ENGENDERING SECURITY: LESSONS FROM POST-CONFLICT CENTRAL AMERICA

by

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Abstract

Analyzing post-conflict contexts from a feminist perspective sheds light on an important, yet overlooked, fact in peacebuilding research: While human rights are formally recognized and codified by public state and international institutions, the actual possibility of enjoying these rights often depends on whether they are respected or violated in private, often intimate, gendered relations. I therefore ask: How might peacebuilding efforts bridge the gap between the promise and practice of women’s rights and basic security in post-conflict contexts? In response, I argue that peacebuilding efforts must foster a feminist vision of positive peace that requires not only the absence of war, but also the elimination of unjust social relations. So long as gendered violence is largely excluded from mainstream peacebuilding theories and practices, a robust human rights regime will remain elusive - even in contexts that are otherwise regarded as peacebuilding "success stories."

In theory, the protection and promotion of human rights as part of peacebuilding is not very controversial. The challenge, as I illustrate, is in finding ways to make these rights a meaningful reality (i.e. a behavioural practice) in the lives of a post-conflict population. Based on 92 interviews and extensive participant-observation research in El Salvador, Guatemala, and

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Nicaragua, I demonstrate how grassroots projects are well-positioned to: a) address the private relations in which gendered violence often occurs, and b) change the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that sustain the gendered power relations and gendered roles subordinating women. I focus on three projects developed by Central American citizens to strengthen women’s rights and basic security: Women’s Police Stations, *Nuevos Horizontes* (New Horizons) a shelter for survivors of intimate partner violence, and the innovative *telenovela* or "social soap" *Sexto Sentido* (Sixth Sense). My findings show how these projects both empower women through a combination of resources, agency and achievements, and challenge traditional gendered roles and identities, such as *machismo*, that normalize violence against women. By challenging patriarchal power distributions and gendered identities/roles from the "bottom-up," my research offers baseline examples of how grassroots initiatives can improve women's security, consequently strengthening the rights-based culture necessary for positive peace.
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Introduction

In the 1990s, Central America experienced a welcome transition from war to peace. In 1990, Nicaragua ended 12 years of conflict between the Sandinista Revolutionaries and the American-sponsored Contras. In 1992, the 12-year Salvadoran Civil War ended with the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords. And, in 1996, after 36 years of civil war, Guatemalans celebrated a hard-won peace agreement. Today, post-conflict Central America is identified as a peacebuilding success story. As Roland Paris describes, “formerly warring parties in all three countries are pursuing their interests primarily through electoral politics rather than by military force. For a region that has enjoyed little peace in the last quarter-century, the absence of war is an accomplishment worthy of celebration.”

But what does it mean for a country to be at peace? Despite an absence of war, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua are plagued with a level of violence classified by the World Health Organization as "epidemic". Violence in post-conflict Central America is so rampant, that homicide rates in “peacetime” have exceeded the average annual wartime casualties. By 1995, annual deaths by homicide in El Salvador exceeded the number of violent deaths recorded in each year of the country's 12-year war. Whereas approximately 5000 violent deaths were recorded in El Salvador's latter war years, in 1996 - four years after the peace accords - there were 8,047 reported homicides. Ten years after Guatemala's official "peace", their homicide rate of 47 per 100,000 inhabitants positioned the state as one of the world’s most violent countries. As Sanford concludes: “In five years of ‘peacetime,’ there have been 20,943 registered murders in Guatemala. If the number of murder victims continues to rise at the current rate, more people will die in the first 25 years of peace than died in the 36-year internal armed conflict and genocide.”

