrid event because the group began meeting and organizing remotely in 2020 due to the pandemic. Once the majority of the participants were in the room, Xuana invited everyone to hold hands and stand in a circle in order to start with the nawal[15] of

[15] The Nawal is the energy, spirit, and strength of beings and elements of nature, they are represented by the very elements of nature like the sun, moon, rain, air, water, plants, and animals because, in the Mayan thought, everything is alive. Each day of the Maya calendar has a specific Nawal as does each person based on their birthday.

the day. One of the group's values was the connection with Maya cosmovision[16] and the reintegration of ancestral traditions into the group and new generations, and they did this by always starting with a short spiritual ceremony to ground everyone in the room.

I began this Chapter with a reflection on an ethnographic encounter at GMR-LA's event that took place earlier this year (2023) to demonstrate the group's organizing principles (women empowerment, cultural memory, social justice, and transnational relationships) and their dedication to a larger social-political movement of Central Americans in the diaspora. GMR-LA was co-founded by three Guatemalan women in 2018 to provide a supportive space to Guatemalan migrant women, especially recent Maya women migrating from Guatemala. Xuana Mulul *GMR-LA* member shared the following and translated in English:

> *Vengo de un proceso organizativo en Guatemala. Tenía toda la intención de hacer algo similar aquí en Los Ángeles con organizaciones para mujeres y organizaciones sociales. Estaba motivada para ver lo que podíamos hacer. Las primeras personas con las que hablé fueron Sandra y Magda para ver qué podíamos hacer juntas. Así nació la idea de reunirnos en un espacio donde pudiéramos discutir situaciones sobre mujeres. Notamos que la situación para las mujeres aquí es difícil, como las tareas asignadas a ellas y estar fuera del país lo hace más difícil.*
>
> I came from an organizational process in Guatemala. I had every intention to do something similar here in Los Angeles with organizations for women and social organizations. I was motivated to see what we could do. The first people that I spoke with were Sandra and Magda to see what we could do together. That is how the idea was born to get together in a space where we could discuss situations about women. We noticed the

[16] Cosmovision is the Maya people's form of spirituality. It is a process that allows us to experience life and be part of the whole. The connection to the world and cosmos are the basis of the action, thoughts, and sentiments in life and of life (Mayan League, 2023).

situation for women here is difficult, like the chores assigned to them, and being out of the country makes it more difficult

Another group component was to create a space to discuss cultural, social, and political issues affecting migrant women in the U.S. and Guatemala. GMR-LA is a small multi-generational grassroots collective composed of eight active women with diverse backgrounds who are from or have roots in Guatemala. The group is also connected to a network of on-the-ground organizations in Los Angeles working with migrant communities while simultaneously connected to Mexico and Central America. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the group had to think of alternative ways to connect and continue raising awareness about survivors' memories of the 36-year (1960-1996) Guatemalan war and produce cultural memory. Instead of seeing the pandemic as a limitation, the group continued to organize and meet virtually. At the same time, the pandemic did not stop the repression in Guatemala or migration; on the contrary, during the past two years, Guatemala has experienced increased state-sponsored violence, political dissent, gender-based violence, and Maya migration to the United States. These social issues motivated the group to create events, vigils, art performances, and solidarity gatherings. The group intends to use their energy, capacity, motivation, and attention to specific campaigns. It provided quality, genuine care to the GuateMaya community through what I identified as a feminist praxis of care (Cahill et al., 2010). GMR-LA collective members identify with intersecting identities: queer, Indigenous, GuateMaya, disabled, first-generation scholars, facilitators, mothers, organizers, and survivors of the Guatemalan war (1960-1996). They are regaining agency by sharing their *testimonios* of their historical memories of resistance and the war.

One of the ways I saw the group challenging state hegemonic narratives from Guatemala to Los Angeles was by actively engaging in place-making (Gibson & Burstow, 2022) and reclaiming public places to educate the public about the reality faced by Maya women in Los Angeles and Guatemala, especially on issues like feminicide. I will further develop this in the chapter's Place-Making: Los Angeles section.

The research questions the chapter aims to discuss are how 8 Tijax and GMR-LA contest hegemonic state narratives? When and how? How do the groups engage in the process of healing cartographies transnationally? And how can their efforts for healing become a liberatory praxis for other feminist groups across the Americas? Through a qualitative research process with IRB approval, I interviewed 15 women who were part of or are in close relationship with the collective work of GMR-LA. In addition, I facilitated a body-mapping workshop with seven collective participants. I used digital ethnography by observing the group's social media platforms and communicating on WhatsApp to learn more about the collective and how they form cultural memory across borders.

To analyze and provide a discussion to the above questions, I am informed by Central American scholars' work on memory (Alvaradoet al., 2017; Hernandez, 2017; Lovato, 2020; Osuna, 2017), intersectionality framework (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991;), and feminist emotional geographies (Gokariksel et al., 2021; Pile, 2009) to weave in the *testimonios* of GMR-LA participants. Through centering the testimonies of the collective, this chapter reflects on how the group produces cultural memory by organizing an annual event, *Jornadas de la Memoria* (Journeys of Memory), honoring the life of Luis de Lion, a Guatemalan poet who forcibly disappeared during the war years (1960-1996). The chapter is organized into three sections: (a) Guatemala's gendered migration, (b) Place-Making in Los Angeles, and (c)

embodied transformative memory, which discusses the data and analysis of the study through an explanation of the Journeys of Memory virtual event in 2022 and the body mapping workshop to examine the embodied transformative memory of Guatemalan women survivors of genocide.

Guatemala's Gendered Migration

Magda, the GMR-LA co-founder, shared the following during the interview and translated into English as:

> *Era para salir del país porque no había otra manera de proteger tu vida. Viste a tus amigos siendo secuestrados y desapareciendo, lo que significa que tú eras el siguiente. Mi esposo (compañero de vida) también fue perseguido. Lo que nos quedaba era salir del país. (Magda, cofundadora de GMR-LA, entrevista 2021)*
>
> It was to get out of the country because there was no other way to protect your life. You saw your friends getting kidnapped and disappearing, meaning you were next. My husband (life partner) was persecuted as well. What was left for us was to leave the country. (Magda, GMR-LA co-founder, interview 2021)

Economic interests from the United States (U.S.) and transnational corporations have altered Guatemala's migration patterns since the 1970s. Guatemalan studies scholars Jonas and Rodriguez (2014) explained that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, growing numbers of Guatemalans migrated as high levels of poverty and social and political turmoil pervaded Guatemalan society (p. 3). Central American scholar Padilla (2022) stated that "U.S. Central American population more than tripled (increasing from 354,000 to 1,134,000), mainly because of the unprecedented influx of Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees fleeing their countries of origin due to the era of Central American's revolutions (p. 3). The following years, many Guatemalan migrants headed North to the U.S. The U.S. government's statistical records indicated that the first significant wave of Guatemalan migration began in 1977. Maya migration

from Guatemala was part of a larger Indigenous migration northward that grew in the 1980s. However, Mayan migration transpired along a spatiotemporal dimension much older than the mestizo/ladino Northward migration experience (Jonas & Rodriguez, 2014). My research looked at both Maya and Ladina women migrants from Guatemala. Therefore, it was relevant to note the spatiotemporal difference between both groups and the common migration patterns that connected them within organizing, social, and cultural efforts, as we saw in the group formation of GMR-LA.

Economically, Guatemala has been a strategic geographical location to extract resources and build global markets. As discussed in Chapter 3 of the dissertation, in the early 1900s, monopoly corporations concentrated their commodities business in the region. One of the first corporations to invade the country was The United Fruit Company (UFC) with the support of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.), whose anxieties about its economic security led to its overthrow of the Jacobo Arbenz democratic government in 1954 and resulted in its support of a military dictatorship in Guatemala in the subsequent years. Friedet al. (1983) explained:

> The elements of that model, also introduced elsewhere in Latin America in the 1960s, are an economy dependent on imports from the United States; a government tightly controlled by the military; a security apparatus inspired by U.S. counterinsurgency specialists; and over this, the rhetoric, but emphatically not the practice, of democracy. (p. 83)

Guatemala, like many other Central American countries, is designed to produce raw materials and export, not just products but people, to the global North to expand capitalists' economic interests across the hemisphere. Although Central Americans continue to migrate, there is also a heightened xenophobia against the population due to how Central Americans are imagined in

U.S. political discourse, mainstream media, and cultural production over close to four decades (from the 1980s to 2020) (Padilla, 2022).

Informed by Speed's (2019) arguments of colonialism, settler colonialism, and neoliberalism, I situated Guatemala as a nation designed with settler colonial hierarchies and relationships intricately connected with neoliberal logic. Castellanos (2017) explained that settler colonialism as a concept has been difficult to translate or explain in a Latin American context. Castellanos (2017) stated, "It is a slippery concept to apply to Latin America where nation-building projects have framed *criollizacion*/creolization as 'an indigenizing process': We are left with the quandary of debating, who is a settler" (p. 777). Therefore, scholars of Latin America have relied on theories of "coloniality" (Quijano, 2000) to account to produce racialized power as a hegemonic and historical project. However, the logics of dispossession and elimination, which are key tenets of a settler colonial model, were not isolated to British imperialism; they were also central to Spanish and Portuguese imperial projects (Castellanos, 2017, p. 778). Consequently, as discussed in Chapter 1, settler colonialism's logic of dispossession was central to use in Guatemala to build a modern nation-state at the expense of land and people. As Speed (2019) stated:

> Neoliberalism, as an organizing logic and a set of practices and policies, has arguably been disastrous for everyone except the super-rich. Neoliberalism can be understood as the extension of liberal ideas of free market economies that underpin modern capitalism, ideas that have enjoyed significant dominance since the mid19th century. (p. 25)

In addition, settler colonialism functioned in Guatemala, first by imposing a colonial logic of racialization and then through stealing Maya land for modern state building (Castro& Picq, 2017; Stephen, 2022). Structural adjustment programs and economic dependency in

CAFTA-DR (Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement) are some modern examples that highlight the contradictions of the economic system, creating more wealth for the rich, exacerbating vulnerable conditions for the poor and forcing people to migrate north due to myriad of reasons (economic, state-violence, feminicide, intrafamilial violence).

GMR-LA members' migration decisions were due to economic hardships and the Guatemala state violence aggression against students, women, workers, and Indigenous populations during the war (1960-1996) and then after. Also, resistance to the nationalist ideology of the Guatemalan state forced thousands of Guatemalans into exile in the United States and other countries. There is extensive research in the social sciences, especially in geography (Nolin, 2006; Wright, 2011; Ybarra, 2018) and anthropology (Yarris 2017; Stephen, 2019; Speed, 2019), which examined the multi-layered conditions of gendered migrations, specifically for Central American women. Feminist geographer Nolin (2006) has written extensively on gendered migrations, explicitly focusing on Guatemalan women's experience in Canada. Nolin's research found that while women migrants found new freedoms and greater equality as women in Canada, others received a more significant restriction on their movement and participation in everyday society (Nolin, 2006, p. 33). In addition, Anthropologist Stephen's (2022) work on transborder territories and communities examined the reasons Indigenous women migrate stated:

> For Indigenous women, the decision to leave their territory is often taken in the context of multiple acts of violence that have in some places become normalized as part of community life. When the only possibility to survive for women and their children is to flee, that is exactly what they end up doing. Sometimes, they may attempt to access local or state institutions of the justice system. When they do, they encounter a particular logic

of subjectification that forces the fragmentation of their individual and social bodies. (p. 6)

Many of these scholars are interested in questions about post-conflict Guatemala and the meaning and making of community, identity, and transnationalism in the context of social disintegration in Guatemala and subsequent forced migration, displacement, and resettlement in countries like Canada and the U.S. It is critical to contextualize the migration experience of Guatemalan women because it relates to U.S. political and economic interventions. As the *testimonios* of my study demonstrated, the multi-layered decisions to migrate are not made by choice. Still, they are systemically forced (i.e., domestic violence, feminicide, economic hardships, inter-communal violence) as many of the women leave family, friends, and relationships behind in the hope of a better life in the U.S. (Abrego, 2014; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Macal 2015; Yarris, 2017). During one of the interviews with Xuana the topics of migration and family separation were brought up, and were as follows:

Researcher: ¿Todavía tienes familia en Guatemala?

Xuana: Sí, mi familia está allí. Vine sola. Mis hijos están en Guatemala. Tengo un caso de asilo abierto, pero no ha avanzado mucho. Pensé que mi caso avanzaría para que mis hijos pudieran estar aquí, pero no ha sucedido. Me considero un refugiado político.

Researcher: Do you still have family in Guatemala?

Xuana: Yes, my family is over there. I came alone. My kids are in Guatemala. I have an asylum case open, but it has not advanced much. I thought my case would advance so my kids could be here, but it has not happened. I consider myself a political refugee.

I choose to use migration over immigration in the context of gendered migration and the experiences of GMR-LA participants because the terms involve political and legal issues that are

tremendously politicized. My research challenged hegemonic terms such as immigration because, as Loyd and Mountz (2018) argued, the word immigrant erases the reality of circular migration, and migrant is meant to be expansive, encompassing long-term residents who are often understood as immigrants. The women in my study had a deep relationship with Guatemala and went back to see family members, attend conferences and political events about historical memory, and continue relationships with friends and family by providing job opportunities or through remittances (Abrego 2014; Yarris 2017).

Anthropologist Stephen's (2019, p. 131) concept of gendered embodied structures of violence denoted the historical and structural violence with embodied experience and analyzed the multi-layered scales of gendered migration. Interrelated forms of violence in places like Guatemala constitute domestic violence, militarized, para militarized, kinship, and masculinized governance and justice onto feminized bodies. Stephen used the history of militarization, paramilitarization, and its contemporary continuity in local gangs and security communities, to explore the historical depth of gendered embodied structures of violence. Stephen stated, "Their focus around masculinity control of local territory, policing through inflicting violence and intimidation on the bodies of those who oppose them, and use of actual and threatened sexual violence against women are defining characteristics" (p. 234). Gendered embodied structures of violence are also heavily experienced by migrant women in detention centers. As of October 2020, more than 1,246,000 backlogged cases were in the U.S. immigration court system, and 275,845 (22%) of them were of Guatemalan women (Stephen 2021). The year 2019 was marked by many asylum requests from women, children, and families, many of whom presented themselves to the U.S. Border Patrol or officials at a port of entry (Stephen, 2021, p. 129). Stephen's concept sheds light on why Guatemalan women are forced to migrate and the

historical and structural violence women in places like Guatemala continue to embody and resist in their migration and settlement journeys.

Border Securitization and Non-belonging

Central American scholars (Abrego, 2014; Alma et al., 2017; Lovato, 2020; Padilla, 2022) have written extensively about memory, place, Los Angeles, and migration and continue to analyze how Central American bodies are deemed invisible in the context of the U.S. nation formation. Padilla (2022) offered the concept of non-belonging to register both how U.S. and Central Americans (immigrants and subsequent generations alike) have been constituted as *others* who don't belong on a symbolic and material level and the related means by which US Central Americans and others affirm, unsettle, and counteract this exclusionary condition. One of the many ways the U.S. promotes xenophobia against Central American migrants is through border securitization and anti-immigrant policies.

In the U.S. imagination, Central Americans have frequently been cast as unequivocal dangers to the nation's sovereignty and as one more example of the perceived ills wrought by Latin American (undocumented) immigration: crime, violence, disease, a drain on resources, and demographic changes that are contributing to the racial and cultural devolution of the country (Padilla, 2022). In contemporary politics, Central Americans have been stereotyped as "rapists," "gang members," and "drug addicts," specifically in a Donald Trump speech about immigration in 2016. Although the stereotypes are directed toward Central Americans, the U.S. has always scapegoated migrant populations during policy changes for the US-Mexico border. For example, in 2010, Arizona passed the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (SB 1070) a strict anti-immigrant law. The Act allowed law enforcement to stop any vehicle

regardless of citizenship or immigration status. However, law enforcement racially profiled anyone that "looked" undocumented, attempting to deport migrants crossing through Arizona. The "show me your papers" law had rippled effects on migrants across the nation, especially in Arizona, as it inflicted fear, mental health issues, and isolation (Reznick, 2020).

