

THREADS OF INDIFFERENCE: NAVIGATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA

Kathleen Giles
California State University, Stanislaus

INTRODUCTION

This exploratory study is designed to better understand the history and development of gender-based violence (i.e. violence against women) in Guatemala and to explore the relationship between the current rise in violence and the past civil war, in addition to investigating what factors are impeding women's access to services. Guatemala is a beautiful place, filled with a vibrant culture and a deep cultural heritage. The country's current sociopolitical climate reflects a long history plagued by poverty and violence; wrought by colonial intervention, ongoing foreign political interference, and organized crime.

- Guatemala has one of the highest rates of homicide in Latin America; in 2013 alone, 5,253 murders were reported by the Guatemalan National Police.

- The National Institute of Forensic Sciences of Guatemala reported an astounding average of 16 murders per day in 2014.

The violence in Guatemala pervades every sector of society, producing a shared experience of victimization and fear. Although both men and women are victims of the violence, evidence from reported data and statistical analysis indicate that women are being targeted solely on the basis of their gender.



<http://english.pestidomohumano.com/files/2011/09/Captura-de-pantalla-2011-06-09-a-las-04-44.png>

LOCATION: SANTA CLARA LA LAGUNA, SOLOLÁ:



<http://maps.maphill.com/pt/24645-91440/location-map/physical-map/fancy-location-map-of-santa-clara-la-laguna.jpg>

BACKGROUND:

A CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

More than 3,800 women in Guatemala were deliberately targeted and murdered between 2001 and 2009. In 2005, there were 305 reported cases of tortured female homicide victims. Among these cases, 403 different torture marks were reported by Human Rights Ombudsman.

La Violencia

In December of 1996, the Guatemalan Army and URNG guerrillas (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) formally signed peace accords ending Guatemala's devastating 36 year civil war.

- 626 villages massacred
- 1.5 million people displaced
- More than 200,000 people found dead or disappeared

The disparity between victims of the war is evident: 83 percent of victims were identified as Maya and 17 percent were identified as Ladino. Up to 99 percent of all sexual violent crimes committed against women were carried out by army soldiers and other security officers, including government officials.

Engrained Impunity

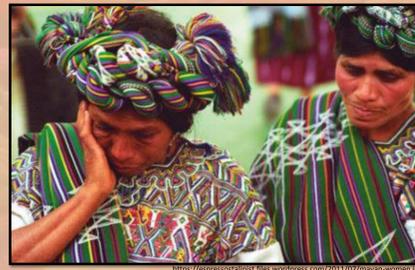
In 2008, the *Ley contra el Femicidio y otras Formas de Violencia Contra la Mujer* was passed, aiming to ensure rights to women such as, "life, liberty, dignity, protection, and equality."

In 2011, CENADOJ (National Center for Judicial Analysis and Documentation) reported 20,398 complaints of violence against women under the 2008 law; less than three percent of these cases presented to the court reached a judgment.

Factors in this include:

- Poor investigative methodology
- Inadequate evidence collection and preservation
- Systematized organized violence
- Victim blaming

A Vortex of Fear



<https://expressjournalist.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/mayan-women.jpg>

"The state in particular must assume this responsibility, because the army came and marked our bodies forever, our lives were marked; they tortured us."



http://www.gadsu.org/cvov/mexico/guatemala_026_1_no_violencia.jpg

QUESTIONS & RATIONALE

Despite the universality of gender based violence (GBV), it appears that the numerous causes and practices of violence are culturally specific; nontransferable onto disparate social worlds.

- What cultural factors support systemic violence and inequality in Guatemala?
- What is the motivation for the propagation of violence against women?
- How effective are NGOs in the Atitlán community?
- How can indigenous groups in rural communities get better access to resources?

The horrendous violence committed against Maya women in the Santa Clara La Laguna community, as well as other women throughout the country, is a systematic violation of basic human rights.

METHODS

Data Collection

Given the inaccuracies of public records, it is clear that additional research is needed. To that end, I will conduct an exploratory study in the K'iche' community of Santa Clara La Laguna, Guatemala, in the department of Sololá. Research activities will be directed by myself, Kathleen Giles, under the supervision of Dr. Tim Wallace of the North Carolina State University (NCSU) Anthropology Department and program director of NCSU 2015 Ethnographic Field School.