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3 The WHO categorizes states with homicide rates over 10 per 100,000 inhabitants as presenting “epidemic” levels of violence.
While this violence affects all Central Americans, women living in this "post-conflict" region face distinct and disturbing threats to their physical security. Consider, for example, these snapshots from post-conflict Central America:

**El Salvador** - In 2003, the decapitated heads of two women (between 15 and 20 years old) were found, still bleeding, near a police station parking lot just outside San Salvador. The body of a pregnant 17-year-old girl was found in an open space in Apastepeque, San Vicente. She had 150 wounds inflicted upon her - many in her stomach - with a knife or similar weapon. According to Amnesty International, "the government blamed *mara* [gang] members for the violence, but there was no proper evidence to support this assumption."7 This case is one of the twelve female murders in 2003 where the victim's body parts were found scattered, purposefully, in different locations. Out of the dozen cases involving the murder, decapitation, and mutilation of women during that year, only two were investigated.8

**Guatemala** - Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz was a law school student, whose life ended at age 19. On August 13, 2005, Claudina went to a party; she called her mother later that night to say that she would be home soon, but never returned. Soon after, her parents received a phone call warning that Claudina was in danger. The parents alerted the local police, who ignored their concern. Claudina's body was later found covered with bruises, traces of semen, and a fatal gunshot wound to the head.

Over a year later, an investigative report was commissioned, and presented, by Guatemala's Human Rights Ombudsman. The October 2006 report criticized the State for failing in its obligation to respect and guarantee the right to life, security, and due process; specifically, the report detailed numerous problems with the State's investigation of the Velásquez Paiz case, including the failure to interview witnesses, to conduct a thorough forensic analysis, and to preserve the crime scene. It was uncovered that a main deterrent to a prompt and thorough investigation was the authorities' classification that Claudina was a "nobody" because, when her body was found on a public street, she was wearing sandals and a belly button ring.

On March 25, 2009, the wife of the Ombudsman who presented the report on the Velásquez Paiz investigation, Gladys Monterroso, was kidnapped, tortured, and raped. The Guatemalan Human Rights Commission identifies this incident as an example of how female family members are

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200,000 people were killed or “disappeared,” 1.5 million people were displaced (with another 150,000 refugees fleeing to Mexico), and 626 villages were massacred. See: Commission of Historical Clarification, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, 1999, Vol. 5, 42. Online: http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/toc.html


8 Ibid.
attacked for political purposes - to generate and perpetuate a climate of terror for those supporting gender equality measures and women's rights.\(^9\)

In 2012, seven years after Velásquez Paiz was murdered, and six years after the Ombudsman's critical report of the State's investigation, the case remains unsolved, with no reported suspects. Out of the approximately 6000 Guatemalan women murdered between 2000 and 2012, only 4% of the cases have resulted in a full investigation, and only 2% have resulted in convictions.

**Nicaragua** - In January of 2009, Rosa-Maria asked her husband for a separation. He had spent the money he made selling lottery tickets over the Christmas holidays on glue (for sniffing) and rum. Rosa-Maria accused her husband of failing to provide for his children and for being "selfish". She felt increasingly unsafe in her home so she asked her husband to move in with his brother. In response to her request, Rosa-Maria recounted that her husband "hit me on my head and back […] he eventually knocked over our house and then chased me down the street with a machete."\(^{10}\)

On March 25, 2011, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission held a hearing regarding women's human rights in Nicaragua. At this hearing, experts testified that 940 cases of intimate partner violence are reported every month, amounting to 31 cases every day. Sexual violence occurs 400 times each month, or 14 times a day; in 85% of these cases, the victims are minors with one in four being a girl younger than 10 years of age. Violations of women's rights and basic security almost always occur in the private sphere, with at least 80% of such violent acts committed by boyfriends, husbands, fathers, step-fathers or other family members.\(^{11}\) In the words of expert Azaria Solís: “While the cases of violence grow in number and in brutality, impunity is a constant.”\(^{12}\)

These stories illustrate the ongoing socially patterned and intentionally organized violence against women in post-war states that, according to mainstream peacebuilding criteria, are "successful" peacebuilding cases. Popular approaches to peacebuilding encourage a “liberal” peace, meaning that peace is inextricably tied to democratic governance and free-market


\(^{10}\) Interview F2. Rosa-Maria lived on the outskirts of Granada, in a very poor barrio. Like the other homes in this barrio, theirs was made of cardboard boxes and a piece of tin for the roof.