Human geographers (Chatterjee 2009; Garmany, 2011; Gregory & Pred, 2007; Slack, 2015) studied the border and boundaries as it expands militarily with the construction of security regimes to deter migrants' mobility (Slack et al., 2016). Slack et al. (2016) unpacked the concept of security by attempting to understand the nation-state's stress of securing the border with military equipment, agents, and fortifications against human life. On one hand, in terms of security, academics have focused on the issue of "human security," emphasizing the rights to local, sustainable, and inclusive frameworks for livelihoods. However, this perspective has been abandoned by the U.S. due to the development of the terrorist security doctrine of post-September 11, 2001, leading to strong militarization in every sector of society (Slack et al., 2016, p. 10). On the other hand, feminist geopolitics examined security as subjective, arguing that "security" creates insecurity and violence for some, while protecting the rights and privileges of the elite in a racialized and gendered manner (Mountz, 2011; Slack et al., 2016; Smith, 2017).

For many Central American women, violence is not just experienced at home but also encountered in the migration journey and at the place of destination. In October of 2018, migrant caravans from Central America arrived in Mexico on their way to seek asylum and refuge in the U.S. Montes (2019) described the 4,000 people joining the caravan to reach the U.S.-Mexico border. Once the caravan reached its destination, people dispersed, and women, children, and the LGTBQ community became more vulnerable to the violence inflicted by border enforcement. For example, Maria Meza and her two children from Honduras had to run away from tear gas

thrown at them by U.S. agents at the U.S.-Mexico border. The tear gas thrown at them demonstrated the direct violence security regimes enact against mobile bodies even if children are present. While most of the world was outraged at this act, the U.S. President continued to claim that the tear gas fired at the migrant caravan was safe to media sources (Elfrink, 2018). Moreover, Claudia Patricia Gomez Gonzalez was shot by a border patrol agent at the Texas border. Claudia was only 20 years old and from San Juan Ostuncalco, Guatemala. She left her family behind and traveled 1,500 miles to reach the U.S. for better life opportunities (Chavez, 2018). Roxsana Hernandez, a transgender woman from Honduras, who arrived in one of the migrant caravans fleeing transphobia in her homeland, was detained by I.C.E. (Immigration Customs Enforcement) and died after five days due to the freezing temperatures in the I.C.E. detention facility (Green, 2018). Gender discrimination is apparent in Honduras, but the immigration policies of the U.S. also prove troublesome for transgender individuals as authorities refuse to help and often abandon them (Dey & McGrath, 2019).

As I concluded the dissertation, Vianey Hernandez, one of the mothers of the 56 girls, migrated to the United States to continue the search for justice, because the Guatemalan court hearings were repeatedly canceled, and she felt frustrated with the state of Guatemala and the legal process. Vianey migrated with her three children, making several stops along the way. Two members of *8 Tijax* also migrated before Vianey to Boston, Massachusets, escaping the death threats due to their close connection to the case of the 56 girls. The political repression, especially under the government of President Alejandro Giammattei, forced many land defenders, especially Indigenous women and journalists, to exile to Europe, South America, and the United States to escape persecution and violence (Escobar, 2023).

In addition to persecuting political dissent, the military perpetrated ongoing violence against Indigenous communities and heightened the abuse of women's bodies and their lands. For example, Marcela Chacach, a Kaqchikel woman from San Juan Sacatepequez, was violently abused by resisting and protecting her land from the company *Cemento Progreso*[17]. Cemento Progreso tried building a private road that passes through her land. Marcela, among other Indigenous women, had been resisting this company, and on December 6, 2022, a group of paramilitaries took over Marcela's home, violently cut off her hair, and threatened to kill her. Due to violent attacks like these, many Indigenous women are forced to migrate, leaving their family behind (Stephen, 2019). Marcela is now a political refugee and migrated to protect her life by asking for the support of the international community. I've been in communication with Marcela who is currently in Arizona but has interest in traveling to Los Angeles and finding work and a safe place to stay. With GMR-LA, we created a GofundMe fundraiser to get donations from *compañeros* in Los Angeles and across the U.S. to help Marcela's precarious situation. Vianey and Marcela's stories are representative of the current vulnerable situation of many women in Guatemala who are either defending their collective memory or their territory for a dignified life, alerting us all to the deep-seeded colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal systems that dominate the hemisphere. As Anthropologist Speed (2019) wrote, "Telling Indigenous women's stories is important because through them, the largely invisible social processes of colonization are rendered visible, and from a distinct ideological perspective" (p. 10). Although *8 Tijax* and *GMR-LA* symbolize seeds sprouting in fields of solidarity for Vianey and Marcela,

[17] Cemento Progreso was funded in 1899 by Carlos Federico Novella Klee and was one of the first cement companies in Latin America.

their ongoing feminist praxis of care and relationships transform into bridges and mountains of hope and liberation amidst settler colonial violence.

Therefore, border security is detrimental to all migrants fleeing persecution from their homelands. Still, unfortunately, women, children, and gender-nonconforming people continue to experience brutal violence from these regimes at different scales. These experiences engage with the intersections of race and gender in the structures that render migrants vulnerable to violence and death (Speed, 2019). Mollet and Faria (2018), Stephen (2021), and Speed (2021) recommended that gendered migration studies be linked to an intersectional framework that supports the explanation of the complexities of women of color, Indigenous peoples, and diverse people's social context.

Intersectionality is a concept that women of color (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw 1991) are pushing to be utilized in academia when analyzing racialized bodies, their geographical context, and the connection to complex realities and social justice. Mollett and Faria (2018) contended that intersectionality was, at its inception, already a profoundly spatial theoretical concept, process, and epistemology, mainly when read through careful and severe engagement with Black feminist thought. My overall research project demands a conceptual and geographic bridging of the scales of the body, groups, home, and state and acknowledging the diverse identities that all the participants bring and experience daily. Therefore, intersectionality is a theoretical framework for feminist analysis, and this chapter is foundational to describe the gendered memory feminist praxis of care GMR-LA is creating to challenge hegemonic state narratives. Intersectionality is an analytic tool to help understand power dynamics at different scales of analysis. As Collins and Bilge (2016) stated, "Intersectionality as critical praxis challenges the status quo and aim to transform power relations" (p.36). GMR-LA is not only

contesting masculinist dominant narratives in organizing spaces in Los Angeles but also in the ongoing conservative rhetoric of Guatemala state against feminist movements, land defenders, and memories of the war (1960-1996).

The subsequent sections of this chapter highlight distinct actions and events GMR-LA is involved in to challenge the U.S. and Guatemalan state narratives by building transnational feminist relations and an active gendered cultural memory. Macmanus (2020) used the analysis of gendered dynamics of memory work to examine how women have intervened in dominant historical memories of the Dirty Wars (Mexico and Argentina), not merely in what women's experiences reveal but how these experiences are articulated (p. 15). For my dissertation, gendered memory was built through the actions and *testimonios* women survivors of genocide shared in public and also through the everyday social behaviors the women in the group like, texting a meeting reminder or intentionally inviting other Maya women across different states to participate in the conversations and decision-making process of the group.

Guatemalan Refugees and Diaspora in Los Angeles

To leave one's country in search of refuge, to save one's family, and one's community meant facing the unknown and not knowing what would happen tomorrow or whether the place one had chosen as temporary refuge would open its doors and warmly welcome those fleeing terror and death (Rigoberta Menchu Tum).

The massive influx of Central Americans into Los Angeles occurred only very recently, during the 1980s, due to increased political violence combined with the economic declines of the region, and the city now has the largest concentration of Central Americans outside Central America. While the Mexican community has produced scholarly research and is fighting heavily for a share of power in Los Angeles, Central American voices remain largely silent (Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj-Lopez, 2017; Kohpahl, 1998). Data from the 2019 Migration Policy Institute report stated that there are approximately 1, 111, 000 Guatemalans (see Figure 28) living in the

United States, with the largest community residing in Los Angeles (Babich & Betalova, 2021). According to the 2021 Census, there are 214, 939 Guatemalans living in Los Angeles. However, this population is underrepresented in these statistics because many undocumented Guatemalans did not fill out census forms or were Mayas, given an ethnic or linguistic category to select (Estrada, 2017, p. 166). Maya studies scholars' analysis of the 2010 Census statistics stated that approximately 500,000 Mayas live and work in the United States (Estrada, 2017). Central American scholar Estrada (2017) studied the informal markets in Westlake Los Angeles as carrying embodied cultural memory and practices of Mesoamerican mercados. The researcher explained, "It is in this context of sociopolitical invisibility that Maya immigrants affirm their culture, memory, and knowledge as they navigate within a hostile national environment that needs their labor but rejects their presence" (p. 166). The issue of Central American invisibility is nuanced and layered with cultural and social differences from other ethnic populations like Mexicans or people who identify as Chicanos, especially in Southern California. Mayan scholars Batz (2014) and Boj-Lopez Boj (2017) wrote about what it is to be a Maya youth in Los Angeles and within the diaspora. Both scholars also wrote about challenging popular notions of what it means to be Latina/o and how it contradicts the Maya experience. By pushing Indigenous migrants to the margins actively incentivizes a form of self-policing whereby Indigenous migrants may strategically choose to hide their own practices or prioritize various forms of acculturation (Boj-Lopez, 2017, p. 204).

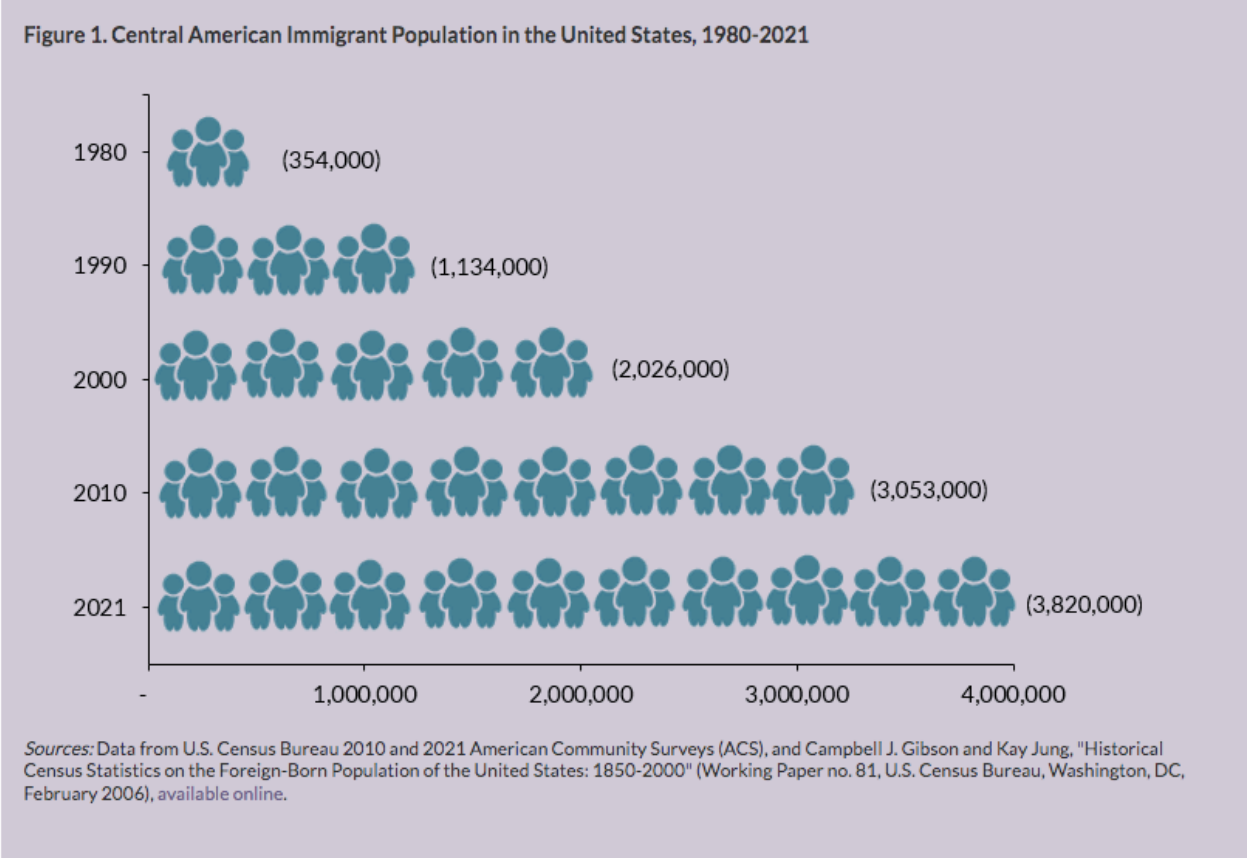
In the 1980s, during the height of Central American wars (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua) and U.S. CIA interventions, many Central Americans migrated internally and to Mexico, fleeing ongoing military violence. Migration to more distant countries such as the United States and Canada was less common, although a few thousand Central Americans lived in

cities such as Washington D.C., San Francisco, New York, and Miami at the end of the 1970s (Garcia, 2006, p. 30). As the wars escalated, these smaller northern populations served as magnets, encouraging further migration. The 1980 U.S. Census counted 94, 447 Salvadorans and 63, 073 Guatemalans; nearly half had arrived during the previous five years. The detention of undocumented Central Americans on the US-Mexico border also increased. In 1977, the first year for which such statistics are available, more than 7,000 Salvadorans and over 5,000 Guatemalans were apprehended (Garcia, 2006, p. 31). The United Nation's 1951 Refugee Convention[18] is a key legal document and defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." Central American people from Guatemala and El Salvador who were settling in the United States as refugees were not able to seek asylum due to restricted policies like the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) signed by President Ronald Reagan in November of 1986. This act introduced civil and criminal penalties to employers who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants or individuals unauthorized to work in the U.S. However, the act also offered legalization, which led to lawful permanent residence and prospective naturalization for undocumented migrants who entered the country before 1982. IRCA transformed immigration law in the United States as it also authorized securitization at the US-Mexico border, criminalizing immigration.

[18] https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-is-a-refugee.html

Figure 28

The Growing Central American Population in the U.S. from 1980-2021



Note: Adapted from Migration Policy Institute.

In the 1980s, the U.S. government discouraged Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees from seeking asylum in the U.S., often calling them "economic migrants" and implying that they were undeserving of protection in the U.S. Immigration. Judges who heard asylum cases would receive individual "advisory opinion letters" from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs regarding whether the applicant's fear of prosecution was well founded. The letters usually repeated the U.S. government's declarations that human rights records were improving and the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala were progressing

toward democracy (Stephen, 2022). These advisory opinion letters demonstrate the level of state hegemonic power and narratives to halt migration flows from specific countries in Central America that were targeted as communist and communist sympathizers in the era of Reaganomics. The *testimonios* of the women in this dissertation contradicted the letters because there was fear, grief, pain, and trauma occupying the bodies, land, and homes of the women survivors of genocide. Malkex and Magda stated the following in their *testimonies* and translated into English:

> *Tuvimos que huir de la violencia, así que mi tía nos llevó a vivir a las montañas. En el pueblo, los militares venían a violar a las mujeres. Nos fuimos y eran unas 5 mujeres. Fuimos a quedarnos entre los árboles cerca de nuestra casa. Teníamos miedo porque estaban matando gente, y sí, hubo violación de niñas y mujeres (Malkex).*
>
> We had to flee the violence, so my aunt took us to live in the mountains. In the village, the military would come to rape women. We left and it was about five women. We went to stay among the trees near our house. We were afraid because they were killing people, and yes there was the rape of girls and women (Malkex).
>
> *La realidad de pensar en eso es que no tienes la libertad de caminar por las calles sin pensar que alguien puede venir y robar tu vida y tu existencia. Lo que viene a la mente son esas famosas furgonetas blancas conducidas por los militares. Eran como la muerte persiguiéndote y nada más importaba. Recuerdo esa sensación de no ser libre, esa sensación de persecución del miedo y la soledad. Creo que algo que Guatemala y su gobierno hicieron con éxito hizo creer a la gente que los activistas que estaban tratando de ayudar a la gente estaban haciendo algo mal. Esto hizo que las familias y amigos tuvieran miedo de ayudar a estas personas porque pensaban que iban a poner su vida en riesgo (Magda).*
>
> The reality of thinking back to that is that you don't have the freedom to walk in the streets without having the thought that somebody can come and rob your life and your existence. What comes to mind are those famous White vans driven by the military. They were like death chasing you, and nothing else mattered. I remember that sensation of not being free, that sensation of persecution, fear, and loneliness. I believe that something

> that Guatemala and its government did successfully made people believe that activists trying to help the people were doing something wrong. This made families and friends become scared of helping these individuals because they thought they were going to put their lives at risk (Magda).