Data Collection will include:

- Participant Observation
- Field notes
- Focus groups
- Research Instruments:
 - ❖ Self-administered survey
 - ❖ Semi-structured interview (community)
 - ❖ Semi-structured interview (NGO)

Prospective research sites will include: 1) the host household 2) Santa Clara La Laguna 3) local NGOs. Research subjects will include the host family, community members, and humanitarian workers. Potential interviewees will be asked to voluntarily participate in the study. I anticipate conducting a series of focus groups in the community; formal interviews with local police, doctors, NGO workers, and town officials; informal interviews with local community members; and a general survey to assess the communities' knowledge of domestic violence.

Qualitative Analysis

I may attempt to undertake discourse analysis by transcribing recorded dialogues, building a narrative on the basis of open-ended interviews and personal conversations. I will be using analytical software such as NUDIST, utilizing cross tabulation and keyword retrieval methods.

Quantitative Analysis

To analyze the data collected from the surveys I will be performing analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether the difference in means between the two groups (rural vs. urban) is significant. In terms of measuring data, I will be using three levels of measurement: nominal, interval, and scale. I will perform tabulation, descriptive, and disaggregation using ATLAS.ti and SPSS, exporting results in XML format.

SIGNIFICANCE

In this exploratory study, I will be approaching GBV from a feminist perspective, viewing the increase in violent acts against women as a product of an entrenched structural power imbalance, emphasizing the need for women's agency.



<https://administanalysis.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/dcm1719.jpg>

I anticipate actively engaging the public in discussions about topics encompassing gender inequality, to inform community members of the resources open to them. I hope to encourage community members to further pursue the channels of education open to them, which are vital to socio-economic advancement. Ultimately, I seek to contribute suggestions for future research, in hopes of dismantling the structural fastenings supporting systemic violence against women.

EXPECTED CONCLUSIONS

I expect there will be many cultural fastenings that perpetuate systemic violence against women in Guatemalan communities and that are particularly entrenched within indigenous communities. It seems as though indigenous Maya are treated as the degenerate "race" and that barriers to public services as basic as education and health care have been effectively erected despite infrastructure-driven development.

- I believe that an inadequate access to education and financial independence, by both men and women, plays a key role in the perpetuation of GBV.
- Pervasive judicial impunity, insufficient legislature, and a complete lack of motivation to solve cases of GBV by law enforcement reinforce violent acts.
- Local cultural beliefs and attitudes and practices grounded in machismo may be preventing women from seeking services provided by local NGOs. Many people today are still deeply impacted by the civil war; mistrust of the Guatemalan government and NGOs is not uncommon among indigenous communities.
- Long-established practices, such as blood feuds, may also be contributing factors that prevent women from accessing state-based and private resources. Only time and an in-depth study can reveal all of the fastenings holding together this current misogynistic patriarchy.

REFERENCES

Crosby, Alison & Lykes, Brinton M. "Mayan Women Survivors Speak: The Gendered Relations of Truth Telling in Postwar Guatemala." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, (2011): 1-21.
Gagne, David. "Insight Crime 2014 Homicide Round-up." *Insight Crime*. 12 Jan 2015. Web. 11 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/insight-crime-2014-homicide-round-up/>>
"Guatemala 2014 Crime & Safety Report." *Overseas Safety Advisory Council*. Crime and Safety, 14 May 2014. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.
<https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=15656>
Munala, Karen & Bookley, Blaine. "Crimes Without Punishment: An Update on Violence Against Women and Impunity in Guatemala." *Social Justice*, 40.4 (2014): 106-117.
Reinmann, Allison W. "Hope for the Future? The Asylum Claims of Women Fleeing Sexual Violence in Guatemala." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 157.4 (2009): 1199-1262.
Sanford, Victoria. "From Genocide to Femicide: Impunity and Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Guatemala." *Journal of Human Rights*, 7.104(2008):122, 2008.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Kathleen T. Giles
CSU, Stanislaus
Email: kgiles1@csustan.edu