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
economies. As in the case of post-conflict Central America, states that sign peace agreements, hold regular elections, restructure their domestic economy (with increased privatization, for example) and participate in international free trade may well achieve a lasting "negative" peace (the absence of war). Contemporary peacebuilding also stresses the importance of cultivating a human rights regime in post-conflict states. The cultivation of rights and basic security falls under the vast umbrella of what Johan Galtung calls "positive" peace. Positive peace is more ambitious than a cessation of organized conflict; it calls for the elimination (or at least the minimization) of all forms of structural inequality as well as the eradication of cultural beliefs/attitudes that legitimize violence in both its direct and structural forms.\(^1\)

One way that post-conflict states can work towards positive peace (mitigating direct, structural, and cultural violence) is by fostering a human rights regime. On paper, it looks as if the post-conflict states of Central America are working to bolster the protection of human rights within their borders, and - in particular - are committed to improving women's rights and basic security. Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua have all codified their obligation to ensure citizens' right to "life, liberty and security of person"\(^1\) in their post-war constitutions and new national laws, in addition to having ratified numerous international and regional treaties that pertain to women's rights. Unfortunately, the high prevalence of femicide and intimate partner violence in post-conflict Central America demonstrates that such public commitments to ensure women's rights and basic security have had little impact on minimizing life-threatening gender-based violence in private relations.

This raises an important question for peacebuilding research: How might peacebuilding efforts bridge the gap between the promise and practice of women's security in post-conflict contexts? “Top-down” approaches to safeguard women’s security – namely laws and rights –

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\(^1\) As Galtung explains, social structures and institutions constitute individuals "in a way that has a particular structural-political meaning, whether that meaning is religious, ethnic, racial, class-based or gendered." This hierarchical ordering of citizens becomes "structural violence" when it creates an "avoidable impairment of human needs" for those who find themselves in the disadvantaged position. Culture acts to reinforce the structural disadvantage of these individuals and to legitimize the consequent direct violence they may face. Galtung thus views direct, structural and cultural violence as intertwined, defining cultural violence as “any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form.”

\(^1\) Within these documents, women's right to security has been framed in different language depending on the source, however, I most often borrow from the wording in Article 3 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which promises that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. See: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The United Nations, 1948. Online: http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml
have so far proved necessary, but insufficient, for limiting widespread gendered violence in post-conflict contexts. Consequently, a problematic “gap” exists between the promise and the practice of ensuring women’s right to physical security in post-conflict states. This gap presents an important problem for two reasons: 1) the rights and security of half the population are jeopardized, which is a security issue in and of itself, and 2) violence against women undermines the establishment of the rights and equality measures that are a cornerstone of positive peace. To help bridge this gap between the promise and practice of women's security, peacebuilding efforts must incorporate a feminist conception of positive peace as put forth by J. Ann Tickner. In her view, positive peace requires "not only the absence of war but also the elimination of unjust social relations, including unequal gender relations."\textsuperscript{15}

Analyzing post-conflict contexts from a feminist perspective sheds light on an important, yet overlooked, fact in peacebuilding research: While human rights are officially recognized and codified in public – by state and international institutions – the actual possibility of enjoying these rights often depends on whether they are respected or violated in private, often intimate, gendered relations. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women points to this fact, defining "violence against women" as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."\textsuperscript{16} The Declaration also reminds us that violence against women "is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men."\textsuperscript{17}

Cultivating non-violent relations in the private sphere is, therefore, foundational for the equality and empowerment of women. Finding strategies to move human rights from public laws and conventions into the daily practice of women’s post-conflict lives presents a significant

\textsuperscript{15} J. Ann Tickner, \textit{Gender and International Relations}, 1992, 128.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
challenge for peacebuilding. To compliment "top-down" legal approaches, my research focuses on the ways in which grassroots actors work to entrench women's rights and improve women's basic security from the "bottom-up". I argue that grassroots projects help increase the security of women living in post-conflict states by taking international and national-level laws and "making meaning" of their content among the population they are meant to serve. Because of their close interactions with women living in situations of life-threatening violence, grassroots actors are in a strategic position to generate programs that are responsive to women's security needs in the private sphere. Thus, my empirical field work offers some answers to the question of "how" a post-conflict society might go about cultivating a feminist conception of positive peace. Based on my research, I argue that the peacebuilding process must include two key elements: 1) Eliminate the sources of insecurity experienced in the private sphere and not only in the public sphere, and 2) Develop appropriate grassroots "bottom-up" peacebuilding projects that work to: a) alter gendered power relations by empowering women, and b) reform patriarchal gender roles/identities that normalize violence against women.