Magda's testimony reflected on the fear and danger of walking in the streets because, in an instant, you could lose your life. Her quote of how successful the state narrative of activists doing something wrong has stayed in the consciousness of the people in Guatemala and in the diaspora. To this date, families who experienced the terror and are still alive do not want to talk about the past because they fear betraying the state and experiencing political persecution and repression.

Amidst U.S. xenophobic policies, a growing sanctuary movement sprouted in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, areas with a growing concentration of Central Americans (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2005). Chicana/o Latino/a studies scholar Ochoa (2020) provided historiography about the sanctuary movement in Los Angeles for UCLA's History-Geography project[19], and he said that during the 1980s, many churches influenced by liberation theology took a stand to support the poor and worked to help the most exploited in society. Many of the churches, like the one mentioned in the introduction of this chapter (The First Unitarian Church) practiced that by opening their doors to migrants. Sociologist Hondagneu-Sotelo (2008) reminded us of Christian anti-borderism in support of Mexican migrants against Operation Gatekeeper in 1994. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2008) stated, "They (the faith-based groups) challenge

[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmNm3F8p8hY What was the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s a conversation with Professor Enrique Ochoa part of the UCLA History-Geography project

border policies that promote the suffering and deaths of undocumented migrants in transit: They posit Christian kinship as an alternative to this injustice" (p. 135).

In Los Angeles, there were several key actors in the sanctuary movement, individuals, and priests at the Plaza Olvera. Priest Luis Olivares was someone who had a social justice perspective and worked with the Mexican-American community and with Cesar Chavez and noticed the migration occurring from Mexico and Central America (Ochoa, 2020). A movement of sanctuary efforts grew in Los Angeles, where churches were working alongside social justice groups like the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). There were refugee centers like Central American Resource Center-Los Angeles (CARECEN) that started as refugee center, and over the years it transformed into a non-profit social service organization for recent Central American migrants. Central Americans created it with Mexican, White, and African-American progressive allies. There was also *Clinica Monseñor Romero* (named after El Salvador's Archbishop murdered in 1980), which was also created by Salvadorans in the diaspora and provided people with medical treatment. Those coming as victims of torture and war could receive medical aid as well as counseling services due to the trauma that people were fleeing (Ochoa, 2020). Another group was *El Rescate* (see Figure 29), formed in the 1980s, was a hub to support recent Central American migrants. The group was a center for solidarity and education to teach people in Los Angeles about these various groups. The 1980s sanctuary movement in Los Angeles is significant for the United States because various ethnic groups were coming together in solidarity to support Central Americans who were being denied refuge and sanctuary within the US laws and policies. Magda affirmed in her *testimony* about the support she and others received through the sanctuary movement and translated into English as:

> *Sí, llegamos durante el movimiento santuario. Fue una forma de ayuda para las personas que salieron de Guatemala y El Salvador. De hecho, cuando llegamos a los Estados*

Unidos, fue una de las principales formas de ayuda que tuvimos con algunas personas del movimiento santuario.

Yes, we arrived during the sanctuary movement. It was a form of help for people twho left Guatemalan and El Salvador. When we came to the United States, it was one of the main forms of help we had with some people from the sanctuary movement.

Figure 29

El Rescate Established in 1981 was the First Agency in the United States to Respond with Free Legal and Social services to the mass Influx of Refugees Fleeing the war in El Salvador

Note: Adapted from: http://www.elrescate.org/english/history/

Enrique Ochoa's historiography of the sanctuary movement in Los Angeles maps out some of the organizations in which some of the women in the study have been a part. Today,

GMR-LA connects with CARECEN and Clinica Monseñor Romero for services or to host an event at one of their conference rooms. The groups and organizations are centrally located in MacArthur Park and Pico-Union, neighborhoods with a high concentration of Central Americans. In 2022, the long corridor between 6th Street and Bonni Brae has been identified as the Maya center in L.A. that, allows people to acknowledge and celebrate Maya culture, language, small businesses, and food in the area.

Geographer Herrera (2022) coined the concept of *cartographic memory* to examine the community of Fruitvale Village in Oakland, inviting us to rethink how social movements mobilize to make changes in existing places. Herrera stated, "By reading space as an archive of social movement struggles, I learned that activists' participation in any form of activism stemmed from their desire to graph a different kind of world" (p. 7). This insight informed me to situate GMR-LA in the context and historiography of part of a lineage of groups that were fostering and activating sanctuary, safety, and a new home for Central Americans in Los Angeles. GMR-LA was part of this constellation of activism using a feminist praxis of care to regenerate and build memory in places like Los Angeles via a transnational feminist movement. The altars, art, protests, and embodied *testimonios* are what I identified as *cartographies of healing*, mapping out the sacred and safe spaces GuateMaya feminist groups created to heal from intergenerational and embodied trauma. The sections that follow explain how GMR-LA is active in place-making in Los Angeles through events at MacArthur Park by honoring Maya cosmology and using a body-territory perspective.

Place-Making: Los Angeles

Sandra Luna, a GMR-LA member, stated the following during the interview:

> *I'm 48, and I currently live in Pico-Union. I have grown up there most of my life, but when we got here, we lived in MacArthur Park. I know why we ended up there because it is a*

> *Central American hub, and my dad had friends who lived there. My dad's friends helped us settle in, and they guided us. My dad got here two years befor;, he had been saving money, and we were lucky we got visas. (Sandra Luna, GMR-LA member)*

Feminist geographer Massey (1994) reminded us of the important dimensions between a "sense of place" and the gendering of space. We can associate a "sense of place" with memory, stasis, nostalgia, home, and feeling a sense of safety. In addition, spaces and places, and our senses of them, are gendered through and through. Moreover, they are gendered in myriad different ways, which vary between cultures over time, and this gendering of space and place both reflects on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live (Massey, 1994, p. 186). The testimony by one of GMR-LA participants, Sandra Luna, described the time when her father was able to migrate to the U.S. after he saved enough money for the journey. It was also a time when men migrated from Guatemala to the United States and then brought their families later. They settled in MacArthur Park, which has become a hub for the Central American community, as Sandra Luna referred to it. Estrada's (2017) argument that the Maya diasporic identity be understood as constructed, reconstructed, performed, and articulated through various cultural and economic exchanges and movements that occur between the immigrants' place of origin (Guatemala) and their new residence, one of which is Los Angeles, is one that I borrowed to examine GuateMaya women in my research (p. 167). What was extraordinary about GMR-LA participants and their identity as GuateMaya women in the diaspora is that, place is a twofold process. The two fold process was braiding Los Angeles as a place of settlement and new home and Guatemala as the place of origin, which the group is extremely connected with by being in relationship with family members or activist groups transnationally. Furthermore, I saw GMR-LA creating and reclaiming place to contest

hegemonic state narratives, a process that Gibson and Burstow (2022) described as place-making.

Gibson and Burstow (2022) used place-making to explain how people recognize, define, and create the places they often call home, intentionally or not. There is an important distinction here between place-making as an official process (City Council decision-making) and the organic place-making activities (on-the-ground organizing) that influence a place incrementally, largely through individual agency (p. 67). I borrowed Gibson and Burstow's (2022) latter distinction about place-making as GMR-LA organized events for public mourning (Suarez Val, 2022) in the city without an official process, but by resisting and reclaiming public space where many Central Americans work, live, and migrate. Place-making activities have a role in reinforcing the longstanding resilience of a vernacular grassroots memorial against top-down pressures of contestation through government regulation (Gibson & Burstow, 2022, p. 67). GMR-LA refused to work with the city council or politicians because the group wanted to remain autonomous and grounded in their values through a collective decision-making process. Avoiding working with the city council official process has allowed for the group to make their own decisions and choices about events and who to collaborate with. Although, this process has its challenges, the group fundraises to keep its sustainability depending on itsmember's skills and creativity. Furthermore, as Blackwell (2023) argued, "Indigenous mobility and community organizing, labor circuits, and spiritual practices are forms of Indigenous place-making that are re-organizing socio-spatial relations in Los Angeles, creating geographies of indigeneity" (p. 232).

The following *testimonios* from two of the co-founders allude to the burnout and also the spirit of volunteerism GMR-LA fosters in all its activities because it is a grassroots community-

based group. Magda and Xuana represented the diversity of GuateMaya women and the alliances they were creating as Ladina and Maya women in the diaspora to forge community, trust, respect, and sisterhood solidarity in a landscape where there is a lack of resources and services for the Maya community.

> *Researcher: ¿Cómo se crean estos eventos? ¿O cómo participan las personas en la creación de estos eventos?*
>
> *Magda: En su mayor parte, somos voluntarios, pero también hay muchos agotamientos. Allí debe ser sostenibilidad. También vivimos en una comunidad bilingüe y multicultural. Necesitamos una representación del pueblo guatemayo. Nuestra comunidad es muy diversa, lo cual es muy hermoso porque ayuda con la creación de ideas sin que todos tengamos las mismas ideas. Venimos de diferentes orígenes, y eso nos enriquece. Es más fácil mantener ese tipo de dinámica.*
>
> *Xuana: GMR-LA es un proyecto muy reciente, y no somos muchos. Imaginamos hacer algo más grande, pero siempre enfrentamos problemas con el tiempo y los recursos. Lo hacemos gratis y en nuestro tiempo libre. No es como en Guatemala, donde podemos hacerlo todo el tiempo. Nace en nosotros para hacer este trabajo. Así que de alguna manera nos dificulta avanzar.*
>
> *Researcher: How do you create these events? Or how do people participate in creating these events?*
>
> *Magda: For the most part, we are volunteers but there is also a lot of burnouts. There must be sustainability. We also live in a bilingual and multicultural community. We need a representation of Guatemayan people. Our community is very diverse, which is very beautiful because it helps with the creation of ideas without us all having the same ideas. We come from different backgrounds, and it enriches us. It is easier to maintain that type of dynamic.*
>
> *Xuana: GMR-LA is a very recent project, and there are not many of us. We envision doing something bigger, but we are always facing issues with time and resources. We do it for free and in our free time. It is not like in Guatemala, where we can do it all the time. It is born in us to do this work. So that, in a way, makes it difficult for us to move forward.*

GMR-LA 2019 event in MacArthur Park, Los Angeles

Westlake/MacArthur Park (see Figure 30) is a residential and commercial area approximately two miles west of downtown Los Angeles. Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001) noted

that by the late 1970s, the area was transformed by Central Americans, particularly through the establishment of Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Honduran businesses like restaurants, markets, bakeries, and *pupusa* stands. These spaces provided recently arrived Central American immigrants with familiar foods. They needed resources like travel agencies, express couriers, newspapers, and news bulletins that maintained connections to the homeland for immigrants fleeing civil wars and state repression. During this time, MacArthur Park started to serve as an important space for rallies against human abuses in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras and calls to end U.S. military aid in those countries (Estrada, 2017, p. 169, 170).

I remember going to MacArthur Park as a child with my parents to eat at the Central American restaurants, and for some time, my aunt lived in an apartment by the park. There are many non-profits and cultural and community spaces now. On 3rd and Alvarado St., a community space known as *Centro Cultural Guatemalteco* was started by Guatemalan political refugees in the 1990s, and that is where I met many of the members of GMR-LA who used to be part of *Colectivo Guatemalteco*. MacArthur Park has become a symbolic place to meet and hold gatherings, protests, and vigils as public mourning (Suarez Val, 2022).

Figure 30

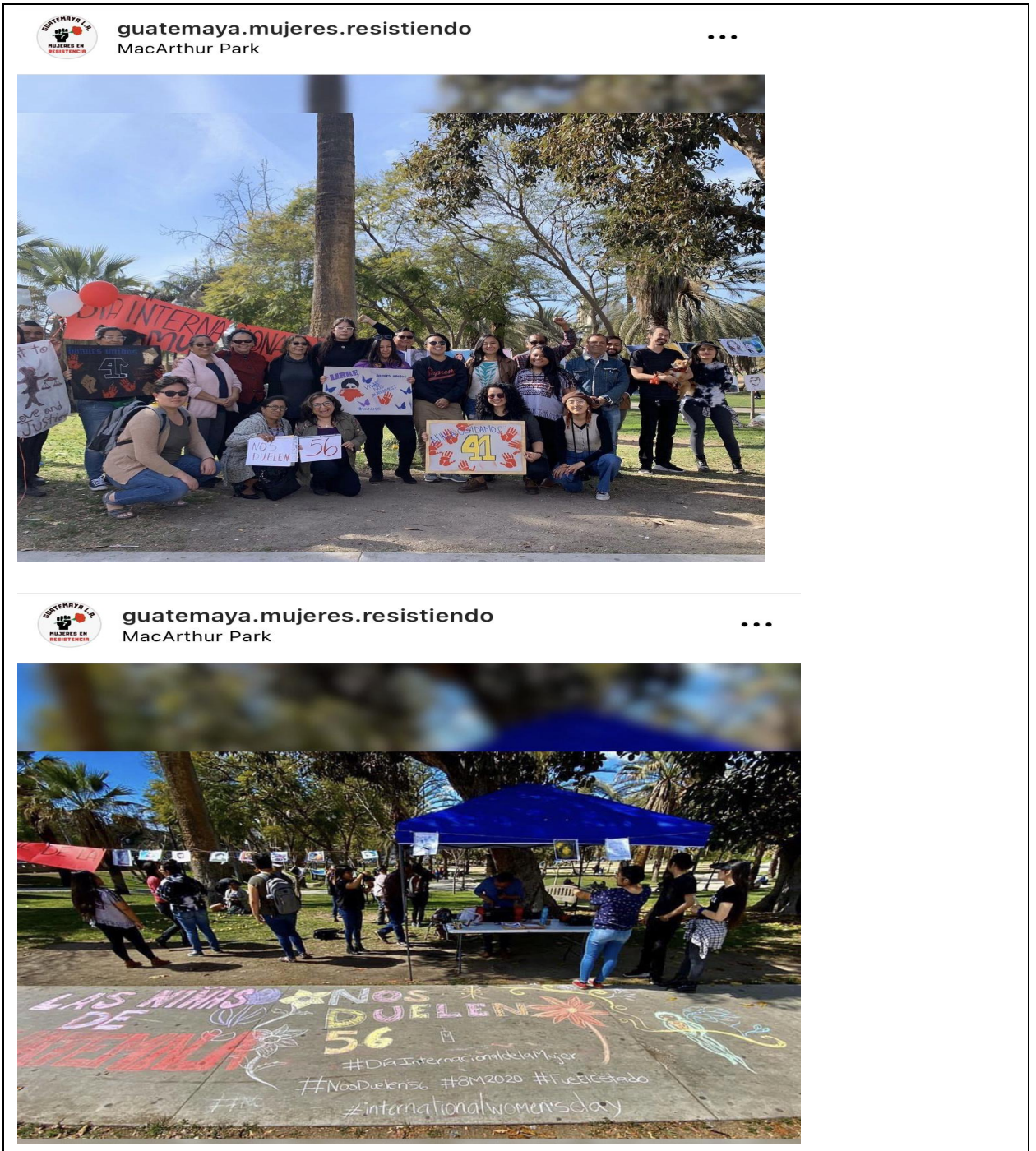
Screenshot of MacArthur Park/Westlake Area map

Note: Adapted from Google maps

In March 2019, a month to commemorate International Women's Day, GMR-LA organized an event at MacArthur Park honoring the 56 Guatemalan girls who had been murdered by the state of Guatemala on March 7, 2017. GMR-LA commemorated the event two years after the massacre with a vigil at the park and a collective gathering with the immigrant community to remember the girls in connection to other local issues such as anti-gentrification, health disparities, immigration, border deaths, etc. The group reclaimed the space by chalking big letters NOS DUELEN 56 (we are in pain for the 56 girls) (see Figure 30). Photos of the girls were hung all around using the park trees to make it a public mourning.