Women's empowerment, in consort with a change in gendered roles, is an important way to address the tripartite of violence (direct, structural and cultural violence) that plagues women's post-conflict lives. A feminist conception of positive peace builds upon mainstream understandings of liberal peacebuilding, but emphasizes the fact that in highly patriarchal cultures we find patriarchal structures and institutions; thus, within such contexts, a "top-down" legal and institutional response will fail to assure women's rights and basic security in both the public and private spheres. Adopting a feminist conception of positive peace would enlarge our indicators of security to include robust support for human rights in the private sphere and - as I detail in Chapters Three and Four - would call for a deployment of resources (material and ideational) to bolster this neglected area. To be sure, there is widespread debate (even, and perhaps especially, among feminists) about what the elimination of unequal gender relations would "look like" on the ground, how to effect such change, and how changes in the distribution of gendered power can be "measured". Again, to quote Tickner: "Gender inequality is not a single variable that can be adequately indexed or measured statistically; rather, it is a historically

18 An excellent sample of these debates can be found in Karen Knop (ed.), *Gender and Human Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
contingent, complex confluence of socio-cultural power relationships, including associated subjective understandings."\(^{19}\) Because post-conflict states differ greatly from one another, and different groups within a single post-conflict state often present a diverse set of cultural, religious and historical factors that will influence gender roles, I stress that a feminist conception of positive peace must be developed in a contextually sensitive manner.

That said, I focus explicitly on improving women's physical security by limiting life-threatening gendered violence; this "indicator" is widely generalizable across all post-conflict cases as women's right to "life, liberty and security of person" is universal. Determining the best ways to go about achieving women's security, however, is a context-sensitive endeavour. The need for contextually relevant approaches to "make meaning" of universal rights among post-conflict populations is exactly how grassroots projects add value to this aspect of peacebuilding. For my purposes, eliminating unequal gender relations requires the elimination of gender-based violence. While this is not a sufficient condition for "gender equality" writ large, it is a necessary one. In post-conflict contexts, where security is fragile and fostering a strong human rights regime necessary, I argue that limiting gender-based violence is a first-order priority. For if women consistently fear life-threatening violence then how can they fully contribute to other peacebuilding goals, such as being the politically-engaged members of civil society or the strong economic actors that a liberal peace necessitates? When women enjoy physical security, I argue, they will be able to increase their participation in other facets of the peacebuilding process exponentially.\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Tickner, 2005, 17.

\(^{20}\) Violence against women erodes the social capital of a state because of the isolation suffered by female victims. Suffering from intimate partner violence "reduces a woman’s quality of life and her ability to participate in activities outside the home, including activities that contribute to the consolidation of the region’s democracies" (Mayra Buvinic, Andrew R. Morrison, and Michael Shifter, “Violence in the Americas: A Framework for Action,” in Too Close to Home, 1999, 17). Libal and Parekh echo this view, claiming that exercising control over women through violence "is the central way men undermine women’s capacities for and exercise of independent decision making, a key feature of the liberal notion of personhood that is the prerequisite for political rights, claims, entitlements, participation, and representation.” (Kathryn Libal and Sarena Parekh, “Reframing Violence Against Women as a Human Rights Violation: Evan Stark’s Coercive Control,” in Violence Against Women, 15, 12, 2009, 1479). In addition to eroding the social capital necessary for peacebuilding, intimate partner violence also drains the already minimal public resources - resources that could be re-directed to other aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. For example, a study aimed at measuring the socio-economic costs of intimate partner violence in El Salvador found that "expenditures on government institutions, legal costs, personal injuries and prevention activities represented over 6 percent of 1995 GDP" (Buvinic et al., 1999, 17). In Nicaragua, total costs of the lost productive capacity of women victimized by intimate partner violence are estimated at US$32.7 million (Mark L. Rosenberg, Alexander Butchart,
Case Study