Figure 31

Photos from March 2019 International Women's Day Event at MacArthur Park



Note: Adapted from GMR-LA Instagram

Official memorials provide tangible access to the past, and memorial encounters are woven into everyday routines across cities, towns, and rural areas. While inviting casual and intentional encounters, vernacular memorials differ in that they are spontaneous, produced outside official processes, and can initiate counter-narratives to commemoration's official, sanctioned subjects (people, events, and issues). Memorials are situated within social processes of political-social-symbolic systems of meaning production (Gibson & Burstow, 2022, p. 67). The vernacular memorials and public mourning GMR-LA was producing in a public park spatially the map GuateMaya community's cultural memory and simultaneously build a network of GuateMaya people in the diaspora.

Latin American critical cartographer Suarez Val (2022) used the term *affect amplifiers* to denote activists, symbols, and protests publicly amplifying feminicide cases in Latin America, specifically in Uruguay. Feminicide has united Latin American feminist activists into continent-wide protests against all forms of violence against women. In Uruguay, feminists appropriated the term feminicide for street demos that started spontaneously towards the end of 2014, protesting gender-related murders of women, the lack of political will to tackle the issue, and the media's sexist and re-victimizing reporting. However, the affective atmosphere around feminicide emerges in the interaction of multiple discourses: the voices of a transnational feminist counter-public, on the one hand, and media and political voices on the other (Suarez Val, 2022, p. 169). Suarez Val noted how the voices of a transnational feminist counter-public are an affect amplifier, and this is how I situated GMR-LA place-making, centering memory with an affective tone and action to amplify the names and stories of girls and women, victims of feminicide in Guatemala.

The group is amplifying affect by practicing Maya cosmovision rituals of placing an altar with herbs and guided by the day's nawal (Maya energy). By doing this, in a place like Los Angeles, the group educates participants about Maya culture and practices and remembers loved ones and traditions. Remembering is a decolonizing methodology, particularly for Indigenous peoples forcibly dislocated from their culture, knowledge, and land (Zepeda, 2022). Collectively, GMR-LA is making space for the sacred, remembering, and re-rooting through cultural production and creating communal or community spaces of healing through cultural memory.

Embodied Transformative Memory

GuateMaya Mujeres en Resistencia-Los Angeles (GMR-LA) formed as a group in 2018. Despite its short trajectory, the group has been able to stay true to its values (female empowerment, cultural memory, social justice, and transnational relationships) by organizing public events that honor the memory of loved ones or commemorate the disappeared —whose very existence is denied by the Guatemalan state. However, in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic produced a state of emergency and quarantine in California, the group did not stop organizing. Instead, it continued meeting virtually to check in among the participants. I also began using methods like digital ethnography that allowed me to observe the group's events online and follow them on their social media platforms, archiving testimonios and events. One critical event the group, specifically co-founder Magda, has been organizing for the past ten years is *Journeys of Memory*. This event pays homage to Kaqchikel writer Jose Luis de Leon Diaz, better known by his pen name Luis de Lion. The following subsections, Journeys of Memory and Cartographies of Healing and Body Mapping Workshop, reflected on research question four: How specifically is transformative memory inscribed in the body, public space, and other symbolic and material geographies?

***Jornadas de la Memoria* (Journeys of Memory)**

> *Researcher: ¿Puedes decirme qué tipo de actividades has creado para mujeres inmigrantes? ¿Algún tipo de evento?*
>
> *Magda: Como sabes, la pandemia nos ha afectado. Sin embargo, un evento que viene a la mente es Viajes de memoria. Organizamos un evento virtual aquí en los Estados Unidos para individuos en Guatemala. Era una forma de conexión entre Guatemala y los Estados Unidos. También se realiza en recuerdo del secuestro del profesor Luis León. Este evento termina el día de su ejecución. Te permite conmemorar lo que sucedió.*
>
> *Researcher: Can you tell me what type of activities you have created for immigrant women? Any type of event?*
>
> *Magda: As you know, the pandemic has affected us. However, one event that comes to mind is Journeys of Memory. We organized a virtual event here in the United States for individuals in Guatemala. It was a form of connection between Guatemala and the United States. It is also done in remembrance of the kidnapping of Professor Luis Leon. This event ends on the day of his execution. It allows you to commemorate what happened.*

One of the values GMR-LA follows is the cultivation of loved one's memory who disappeared or were murdered by the Guatemalan military during the war years (1960-1996). Most of the participants in the group identified as survivors of genocide who lost family members during the war years. Magda, a political refugee who migrated to Los Angeles during the 1980s, met the daughter of poet Luis de Lion, Mayari de Leon, and transnationally, Magda and Mayari have been able to organize events for her father's memory. Jose Luis de Leon Diaz was born in San Juan del Obispo in Guatemala, on August 19, 1939. He became a teacher and, in 1965 married Maria Tula Gonzalez Garcia and had three children. Luis de Lion was a popular educator whose main passion was to cultivate literary knowledge in children from his village. Luis de Lion received anonymous death threats during the war on May 15, 1984. His whereabouts were unknown until 1999, three years after the signing of the peace accords that formally ended the 36-year war in Guatemala. His daughter Mayari found out about the details of

her father's disappearance in a police report. Leon Diaz initially appeared in this report as number 132, but three days after he was captured, the code "300" in the document indicated that he was executed. Since these official reports came to light in the Archivo Historico de la Policia Nacional, Lion's family members tirelessly petitioned the Guatemalan government to provide information about his remains. The government has ignored them and refused to offer any information. Yet Lion's memory and sacrifice will never be forgotten; they remain alive today through his writings and his family's project of *Luis de Lion poems collection* (Keme, 2016, p. 44). Lion's story captures family members' immense love for their loved ones who disappeared during the war and their frustration at the government's negligence. Instead of turning the page, Guatemalan migrants in the diaspora reach out and continue to uplift the memory of revolutionaries like Luis de Lion with events like *Journeys of Memory*.

In June 2022, GMR-LA organized *Journeys of Memory* by inviting Mayari de Leon to share more about her father and the project she coordinates to share his poetry. In addition, Katia Orantes was invited as a guest speaker to provide a report about the Guatemalan National Historic Police Archive, where many of the disappeared whereabouts have been found recorded in police reports, like those of Luis de Leon. The event was virtual (see Figure 32) and transmitted on GMR-LA's Facebook platform. About 20 people connected to view the live stream. Comments like: "Thank you for the work you do," "Thank you for struggling with love, strength, and culture," and "Thank you for keeping his memory alive" were written in the comment section by virtual participants. In the end, Mayari could read one of her father's poems, and she began to cry as it continued to be an emotional journey. Her emotions were felt by the rest of us who had our cameras off, but we were listening, and it impacted the group to be in a community with other genocide survivors. The virtual event provided a safe space for people

who have experienced trauma and want to be in solidarity with each other. It reminded me of one of the questions I asked Magda during the interview. The conversation was as follows and translated into English:

> *Researcher: ¿Cómo es un espacio seguro para ti? ¿O un espacio seguro para aquellos que han experimentado violencia contra las mujeres o violencia en general?*
>
> *Magda: ¿Un espacio seguro? Estoy pensando en esto como mujer, inmigrante y como persona que viene de la guerra. Creo que un espacio seguro es donde las mujeres con antecedentes similares pueden reunirse y discutir sus experiencias. Donde puedas sentirte seguro para expresarte y comentar sobre lo que vives. También estoy pensando en la parte emocional. En esa parte, siento que es muy difícil para la gente entender lo que les sucede a las personas que migran a otro país. Especialmente para aquellos que no han experimentado algún tipo de guerra y violencia.*
>
> Researcher: What does a safe space look like to you? Or a safe space for those who have experienced violence against women or violence in general?
>
> Magda: A safe space? I am thinking of this as a woman, an immigrant, and as a person who comes from war. I believe a safe space is where women with similar backgrounds can come together and discuss their experiences. Where you can feel safe to express yourself and comment on what you live. I'm also thinking of the emotional part too. In that part, I feel that it is very hard for people to understand what happens to people who migrate to another country especially for those who have not experienced some type of war and violence.

Figure 32

Zoom Event of Journeys of Memory with Mayari de Leon, Daughter of Kaqchikel Poet Luis de Leon

Note: Adapted from GMR-LA Facebook

Body Mapping Workshop- Los Angeles

For my methodology, I borrowed from Lorena Cabnal's fourth element, as she explained that body and territory are spaces of vital energy that must work in reciprocity (Cabal, 2019). Cabnal proposed a reciprocal way of healing from colonial violence and trauma for well-being from the perspective of women and Indigenous communities (Cabal, 2019). To gain a deep understanding of the genealogy of gendered colonial violence, I drew from Cabnal's (2015) work. I aimed to highlight theme three using body mapping methodology and contribute to epistemologies of collective emotional healing as Cabnal (2015) asserted, "To understand the body as territory is to awaken women's consciousness to the historical experiences and structural oppressions of the body– which include patriarchy and coloniality" (p. 22).

As explained in chapter 2, I used body mapping to encourage participants to share about emotions, places, trauma, and memories experienced on the body. Latin American feminist decolonial geographers (Cabal, 2010; GeoBrujas, 2021; Zaragocin, 2020) used body mapping as a decolonial counter-cartographic perspective highlighting Indigenous peoples' lived experiences. In addition to body mapping, the testimonio method provided space for Maya women living in Los Angeles to share their perspectives on migration, trauma, and relationships.

On October 3rd, 2021, I facilitated my first body mapping workshop with seven GMR-LA participants. There is a spatial-temporal dimension when organizing the body map workshops because it took about two months to organize as I created a flyer and a Google form explaining to each participant workshop details, including ordering food and studying the guide, to translate the content from a Latin American perspective to one of Los Angeles (Zaragocin, 2020). For example, *cuerpo-territorio* analyzed how Indigenous women in Latin America connect their bodies to their territory and are affected by land dispossession and displacement. I was using *cuerpo-territorio* to analyze the embodied testimonios of GuateMaya women survivors of genocide and also GuateMaya women's identity in the diaspora— Los Angeles—and how the new territory can inflict fear, invisibility, and isolation.

As mentioned in Chapter 4 of this study, to organize the body mapping workshops, four main elements were instrumental in guiding the process: (a) The location—each workshop took place in a community space, making it accessible to the participants and creating a welcoming environment; (b) Sacred Space—because we were discussing emotional topics, an altar was placed at the center to ground us and to follow a Maya cosmovision practice; (c) Bodily Movement—Before initiating the body maps, we were guided to stretch and do body movements like dancing and somatic exercises to connect back to our bodies; and (d) Indigenous-based food

nourish our body and spirits. I ordered seasonal food from Indigenous chefs. Emotionally, I was a bit nervous because this was a new concept for me. However, I reminded myself of my social work training in values like meeting the person where they are at, building the relationship, and honoring consent.

My intention with this workshop was to create a sacred space with Indigenous-based food, a relaxing space for the participants to feel cared for, and a space where we could talk about our intergenerational traumas. The food was ordered from Marlene, an Indigenous woman who has a project called *Irekuarhikua, a P'urhepecha* word that translates to "way of life." She cooked chicken in pepian, quinoa salad, and guayaba atole. When the participants arrived and noticed the food, their faces expressed love, excitement, and nourishment.

There was no rush to get the workshop started. Instead, we ate together, and an altar with candles, flowers, and photos of the 41 girls was placed in the center of our circle to ground our spirits. After we finished eating, I opened the space by introducing the workshop, explaining that it was for research purposes. Still, I was also interested in the emotional care of survivors of genocide, envisioning how these types of workshops can be part of an intergenerational feminist healing curriculum in the future. Before starting the body maps, we discussed topics like intergenerational trauma, migration, gender-based violence, and healing. We incorporated bodily exercises and movement to connect to our bodies, emotions, and thoughts we had during the day.

To initiate the body maps, I placed white paper and colored pencils on different tables so the participants could use the materials to create their body maps (see Figure 33). Using the guide and the following questions to map our emotions on our bodies, I asked each participant:

1. Can you draw where in your body you have experienced any violence in Guatemala or Los Angeles? And how did it feel?

2. How has the fear of violence impacted your body?

3. Can you draw what emotions you feel when you walk in Los Angeles as a Maya woman?

4. How has the process of migration impacted your body?

5. Can you draw in your body how power and strength feel?

Figure 33

GMR-LA Body maps Reflect Their Emotions Around Organizing, Work, Migration, and Borders

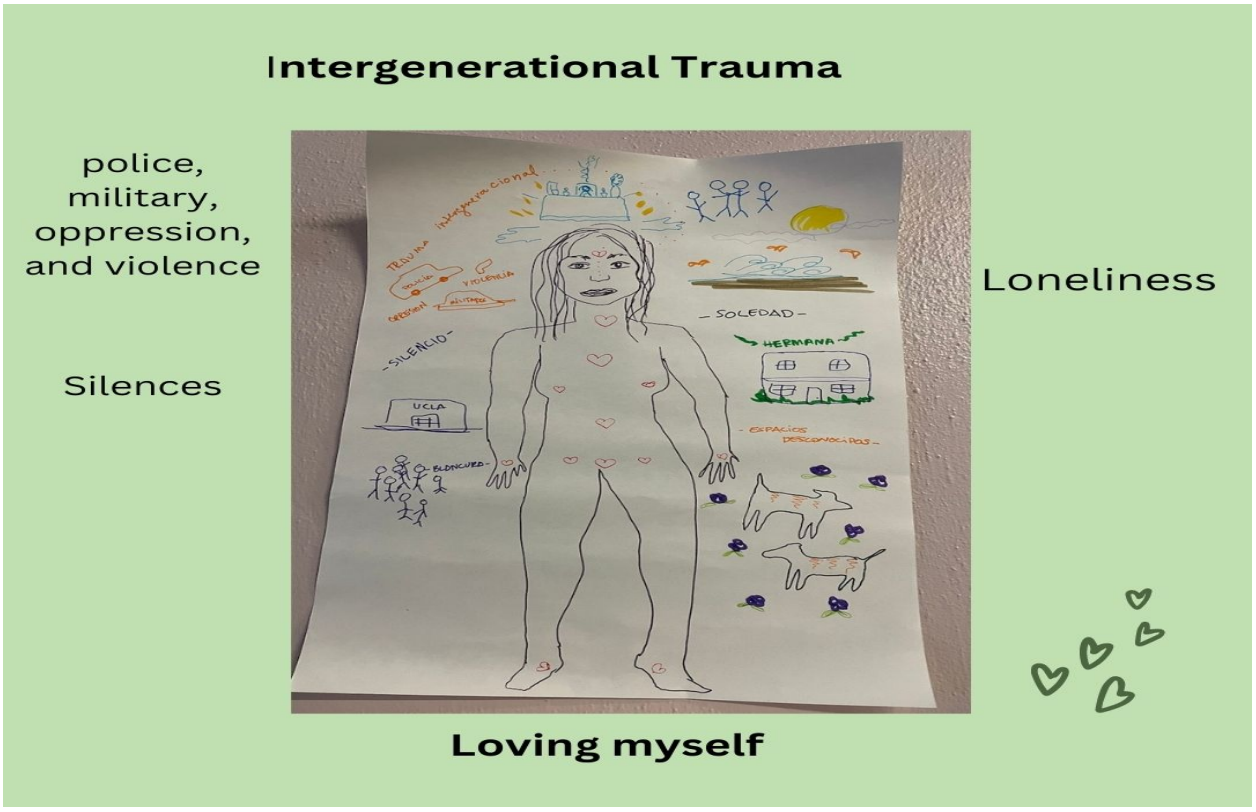
At the end of drawing our body maps and responding to some of the questions, the participants sat together in a circle to share their body maps. I borrowed this idea from decolonial feminist geographers like Zaragocin (2020), who has been co-facilitating these types of workshops with women from the Amazon. After everyone creates their body map, they sit in a circle to share and hear each other out. Collective reflections are important and depending on the

group, it might build on individual drawings on the body or the bodies to reflect communities. In some versions of the *cuerpo-territorio* method, the body symbolizes larger groups of people and not necessarily individuals (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020, p. 9) The circle reminded me of a support circle where people with common traumas or issues come together to share as a collective voice and feel supported without judgment. The circle with GMR-LA was to reflect and debrief on the body maps and workshop.