In various peacebuilding “success stories,” negative peace is achieved while positive peace remains elusive.\(^{21}\) This is certainly true in my regional study of post-conflict Central America – a case composed of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Each of these three states was subject to a peacebuilding mission under the traditional liberal state-building model (Nicaragua in 1989, El Salvador in 1991, and Guatemala in 1997). Having signed peace agreements in the 1990s (Nicaragua in 1990, El Salvador in 1992, and Guatemala in 1996) this region has enjoyed democratic elections, domestic economic reforms, increased participation in free trade agreements, and not one has slid back into large-scale intrastate conflict. Thus, compared to their African counterparts who struggle with protracted conflict, each of these states has been pronounced a peacebuilding success.\(^{22}\)

However, when these cases of “successful” peacebuilding are evaluated in terms of cultivating a robust human rights regime that upholds citizens' basic security, the region has failed. As I mentioned earlier, the World Health Organization categorizes post-conflict Central America as experiencing “epidemic” levels of violence as homicide rates in “peacetime” have far exceeded average annual wartime casualties. State-based peacebuilding research focuses on what the state is – or is not – doing to build peaceful relations between itself and its neighbouring states and/or between factions within its own borders that may threaten state failure; yet, there are many egregious violations of human rights and security that may not threaten the state's internal collapse but do present an obstacle to building positive peace.

In post-conflict Central America, two of the most significant manifestations of violence experienced by women are \textit{femicide} and \textit{intimate partner violence} (IPV).\(^{23}\) With regards to

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\(^{23}\) My thesis uses the term “intimate partner violence” (rather than “domestic violence”) as this is the terminology employed by international institutions, such as the World Health Organization, as well as the proper term used
femicide, a helpful distinction is to be made between “overt” and “covert” forms. Overt femicide includes the intentional and violent killing of women, often accompanied by rape, mutilation, and torture. Covert femicide includes types of life-ending violence against women that are institutionally entrenched through policy. In defining the other major type of violence against women in post-conflict Central America - intimate partner violence - I use the definition provided by the World Health Organization, which refers to “any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in that relationship.”  

Intimate partner violence, therefore, includes acts of physical aggression (slapping, hitting, kicking or beating), psychological abuse (intimidation, constant belittling or humiliation), forced sexual intercourse, or other extreme forms of controlling behavior (such as isolating a person from family and friends, monitoring their movements and restricting access to information or assistance).  

My dissertation contains evidence of multiple decapitations of women, annually rising rates of femicide, and levels of intimate partner violence that affect an estimated 90% of women in parts of the region. Femicide and intimate partner violence are forms of gender-based violence because they are embedded within a structure of gendered power relations that disadvantage females/femininity in favor of males/masculinity. The subordinate power position of women in Central America helps explain why their rights to physical security and bodily integrity are almost always violated at the hands of a male perpetrator. To better assure women’s security, peacebuilding efforts must address both the direct acts of violence women experience as individuals as well as the structural and cultural conditions that permit and encourage such life-threatening violence. In so doing, post-conflict Central America will cultivate a more robust human rights regime and, consequently, a more durable “positive” peace.


25 Ibid.
Methodological Questions: Why Women? Why Post-conflict Contexts?

In post-conflict Central America, a clear gap exists between the numerous public promises these states have made to assure women's rights and the ongoing violation of those rights - often in the context of private relations. The region is, therefore, an excellent case from which to develop a feminist conception of positive peace based on the workings of grassroots efforts to bridge the gap between the promise and practice of women's security from the "bottom-up". However, two questions require further comment. First, why study violence against women in a region where approximately 90% of the life-ending violence is male-on-male? If we use the homicide rate of each sex to determine the importance of human rights issues, then - with 9 out of 10 murder victims being male - is it not men's insecurity that presents the most pressing human rights issue in post-conflict Central America? Second, if violence against women is a problem worldwide - not merely in post-conflict contexts - then what makes women's right to "life, liberty and security of person" an issue of particular relevance to peacebuilding? Why does gender-based violence obstruct a rights-based culture in post-conflict Central America while not doing so in other countries, such as Canada or the United States?