In this particular workshop, we had an intergenerational group of women aged 30-52 years old. The younger generations drew their bodies naked with no clothes, reflecting their connection to their body and femininity (see Figure 34). Instead of writing emotions, they drew hearts all over their body, symbolizing self-love and care. Some of their challenges were school, feeling lonely, and being away from family members in Guatemala. They wrote to denote the places they feared and drew social institutions like police, military, oppression, and violence. In the same color, they wrote the intergenerational trauma as a concept and feeling that the above social institutions have produced in places like Guatemala and in our bodies.

Figure 34

Body map of a Younger Generation Participant of GMR-LA



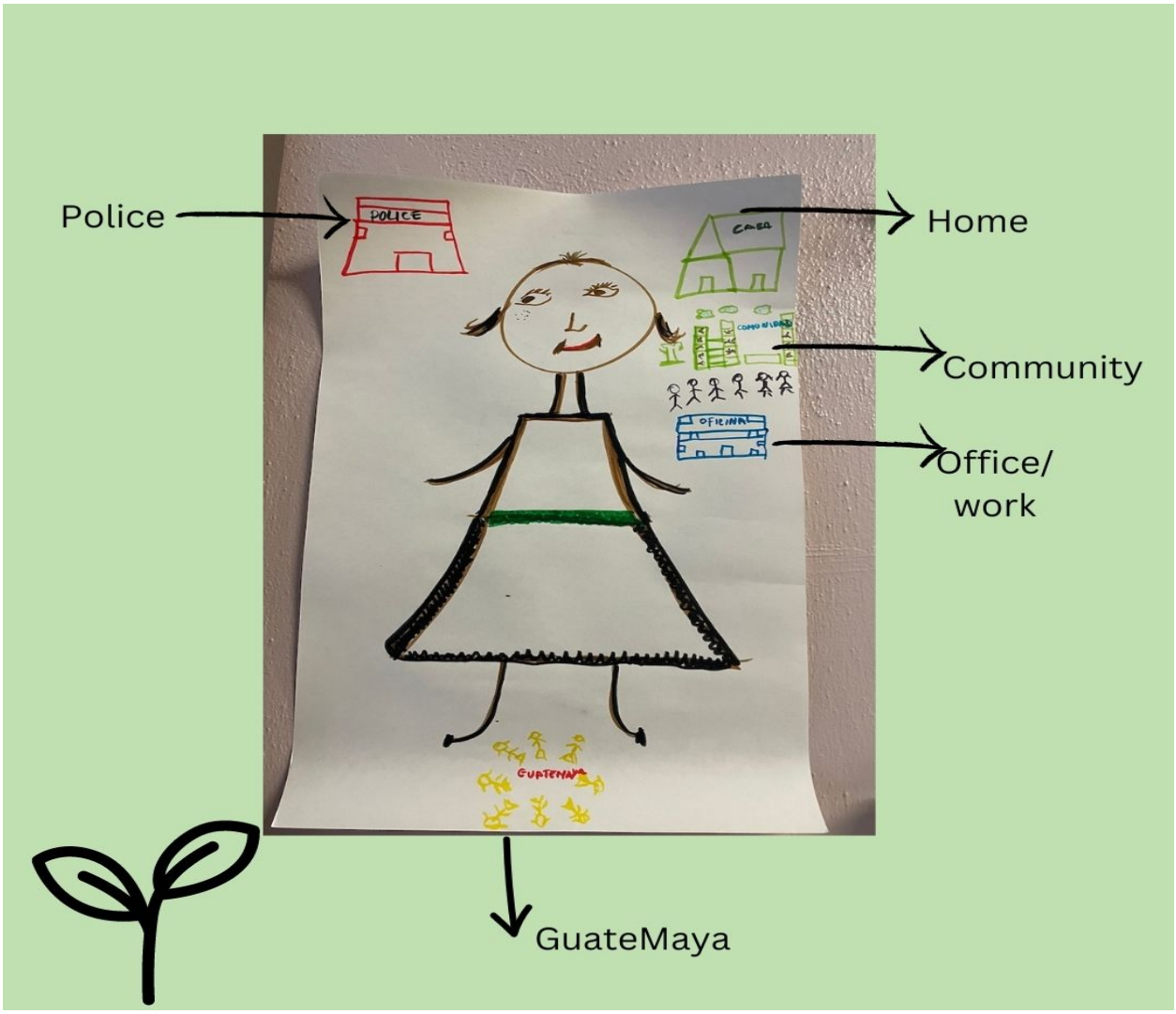
The questions for GMR-LA dealt with both places (Guatemala and Los Angeles) to characterize the places their identities reflect. For the older generations in the group, their bodies had clothes and particular clothing objects they wore, like glasses or skirts. Xuana, a K'iche' Maya woman, dressed her body in a skirt and kept her answers simple (see Figure 35). However, when observing her drawing, she wrote GuateMaya below her legs, as in birthing this community of hope and unity. Chicana feminists (Anzaldua, 2015; Medina & Gonzalez, 2020; Ross, 2016) have written about the radical act of mothering and caring for communities. Xuana's drawing reminded me of rethinking mothering from a radical point of view. Chicana feminists have defined mothering as:

> Revolutionary mothering leads to considering survival as a form of self-love, and as a service and gift to others whose lives would be incalculably diminished without us: Sharing our strengths while honoring our weaknesses together is not a contradiction but a way to make love powerful. (Ross, 2016, p. xviii)

Strength and love are what unite both GuateMaya feminist groups as members do this type of work for the care of their communities without any monetary compensation.

Figure 35

Xuana Mulul's Body map



Speaking to Xuana over the years, she has been the beacon of care for the group as an elder and as someone who identifies as a Maya woman. Xuana is an Indigenous woman with years of leadership and volunteering in non-profit organizations in Guatemala. She guides the group with Maya cosmovision traditions and keeps the group grounded as the conflict mediator. Personally, I saw Xuana as my spiritual guide. When I was in doubt or in need of advice, I called her, and we talked about our organizing strategies and what would be best for the community. Therefore, it is no surprise why she wrote and drew a group of people symbolizing community, as it seems this is at her core and what is important for Xuana in terms of her role with GMR-LA.

Sandra and Magda, who are two of the co-founders of the group, are women who have an academic degree and are professionals in their fields. Unlike Xuana who, is in a more precarious situation due to being a recent migrant, Sandra and Magda have been in the United States for the past 30 years, speak English, and are property owners. Their drawings (see Figures 36 and 37) centered on what makes them feel safe and happy, like nature, being with family, work, knowledge, and food. Magda's drawing pointed out what she feared like, Immigration Centers and the U.S.-Mexico border, as a reflection of her identity. Most of the participants feared the police, ICE, and border structures that have crossed them.

Borrowing from Geobrujas and Mason-Dee's (2021) analysis of material and symbolic borders, they ask, what do we mean by symbolic? "We are the borders that we cross, and that cross us," for GMR-LA participants, borders, geographical lines, and divisions were drawn on their body maps as places they feared or they felt uncomfortable. The border tends to be the limit that separates territories, bodies, and cultures; it is a limit that is sustained with violence, generating fringes of death and terror, and is also a very fragile space (Geobrujas & Mason-Dee,

2021, p. 170). Borders are also destination and meeting places where two worlds and geographies can meet. As the name of the group GuateMaya, also reminded us, two groups of people were meeting to reflect and confront years of social and cultural divisions.

Figure 36

Magda's Body map

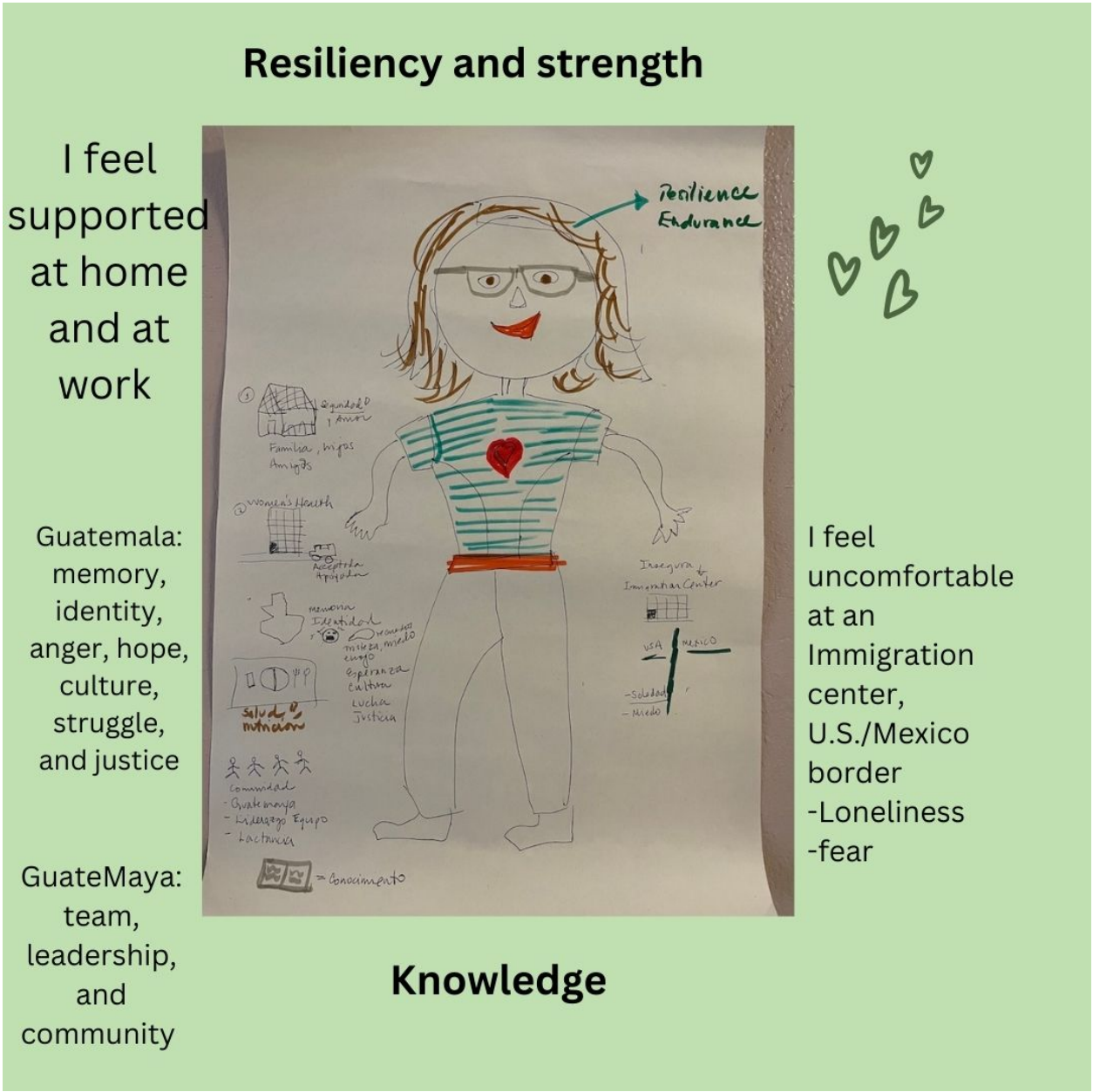
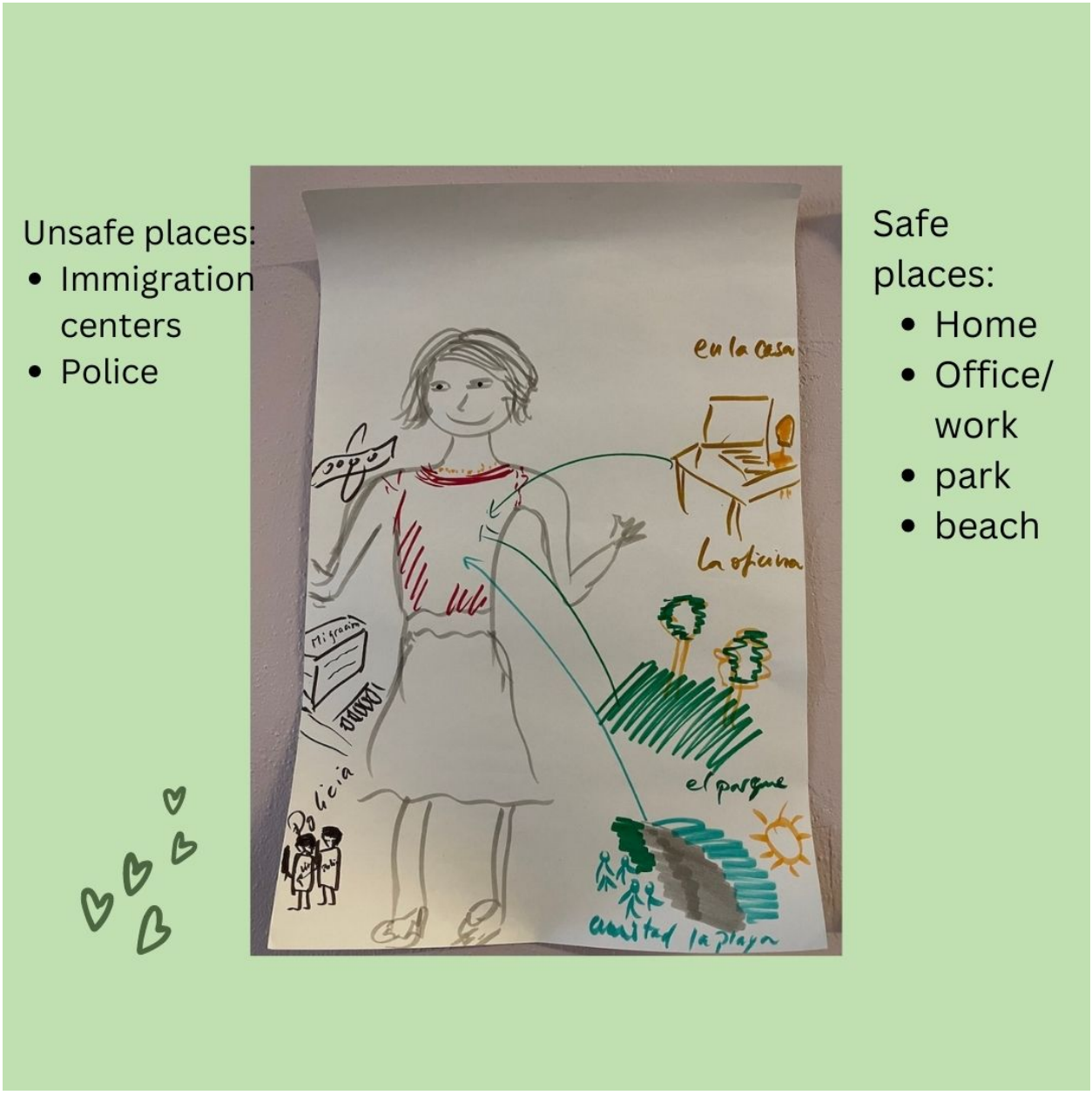


Figure 37

Sandra's Body map

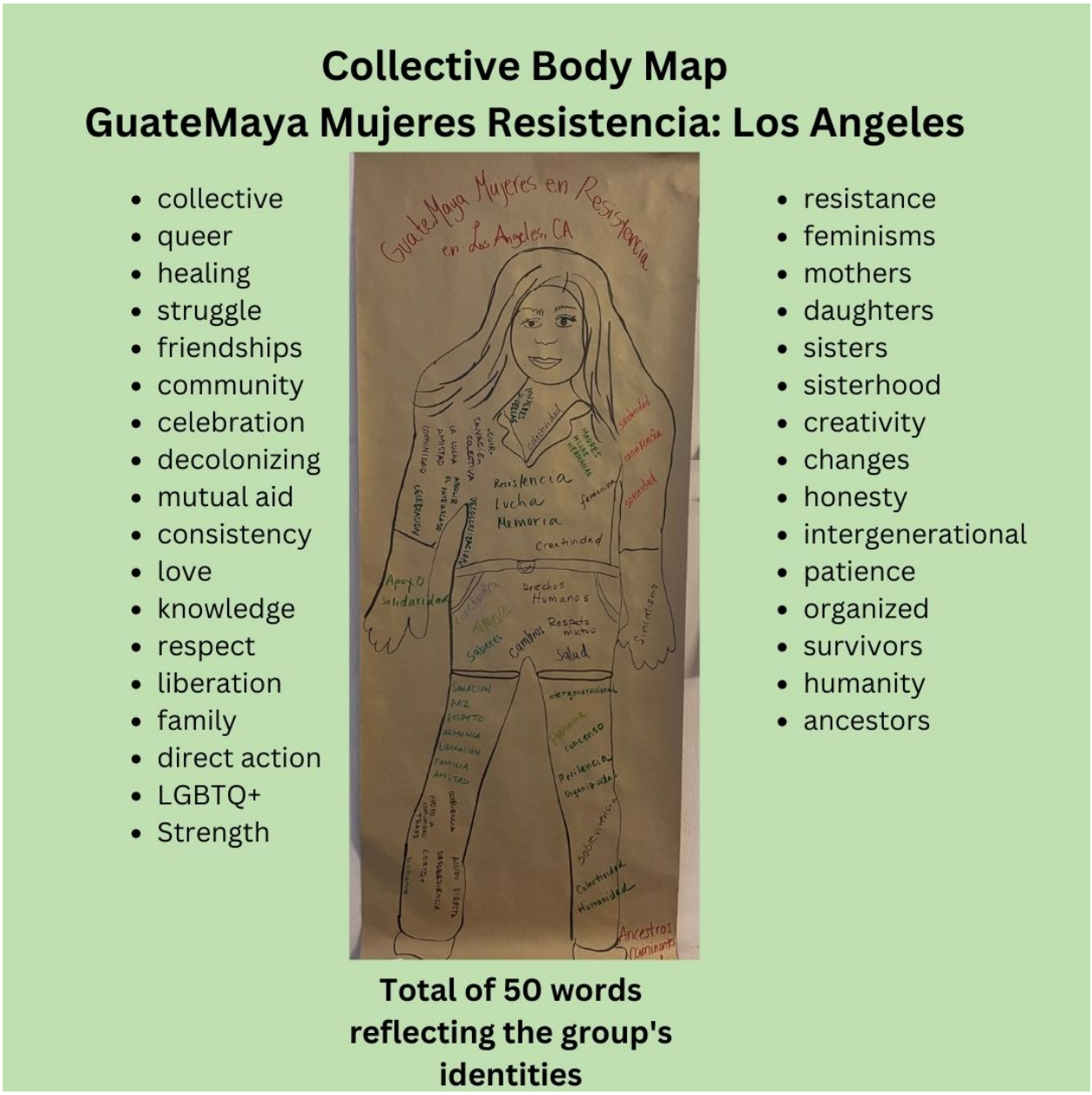


The individual body maps made each GMR-LA participant reflect on their identities in connection to macro-scale structures like borders, police, and Immigration centers and also

places where they felt safe, like home, work, and nature. From drawing our body maps, we also drew a collective body map. To do this, I asked if anyone felt comfortable laying down on a big piece of paper and their body would be drawn. One of the younger participants volunteered, but it was amazing to observe how everyone else in the group helped her out and drew her body onto the large piece of brown paper. For the collective body map, I asked if we could write words that symbolize and speak to the group's identity and values. The group wrote 50 words ranging from solidarity, unity, sisterhood, and community symbolizing the group (see Figure 38).

Figure 38

GMR-LA Collective Body Map



Note: GMR-LA Collective Body Map)

Everyone in the group was amazed at the body map and the words everyone thought of representing the group's identity and efforts. Many of the participants cried at the end, knowing

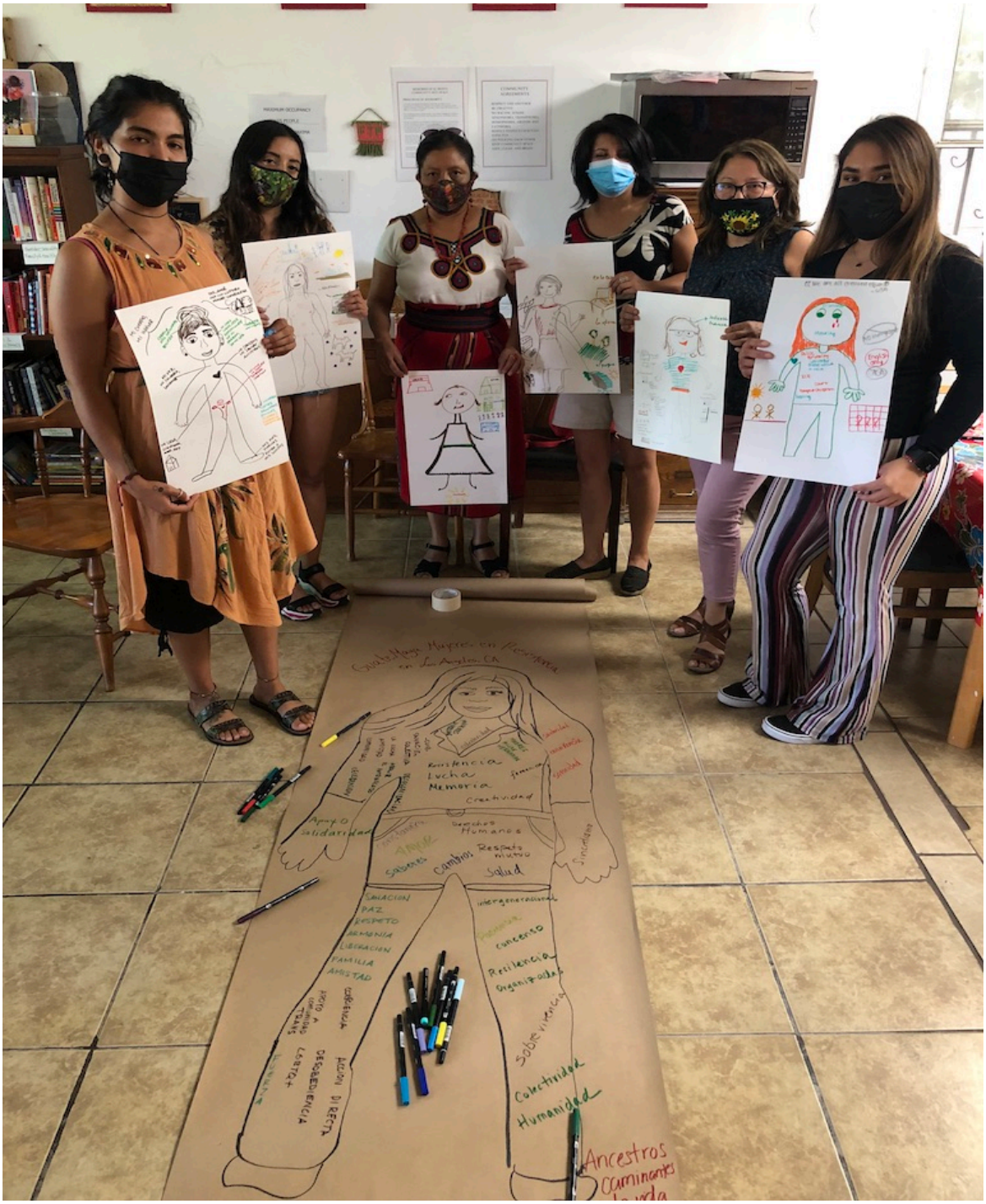
that it is not easy to organize as everyone carries different roles in their lives like mothers, wives, daughters, caretakers, full-time workers, and despite all, they are forming a new group about GuateMaya identity centering the voices and lived experiences of migrant women in Los Angeles.

This individual and collective embodied practice allowed participants to cultivate cultural memory by using the body as a place that holds memory and our first territory (See Figure 39). Cabnal (2010) reminded us that our bodies have suffered multiple levels of violence, but at the same time, we can heal together with other bodies. Spiritual Chicana activist Grace Alvarez Sesma (2021) stated that women caring for women is ceremony. This is her message to women who care for others:

> The *abuelitas* are calling you: leaders, activists, homemakers, community makers, and *chingonas*. You must be as dedicated to your spiritual self-care as you are to your families and community. Just like our beautiful Coyolxauhqui moon calls back her energy to become whole again, you can call back to yourself any energy you have given away, or that has been taken away from you, whether done consciously or unconsciously, so that all aspects of you are called forth from hiding, and you can come integrated and present in your daily life.

Figure 39

Individual and Collective Body maps by GMR-LA Participants



Overall, the body mapping workshop became a sacred space for the group to retreat from their daily routines and focus on themselves. One of the participants shared how this type of work was necessary for survivors of war and could allow for honest conversations about the past to move into healing, restoration, and trust.

Medina and Gonzalez's (2019) work on healing practices has encouraged other generations of women activists and spiritual practitioners to center on healing the fragmentation of our "bodymindspirit," a phenomenon that began through the imposition of Western-Christian epistemology so that we can, in turn, heal the traumas endured in many of our families and communities (Medina&Gonzalez, 2019, p. 6). In addition, cultural knowledge and cultural capital have assisted those affected in overcoming traumas as they celebrate significant transitions in their lives and connect with ancestors and the natural world. The Chicana feminist spirit work supports the understanding of creating alternative cartographies to heal our bodies and territories. Garcia (2019) explained the process of calling the soul back, which referred to a willful move toward reintegration and transformation of consciousness that carries the potential to restructure how we experience and move through our lives radically. Calling our souls back is not only an act of resistance to *desconocimiento* (ignorance) but also an invitation to heal ourselves– and, in this case, through narrations and stories that become medicine (p. 14).

As *cuerpo-territorio* and decolonial feminist scholars (Cabnal 2010; Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020) contended, relationships and relational accountability are key notions in Indigenous ontologies and research paradigms. As such, decolonial geographers emphasized the need to situate their embodied positions about the spaces they inhabit through an accountable practice committed to decolonization and liberation struggles (Heimer, 2022). The body mapping workshop allowed women survivors of genocide to share their embodied testimonio by

connecting to their bodies and building a community amongsthemselves. These relationships are essential and transform embodied memories as the group navigates landscapes like Los Angeles. This place exploits and subjugates the labor of recent migrant people and continues denying the Maya community's multicultural and plurinational background.

Concluding Reflections

The actions, symbols (altars, art, and herbs), and events in person and virtually GMR-LA organized are what I call *cartographies of healing*. Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldua's (2015) final writings was titled, *Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound*, in her writings, she discussed *conocimiento* (consciousness) and a reclaiming of spiritual activism. She wrote:

> Conocimiento urges us to respond not just with the traditional practice of spirituality (contemplation, meditation, and private rituals) or with the technologies of political activism (protests, demonstrations, and speakouts), but with the amalgam of the two: spiritual activism, which we've also inherited along with *la sombra* (shadow)." (Anzaldua's, 2015, p. 19)

Anzaldua's words described the consciousness of GMR-LA as bridging spirituality with technologies of political activism, which are also part of that gendered memory with a feminist praxis of care. *Cartographies of healing* center spiritual activism prioritizing our ancestors and our relationships with our body-mind-soul with the land transforming pain, guilt, and isolation for intergenerational healing towards GuateMaya feminist groups' futures.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION: GUATEMAYA DECOLONIAL FUTURES

"*The isthmus was left riddled with broken communities, broken bodies, and broken memories" - Aviva Chomsky (2021)*

This study examined the multi-dimensional ways GuateMaya feminist groups contest the state of Guatemala's hegemonic narratives by producing counter-cultural memory using spiritual altars, embodied testimonies, art, and protests. By creatively mapping and engaging in cultural memory production, the groups were remembering collectively and problematizing dominant ways of remembering and building a counter-cultural memory. Chomsky (2021) wrote about Central America's forgotten history and cited Nancy Peckenham as she said, "To remember is dangerous" (p. 11). The groups in my study deliberately remembered the 500,000 or more who disappeared and the 200,000 killed in the 36-year (1960-1996) war (Manz, 2008, p. 152). As I argued in this study the continuation of the war is reflected by the ongoing feminicide rates that disappear and kill Ladina and Indigenous women daily. Therefore, the groups in my study countered Guatemala's state hegemonic memory and narratives of ignoring the past and present state-sponsored violence.

The case studies I chose to study represent feminist groups in Guatemala and in the diaspora that decided to build a memory based on their accounts, principles, and political convictions. For *8 Tijax*, the search for justice for the 56 girls is a priority, and the mothers' testimonies zealously elevate the girls' memory. They are determined never to forget what the state did to their daughters on March 8th, 2017. As with GMR-LA, the group comprises women from Guatemala living in Los Angeles who create a community for recent migrants and political refugees to build solidarity around Guatemala's past and contemporary issues. Both groups' oral and embodied testimonies illuminate the urgent need for archiving feminist memories of the war

and contemporary issues such as feminicide with a *cuerpo-territorio* lens that communicates the nuances of cultural memory from an embodied geographical perspective. As a doctoral student in training, I was careful throughout documenting the oral and embodied *testimonios* because of how retelling a story can impact a survivor (Stephen & Speed, 2021, p. 9). However, guided by the framework of cuerpo-territorio (Cabal, 2010) and body mapping methods, I created a space to feel confident to do this dissertation with care and love, which the participants appreciated.

The assassination of Berta Caceres, a Lenca environmental activist, in March 2016 left many of us with permanent grief. Berta's struggle was not just about her people but also about protecting the river, her territory, as it is spiritual and culturally significant to the Lenca people. Her death, like the death of the 41 girls in Guatemala highlights the continued political violence against Indigenous activists, community leaders, women, and girls. Central American scholars Alvarado et al. (2017) stated, "As our histories have shown, the violence of the past links to the present through global processes" (p. 221). In 2017, the book *U.S. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance* written by these scholars was released. Central American scholars were the contributors of the book and wrote about language, customs, and performance and insist on the importance of spaces such as parades, *mercados*, and public art. The contributors show that U.S. Central Americans produce art and counter-narratives that disrupt sanitized versions of pan-ethnicity and pan-Latino/a identities (Alvarado et al., 2017, p. 222).

The book encourages the following three recommendations for future research. First, Critical Indigeneity and Afro-Indigeneity—a demand that we look at critical Indigenous practices from more politicized perspectives as part of hemispheric identities. This lens thus challenges eurocentric analysis frameworks to propose analytical lenses grounded on Indigenous

saberes (knowledge and practices). Second, gender—Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are countries with high femicide rates. Within the cultures of Central American diasporas, we need to examine the stories and knowledge that women communicate as pedagogical lessons.Lastly, Migration/Refugee Policy—women and children embark on harrowing journeys through Central America and Mexico to make their way to the U.S. border, where they are intercepted by or surrendered to immigration authorities. During the last three decades, Central Americans have been at the center of national immigration and border security debates (Alvarado et al., 2017, p. 225).

As I reflected on their recommendations and concluded this dissertation, I contemplated how this project responded to the above recommendations regarding the study of Guatemala, the high feminicide rates connected to migration, and centering Indigenous knowledge and practices. However, for future research, I will delve deeper into the third recommendation about migration/refugee policy as I have recently connected with two political refugees whose stories will be shared in subsequent paragraphs. Therefore, the conclusion to the dissertation reflects on research question four: How do the groups engage in the process of healing cartographies? And how can their efforts become a liberatory praxis for other feminist groups across the hemisphere? I discuss following three sections which reflect on my research question. (a) Transnational Feminist Relations among GuateMaya feminist groups; (b**)** Mapping GuateMaya decolonial futures will delve into what I call *cartographies of healing* among the GuateMaya groups; and **(c)** Contributions to Cultural Memory and Feminist Geography as I situated this project within the larger context and subfields of both cultural memory and feminist geography.

Transnational Feminist Relations

By examining the groups' multi-scalar efforts at a bodily, local, and transnational scale (Alvarado et al., 2017; Blackwell, 2023; Cabal, 2010), I situated the study as a transnational research examination of GuateMaya feminist groups. The groups are closely connected to their local networks but are also weaving transnational collaborations with other groups addressing feminicide or issues affecting migrants in the diaspora. Nagar and Swarr (2010) described transnational as a descriptor that has emerged from certain historical moments in the U.S. and Canadian academies. It is important to acknowledge, therefore, how the deployments of transnational continue or depart from the intellectual and political legacies of women of color/third world/multicultural/international/global feminisms (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p. 4). The scholars proposed that transnational feminisms are an intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that can "attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capitalist patriarchies, and the multiple ways in which they (re)structure colonial and neocolonial relations of domination and subordination" (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p. 5). The transnational feminist praxis the groups practice moves away from a global feminism that has stood for a kind of "Western cultural imperialism" (Roberts, 2004). Instead, they are grounded in a feminism that, "addresses the concerns of women around the world in the historicized particularity of their relationship to multiple patriarchies as well as to international economic hegemonies" (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; p. 17).

For this dissertation, I used transnational feminist relations because it already implies the relationships built between groups across nation-states and borders. Conway (2008, p. 210) argued for a rethinking of the transnational such that we can deploy the term in more analytically precise and useful ways. The "transnational" implies relations (communications, coordination,

collaboration, knowledge, and organizational links, and travel) across space and difference, preeminently differences constructed as national. Like all such terms, the transnational cannot be thought of as a single fixed scale (in terms of geographic reach or scope). The transnational can imply many geographic scales (sizes, levels, and relations), both within and across the juridically recognized borders of nation states. Like the "local" and the "global," it has no apriori content (Gibson-Graham, 2002, pp.30-31).

Historically, "transnational feminism" emerged in the context of UN-sponsored conferences and the growing contact among feminisms across the North-South divide. By the mid-1980s, major debates erupted between "third world" and "Western" feminisms, the latter signifying the globally dominant, liberal feminism of US-based White, class-privileged women and of the aid and development establishments. Third-world feminists accused Western feminists of projecting monolithic understandings of women's oppression based on their own culturally specific but putatively universal experience (Conway, 2008, p. 211).

The increased use of "transnational" by feminist theorists has also implied a critique of the centrality of nations, nationalisms, and the national scale in political life, including in feminist political imaginaries (Conway, 2008). In the work of some scholars, the transnational is a way of naming the circulation of feminist discourses across various kinds of difference without reinscribing national(ist) boundaries or invoking a global-to-local hierarchy among scales of activism. For example, the work of the case studies in this dissertation was never ranked to who is doing more than the other. Instead, relationships, care, and emotions were prioritized as tools to combat the struggles from the body to the state each group was confronting (i.e., court hearings, grief, or solidarity actions). Alexander and Mohanty (1997) described transnational feminist as:

> A focus on the state seems crucial," especially in Third World contexts, given the entanglements among Third World women, global capitalism, and Third World nation-states. Yet, given the urgency to form "global alliances" to counteract "global capitalist processes," they argue for "a comparative, relational feminist praxis that is *transnational* in its response to and engagement with global processes of colonization." In short, they are pointing toward transnational feminism (xxix).

Transnational feminism relations look different across space and time. Indigenous and Chicana scholar Blackwell (2023), studied Indigenous women activists in different regions in Mexico and stated that they struggle to create a new world where many worlds fit by weaving together ancestral knowledge, dreams, and instructions with visions for future generations (p. 18). Indigenous women's continental activism conjured the scale of Abiayala, a horizontal scale of connection to each other and to land, that shifts the geopolitics of international diplomacy and transnational activism that had erased them and their epistemologies. Blackwell (2023) explained the different scales of activism by identifying it as, "geographies of difference." Geographies of difference is attentive to how, even within differential relations and flows of power that constitute networked scales of activism, not only is power configured differently between each scale, but also social movement actors are differently situated by these power configurations within each scale. Geographies of difference name how the political landscape of each region, not to mention each country or scale at which Indigenous women are organized, is quite distinct, so that activists at each scale navigate the different terrains of social, political, and economic power as they move (Blackwell, 2023, p. 7).

Anthropologist Stephen (2019) referred to the organizing of *Mam* women in Guatemala as transborder communities tightly networked from multiple locations in Huehuetenango and

Mexico and into various states in the U.S. These transborder communities place more importance on extended family and kinship connections, community connections, and evangelical churches. Women provide solidarity for one another by translating for one another, helping in getting rides, and finding health and educational resources (Stephen, 2019, p. 232). These transborder communities exemplify the relationship-building of GuateMaya feminist groups with other solidarity community-based groups in Guatemala and in the diaspora, but specifically in Stephen's description, it is about providing mutual solidarity through sharing rides and helping with translation needs. For example, *8 Tijax* and GMR-LA have fostered a strong sense of community, and many members see one another as extended/chosen family, rely on one another, and share resources for food pantries, transportation, or mental health services. The study took a transborder and mainly transnational feminist standpoint as the groups communicated between Guatemala and Los Angeles and received support from groups in Canada, Mexico, and South America.

As discussed in Chapter 1 of the dissertation, the concept of feminism has been problematized by Indigenous groups from the global South to alert us of the Western philosophy of feminism. Still, both groups identified as feminist and plural feminisms, expanding and connecting it to a decolonial feminism perspective that acknowledges differences (Blackwell, 2023). Lee-Oliver and Banales (2023) explained that the term "decolonial" has been central in critical conversations and spaces that have long trajectories in many parts of the planet, but particularly in the geographical areas of the Americas or Turtle Island and Abya Ayala. The term "decolonial" and variants like "decolonize" and "decoloniality" have gained increasing traction in academic spaces, activist movements, and social media. The visibility of these terms creates

new opportunities to build upon the momentum of the times and explore decolonial feminist work today.

Martinez and Aguero (2021) explained that what differentiates decolonial feminism from communitarian feminism is the historical moment that each one takes as a starting point for its theoretical-analytical construction. For decolonial feminists, itwas the invasion of *Abya Yala* in 1492 by the European colonizers. For community feminists, the oppression of women's bodies did not begin in 1492, but the already existing history of oppression was reinforced and deepened by colonization. Informed by this distinction, both groups acknowledge the oppression of Indigenous women from 1492 but continue to learn about communitarian feminism standpoint from an ancestral history of oppression.

Therefore, situating both groups as decolonial feminists is also how 8 Tijax and GMR-LA approached and engaged with on-the-ground events and relationships. The global pandemic (Covid-19) positioned the groups to rely on virtual meetings and feel closely connected to groups in Guatemala and others across the hemisphere, building on a feminist praxis of care. It ultimately created a time-space compression (Massey, 1994) in a globalized world. One example of a transnational feminist relation took place earlier this year in February 2023 in support of the mothers of the 56 girls. At the beginning of February, the Hogar Seguro case's legal process was initiated again. The court hearings were announced, and with great enthusiasm, *8 Tijax* shared the dates on their social media platforms. As GMR-LA, we shared the hearing dates, and with high anticipation, we waited for *8 Tijax* responses. When this happened, I wrote in my field notes:

> After six years, the first hearing was finally going to start. This meant a lot to the mothers and activists. I texted Steff, co-founder of 8 Tijax, to check in and ask if the hearing will

be transmitted publicly on Facebook. She responds in minutes, sharing that's what they are trying to figure out, but she doubts it because is the first one. Then, I message GMR-LA groups WhatsApp chat, letting them know the news, and then the group posts on their social media page informing the international community of the news. This is a good example of digital ethnography because, as a researcher, using digital communication tools has become significant to connect and spread information across digital platforms. These social media platforms that, for many, are used to showcase individualistic interests, but for these groups, are tools for getting collective attention, spreading the word, and to continue to keep the memory of the girls alive, hoping for a glimpse of justice.

We continued to follow the social media posts on Facebook, but we noticed a pattern that all the court hearings were being canceled. Some of the reasons included that there was no audio, one of the lawyers was absent, or a judge did not appear at the hearing on time. Five hearings were canceled, frustrating the mothers, *8 Tijax*, and the international community. On February 19, I wrote a statement (see Figure 40), and 19 groups from different parts of Canada, Mexico, and South America put their logos on my statement, creating, as one 8 Tijax member said, "digital feminist noise!" The statement was shared on different social media platforms to inform the state of Guatemala that we were paying attention to what was happening and that the girls' mothers were not alone in their search for justice. Although the Guatemalan state most likely did not see the statement, what I wanted to do was reach the mothers with *ternura* (tender care), sending them a virtual hug amidst the state's corruption and negligence in the Hogar Seguro case.

Figure 40

A Statement Released on Social Media Platforms on February 19, 2023, Communicating Support from the International Community for the Mothers of the 56 girls Against the Court Hearings Cancellations

Justice for the 56 Guatemalan girls

It's already been 5 years and 10 months since the state of Guatemala punished and imprisoned 56 girls in Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción. On March 7, 2017, the day before International Women's Day, a day to honor the hard work of women worldwide, 56 girls tried to escape ongoing sexual abuse, child sex trafficking, malnutrition, and the physical abuse they suffered at the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción state shelter in San José Pinula, Guatemala. The shelter's responsibility is to protect the well-being of children and adolescents who suffer abuse. One of the girls staying at the shelter mentioned that they wanted to feel a sense of freedom as they were denied all basic necessities, even sanitary pads for menstruation. Their freedom lasted only a few minutes before the former president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, called the police to return the girls to the appalling conditions of the so-called shelter. One hundred policemen arrived to capture the girls -identified as escaped criminals- and lock them in a small room. They were prevented from using the bathroom and forced to create a private area to urinate using two mattresses.

After a couple of hours, a fire broke out inside the shelter. The girls screamed for help, kicking in the door to escape the fire. It took Linda Marroquín (police manager) nine minutes to open the door. **The negligence of the shelter's staff and the criminalization of the girls by the police resulted in 41 deaths, while 15 survivors were left scarred with physical and emotional injuries**. 5 years and 10 months have passed since this terror occurred, but the mothers of the girls and feminist activists in Guatemala and around the world continue to demand justice.

The trial for justice continues to be suspended. On January 9, 2023, the trial was suspended because the lawyer Willy Rendon did not appear at the hearing. The trial was suspended and the new trial date was January 19, 2023, but this time it was suspended again due to audio issues. **Vianey Hernandez, mother of Hashly Hernandez, one of the girls who died, says, "They are not going to give me back my 14-year-old daughter, she was the only one who was sexually abused, and they have not given me any response, it is unfortunate that this keeps happening and there is no justice."**

The international community, the people of Guatemala, and women in the diaspora are observing this process and we continue to show solidarity with the mothers who demand justice for their daughters. **The case of the 56 girls is FEMINICIDE and we demand that justice be done for the girls, mothers, and women of Guatemala NOW!**

I was inspired by Castro's (2019) work about Colombian rural women as she stated, "Ultimately, rural women are not passive subjects of the global rural. They do not need liberating. Rather, they need to be recognized as autonomous political subjects capable of enacting change in their territories and, in turn, shaping the global rural" (p. 70). These transnational ethnographic feminist efforts invoke a collective and liberatory practice for solidarity and mutual transformation. These examples contribute to constructing another world that challenges the orthodoxies of neoliberal globalization. Therefore, it is imperative that, as scholars, we become allies in the project of deconstructing and de(s) colonizing knowledge, feelings, and experiences.

Mapping GuateMaya decolonial futures

Goeman (2013) asserted the following:

> The key to dissimulating traditional geographies in the text is instigated with the recognition that borders, while not arbitrary or without material consequences, are imagined into being and reinforced through state apparatuses. Borders, like Indians, become common sense. Current conceptions of living Native people as only existing in the past or only "real" in certain geographical regions permeate "commonsense" knowledge about Native peoples and geographies on a global scale. (p.164)

In this section, I discuss GuateMaya decolonial futures as a provocative theme to acknowledge that this work is ongoing despite concluding the study to meet university timelines. I open it with a quote from Native scholar Mishuana Goeman, in her book *Mark My Words,* where she critiqued hegemonic map-making and highlighted the many ways Native women have been mapping through storytelling and collective narratives away from colonial maps. As a feminist geography scholar, I purposely decided to use methods like body mapping as counter maps and

cartographies to center the embodied geographies of GuateMaya feminists and women survivors of genocide. The body maps are intimate processes of creating maps and reflecting on our bodily autonomy amidst state power and patriarchal systems. With utmost respect, I borrowed the concept of "futures/futurity," acknowledging Black feminist writers, Black women scholars' voices, artists, and poets who have paved the way for Native, Chicanx, and GuateMaya scholars to devolve into questions of futurism dreaming, and speculative futures.

Black feminist scholar Collins (2000) asked, "Why are African American women and our ideas not known and not believed in" (p. 3)? Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and their ideas not only in the United States but also in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, and other places where Black women now live has been critical in preserving social inequalities. For most African-American women, survival has been such an all-consuming activity that most have had few opportunities to do intellectual work as it has been traditionally defined. Therefore, Black feminist thought is a critical social theory centering on the struggles of Black women but also the survival, resistance, and joy in the collective imagination.

Gunn (2019) affirmed that Black feminism has a long, rich tradition of radical speculation. Black feminist writers envision black liberation as freedom for all oppressed people. In the 1970s, the Combahee River Collective's statement asserted that Black women's liberation is necessary in and of itself, not as a supplement to feminist and Black liberation struggles (Gunn, 2019, p. 273). The Combahee River Collective employed radical speculation beyond survival by asserting, "If Black women are free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (Gunn, 2019, p.276). Therefore, radical speculation enables us to imagine futures, reclaim histories, and create alternate realities. Speculation is *radical* when we imagine futures unbound

by ideologies and structures designed to delimit Black lives. Radical speculation is, therefore a framework fit for dismantling White supremacy (Gunn, 2019).

Using Black radical speculation, Native women scholars are also centering decolonial futurities. From a Native American woman's perspective, Goeman (2013) explained that "Unlike Western maps whose intent is often to represent the "real," Native narrative maps often conflict, perhaps add the story, or only tell certain parts: Stories and knowledge of certain places can belong to families, clans, or individuals" (p. 25). Indigenous maps create multiple perspectives, like plurality to mapping, and where many worlds can fit. In addition, Indigenous futurity encompasses the past, our ancestors, plant, and animal relatives. Indigenous writer Nixon (2020) explained poetically:

> Armed with the spirit and teachings of our ancestors, all our relations behind us, we are living the Indigenous future. We are the descendants of a future imaginary that has already passed the outcome of the intentions, resistance, and survivance of our ancestors. Simultaneously, in the future and the past, we are living in the "dystopian now." Indigenous peoples are using our own technological traditions-our worldviews, our languages, our stories, and our kinship, as guiding principles in imagining the possible futures for ourselves and our communities.

Many of the ways the groups I studied in this dissertation survived or mapped out their relationships was using technologies of care rooted in Indigenous ancestral traditions from having ceremonies, tending the plants and herbs, and co-depending on one another. I brought myself into this section as a GuateMayan woman in the diaspora who has been learning about her ancestral lineage using plant medicine[20]. If it were not for my maternal grandmother,

[20] www.ixoqarte.com

Amanda Macal, and her stories about my great-great grandmother Carmelina Macal, who was a *curandera* (healer) and born in Comitan, Chiapas, I would not have known about my Indigenous lineage. Since 2016, I have been working with herbs and making my own plant medicine—what we call *pomadas*—to care for the skin or a scar. This is rooted in *Abuela* knowledge of growing your own herbs, drying the herbs, and making potions for an ear or eye infection or a stomachache. I am grateful to *my Abuela Mamamanda* for mapping and narrating the story of my *tatarabuela,* whose photo is on my spiritual altar. Throughout this dissertation, I have talked to her to calm my stress and invoke her courage.

Xicana Indigenous scholar Zepeda (2023) wrote about reclaiming Indigenous knowledge. The vision of this queer Xicana Indígena root work is to create an explicit site of analysis and praxis to connect again to spiritual roots, plant medicines, and ceremony that can lead to a path of *conocimiento* and *sanación* (healing) of intergenerational traumas for Xicana/x Indígena peoples, including detribalized and de-indigenized Chicanx and Latinx communities. To do the work of healing from intergenerational traumas of *susto* (fright), shame, vergüenza, and grief that have been internalized over generations due to colonial state logics of racism and projects of de-indigenization, Zepeda (2023), asked, "how can art as visual storytelling re-narrate our connections to madre tierra and our plantcestors" (p. 120)?

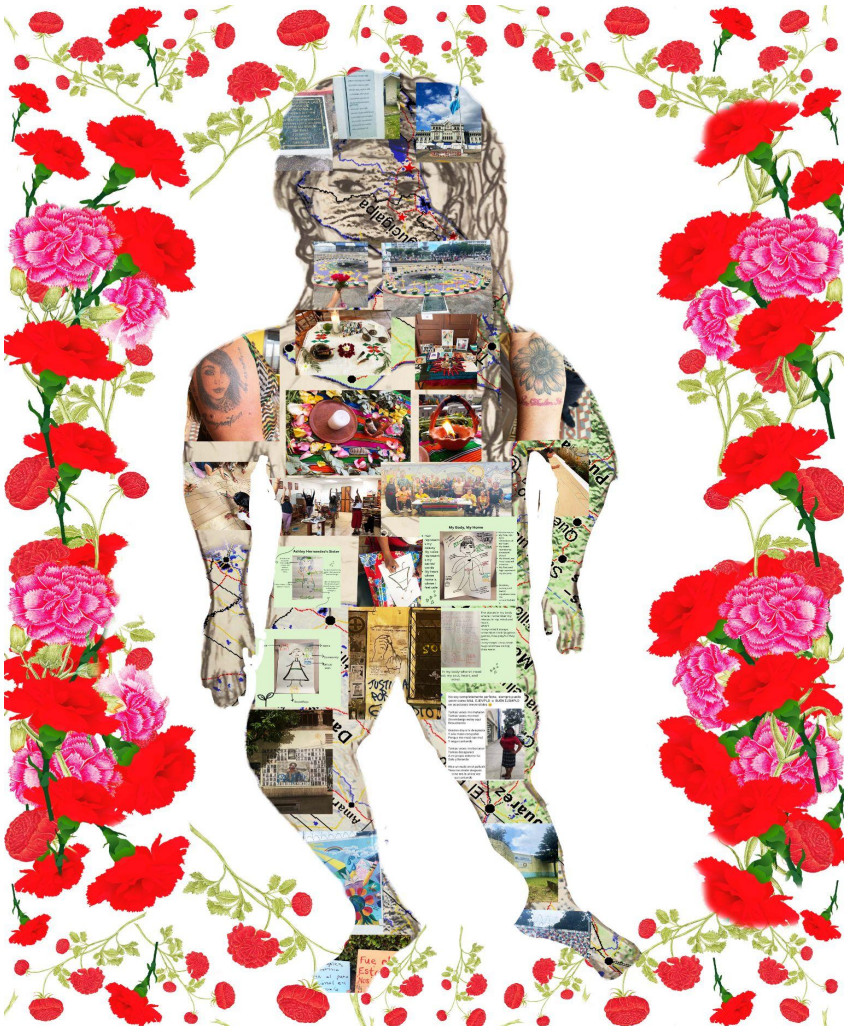
GuateMaya feminist futures can be visualized through altar making, connecting to mother earth and grandmother knowledge, and wearing traditional clothing. Maya scholar Boj-Lopez (2017) wrote about weavings that rupture and the possibility of contesting settler colonialism through the retention of Maya clothing among the Maya diasporas. In her work with Maya youth in Los Angeles, the scholar analyzed how the use of original clothing by young second-generation Maya women in Los Angeles disrupts social and political hierarchies that exist

around Indigenous practices, beliefs, and people in Guatemala and the United States. Learning to wear Maya clothing and understanding its meaning and function in home communities and within the diaspora allows youth to continue claiming and transforming traditions. Because Maya clothing is a visible marker of Maya identity, within the context of displacement and migration, it remains a terrain on which new identities and alliances are negotiated (Boj-Lopez, 2017, p. 189). This is a way Maya youth and younger generations in Los Angeles and in the United States are forging futures of Maya acknowledgment and practices to be respected and appreciated in the larger society. In addition, the youth are connected to older generations and to a Maya identity without necessarily being able to articulate what each textile means (Boj-Lopez, 2017, p. 197). Furthermore, this is an example of the cuerpo-territorio framework as each piece of Maya clothing represents a territory; Maya youth wear their territory with pride and reveal stories of displacement and resistance.

Healing Cartographies as GuateMaya decolonial futurity

Figure 41

8 Tijax and GMR-LA Collective Body map. Photo of a Woman with a Collage of my Dissertation Fieldwork Photos from Guatemala to Los Angeles 2019-2023 Visualizing Embodied Geographies



This dissertation intended to highlight the oral and embodied testimonios of GuateMaya feminist groups and members who are survivors of Guatemala's 36-year (1960-1996) genocidal war. The study participants poured their hearts out and shared memories of the past during their oral testimonios. With care and affection, we can weave liberated futures with these stories. For many of us who are the descendants of terror, fear, and silence, feeling liberated means to be healed from the past and able to live without guilt in this complicated world. Therefore, I wanted

participants to feel a sense of healing, a breath of fresh air, and feel as part of the community during the body mapping workshops and even when spending time together at a meeting or through texting on WhatsApp. As a feminist geographer, I felt that I was practicing healing cartographies, mapping our present and our future through spiritual altars and embodied testimonios.

Healing cartographies are exemplified by the verbal, embodied testimonios of GuateMaya feminist groups mapping out the plural communication and language through art, songs, poems, and events as a critical recovery of memory and healing. I kept visualizing the healing cartographies of this dissertation, and I wanted to put an image on paper. My cousin Marina, who is an artist, was able to help me. It would be great because photos also represent memories and memorabilia of loved ones. I gathered my fieldwork photos and asked her to add the photos to an image of a woman's body, making the body of the woman a map (see Figure 41). As we worked on this collage together, she became very excited to know more about Guatemala's history from a woman's perspective. Therefore, the collage represents the healing cartographies and maps out embodied geographies using GuateMaya's feminist decolonial futurity, the body and territory of my research, and the transformation it took to get to this point.

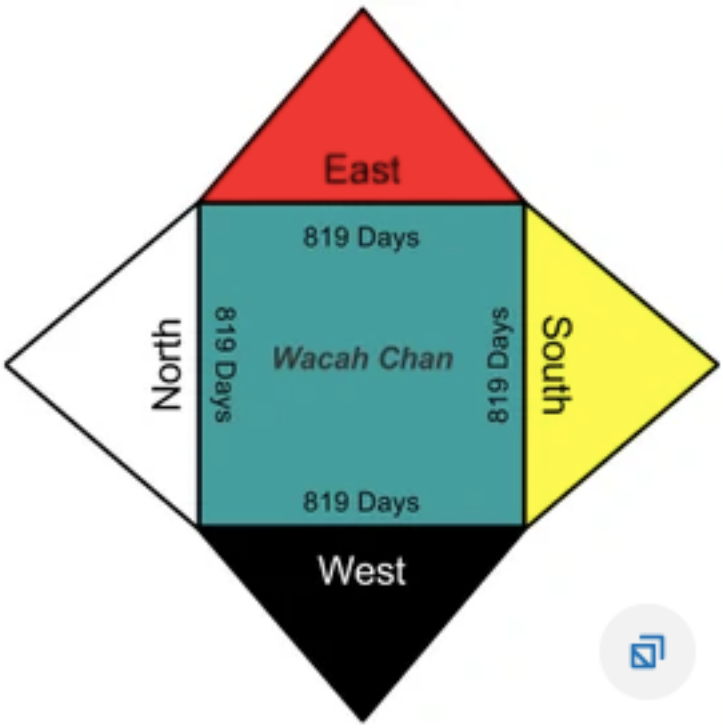
As Marina and I worked on the collage, we intentionally added photos on the parts of the body that symbolize a specific action in relation to the image. For example, the women's head and heart symbolize memory. We added photos from my fieldwork that reflected historic and cultural memory. On top of the head, we placed the photos of the 56 girl's memorial and the altar in the Plaza de las Niñas. The heart and chest areas include four different altars created by the groups in the study. Instead of memorials, the groups connected more to spiritual altars to invoke the memory of the girls and loved ones in the present time. The arms include photos of the arms

of Vianey Hernandez, with tattoos of her daughter Ashley and a sunflower, which symbolizes the 56 girls. Coming down to the legs represents the two body mapping workshops, and we add a few photos of the body maps from both groups. The feet include the photos of Hogar Seguro shelter and some posters we used for a protest in Los Angeles calling out the state of Guatemala for the 56 girls' massacre.

What interested me was that the woman's eyes were looking toward a direction. I was using Maya cosmology and the four directions to guide me in which direction the woman was looking towards. Reading about Maya's cardinal directions, she would be looking at the direction of the North (see Figure 42). In contrast to the Western directions, the North is not on top but on the side, and in Maya cosmology, the North symbolizes the color White, the father sky, and the way of the sacred warrior. Growth, children, and education are linked to the North. What is beautiful about this image is that it embodies both groups, personifying their actions, stories, and beliefs by marking the body's memory and identifying as the first territory. The women in the groups are sacred warriors, warriors who carry *cargas* and also walk a path for the liberation of sacred memory.

Figure 42

Maya Cardinal Directions Screenshot



Mayan directional map

In addition, the woman's body has no borders, allowing for the territories to touch and embrace differences but stretching out the territory for participatory change using spiritual technologies like altars. The red flowers around the collage are carnations of red to represent the everlasting memory of loved ones. Marina added the collage to her blog titled, "*Collective Memory Making and Healing among GuateMaya survivors of State Violence Through Testimonies, Public Art, and Music,*" as she explained what it means to her and making it expansively live in the dissertation and in the digital world. Therefore, I will continue to expand the concept of healing cartographies in future work.

Contributions to Cultural Memory and Feminist Geography

Decolonial feminists conceptualized their struggle as a process that is alive, which plays with the entanglement of theories, testimonies, and resistances (Millán et al., 2014). They question how to develop our own thinking, considering theories that exist but also thinking from a decolonial perspective (Castro, 2019). Overall, this dissertation had four aims. The first aim was to answer my research questions concerning the epistemologies of women involved in GuateMaya feminist groups. Through developing the research questions, I selected methods that center the women's lived experiences in the groups.

The second aim was to center the oral and embodied testimonies of GuateMaya feminist groups as a counter-cultural memory to Guatemala's state hegemonic narratives of the war and feminicide issues in the country. Like any capitalist, patriarchal, neoliberal body, the state has its logic and rationale, strategically producing narratives that harm the country's marginalized populations. In contrast, the narratives and cultural memory production of the GuateMaya feminist groups asserted their own lived experiences and what they witnessed during the war years and perspectives about feminicide. The aim was not only to center on the problem but also on how the narratives can be a liberatory and transformative experience for the individuals and groups who are practicing a feminist praxis of care by building collectives, international solidarity networks, fundraisers, and statements against the state daily.

The third aim was to operationalize the decolonial emancipatory feminist framework of cuerpo-territorio. Using cuerpo-territorio, the GuateMaya feminist groups could trust the process and the methods I employed, such as body mapping, testimonio, and digital ethnography. These methods are not new to the social sciences but have been contested as not "scientific" enough (Speed, 2019). However, I also disrupted hegemonic thinking and doing in academic settings by

employing these methods during a global pandemic. When I presented my research at academic conferences (i.e., AAG or MALCS), there was a wave of appreciation, and colleagues felt like they could also use the methods without feeling constrained from their departments. These methods taught me to be genuine in my research and center participants' knowledge and practices.

The final aim was to foster a sense of healing throughout the dissertation for me and the participants. Healing has become a popular term today, especially among the younger generations. Connecting the cuerpo-territorio framework and Lorena Cabnal's teachings with U.S. mental health practitioners on healing, justice can be a transformative way to initiate conversations about healing in a transnational perspective and making the connections between the Global South and North as more Maya woman migrants continue to migrate to the U.S. due to political persecution and violence.

Overall, the interdisciplinary dissertation covers a range of disciplines like geography, feminist studies, ethnic studies, Latino/a Studies, Chicana/o studies, Native studies, and Central American studies. The dissertation closely contributes to cultural memory and feminist geography, subdisciplines in geography. These two subdisciplines continue to grow, and by contributing to embodied testimonios, counter-cultural memory, and GuateMaya decolonial futures, I am contributing to the growth of the subdisciplines to expand on questions of Global South and North relationships, Maya migrants in the diaspora, and bodily healing and autonomy among Indigenous groups and women.

For future work, I aim to continue contributing to building a space to affirm the growing presence of an Indigenous diaspora from Latin America, shifting and raising questions about transnational meanings of race, place, and indigeneity. In addition, I aim to add to the ongoing

literature about hemispheric feminisms, Indigenous and Ladina feminisms, diasporic communities, and transnational relations across space and time. I am building on Lorena Cabnal's arguments of body and territory to make the intersections between colonial violence and the effects on women's bodies and how the body can reclaim ancestral traditions and heal intergenerational trauma.

The decolonial methodology of body mapping is used to connect our bodies and territories; it is gaining momentum in anglophone feminist geography and feminist geopolitics (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020). The method contributes to a collective and transformative justice perspective to discuss structural and interpersonal forms of violence and what praxes can be implemented within institutions and in our personal lives. The future of the participants and Guatemala continues to feel complex as the people of Guatemala voted in a new president, Bernardo Arevalo, whose platform favors the people's voice. However, the state of Guatemala continues to function with corrupt politicians. The GuateMaya feminist groups in the diaspora are worried that there could be another possible military coup d'état. Resistance, protests, and artistic expressions are central tools for the groups to voice their demands on the current situation to continue producing counter-cultural memories in Guatemala and the diaspora.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-structured interview questions:

What's your age? Where do you live?

How did you get involved in the organization? When?

What type of occupation do you hold right now?

Are you going to school?

Are you married? Single? In a partnership?

How long have you been involved in the organization?

What motivated you to be involved?

What motivated you to migrate to the United States?

Do you still have family in Guatemala?

What do you remember about the Guatemalan war? Were you involved in any groups?

Were your family members impacted by the war?

How do you think the war impacted women?

How do you think the war inflicted trauma and intergenerational trauma?

How do you define the feminist movement in Guatemala?

How does the group define gender-based inequalities?

How do you define feminism?

Can you tell me about the activities and campaigns the organization creates for women?

What type of services does the organization provide?

How many women are involved? Are other gender identities also involved? GNC, queer, trans women?

How much support do you get from the state? Foundations?

What does a safe place/space look like for women victims of gender-based inequalities?

What are some of the challenges when organizing? What are the assets?

Does your family support you?

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