In response, I argue that the gender-based violence of femicide and intimate partner violence in post-conflict Central America has a distinctive and disturbing quality. In particular, two dimensions of this violence stand out: 1) some of this violence appears to be an intentionally organized (or systematic) targeting of equality measures, and 2) the socially patterned (or systemic) nature of this violence points to women being targeted as a social group.26 In the first case, my dissertation contains numerous examples of women being threatened, kidnapped, tortured, raped and/or murdered because of their public support for women's equality and human rights. As described at the beginning of the introduction, the kidnapping, torture, and rape of Gladys Monterroso (wife of the Human Rights Ombudsman in Guatemala) is one case of this intentionally-organized, politically-targeted violence.

Another example where women - as a sex-based social group - are suffering the life-threatening effects of intentionally organized violence is the case of covert femicide. As Russell

and Harmes explain: "The concept of femicide includes covert forms of woman-killing such as women being permitted to die because of misogynistic attitudes and/or social institutions. For example, wherever women's right to choose whether to be a mother is not recognized, thousands of women die every year from botched abortions." Detailed in Chapter Two, 97% of countries allow for abortion when the mother's life is at risk. El Salvador and Nicaragua are two of the six states that have instituted a total ban on abortion, including abortions in cases of rape/incest and when the life of the mother is at risk in carrying the fetus to term.

Notably, El Salvador and Nicaragua passed the ban during their "post-conflict" period, through democratic vote. As the law expresses the will of the people, Salvadoran and Nicaraguan politicians often point to this fact in defense of the ban. A feminist analysis reveals that the criminalization of therapeutic abortion is a form of intentionally organized violence against women that undermines women's right to life, liberty and security of person. Unlike the (mostly gang-related) male-on-male violence of post-conflict Central America, the total ban on abortion is a state-perpetuated human rights violation that legalizes the preventable death of female citizens. This rights violation, suffered only by females, is made possible because of the gendered power relations and patriarchal roles that normalize violence against women in these states. Unlike other states in which gender-based violence occurs, the case of post-conflict Central America includes democratically-elected governments that have instituted a form of intentionally organized, gender-based, violence as official state policy.

The second way in which gender-based violence in post-conflict Central America has a distinct and disturbing quality is in its socially patterned targeting of women as a "social group." I argue that women in post-conflict Central America constitute a recognizable, at-risk "social group" (rather than a sweeping social demographic with no connections between the individuals) because this group has both social visibility and particularity. According to the Ninth Circuit

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28 States identified as "Catholic" - such as Italy, Ireland and Guatemala - allow abortion in cases where the mother's life is at risk. Such policy differences undermine the argument made by Nicaraguan and Salvadoran officials that the ban is an important - even necessary - expression of their state's religious identity.
29 Chile, Dominican Republic, the Holy See, and Malta are the other states to have a total ban on abortion. See: United Nations, *World Abortion Policies*, 2011, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
Court in the United States, a "social group" is one that is united by "an innate characteristic that is so fundamental to the identities or consciences of its members that members either cannot or should not be required to change it" and this characteristic makes this group of people socially recognizable. Central American women possess the "innate" and socially recognizable characteristics of their sex; thus, they qualify as a social group. Being of the female sex then overlaps with the socially-constructed power relations and roles/identities that are gendered.

The Court then states that a connection must be demonstrated between the persecution of these individual women and their membership in this (sexed) social group. This connection can be contentious, but the examples of socially patterned violence against women put forth in my dissertation lend support to this claim. To be clear, there is no set quantitative benchmark for what constitutes violence that is "socially patterned". In the case of covert femicide (the ban on therapeutic abortion) 100% of child-bearing age females in El Salvador and Nicaragua are vulnerable to this form of state-perpetuated life-threatening violence. With regards to intimate partner violence, estimates claim that 90% of women in Guatemala and El Salvador suffer this form of gender-based violence. With such large proportions of the Central American population affected by femicide and intimate partner violence, it seems reasonable to label this form of gender-based violence as socially patterned. This label is helpful for my purposes because it highlights the non-random and pervasive qualities of the violence undermining women's right to life, liberty and security of person in the region.

As further support for this argument, women's widespread insecurity in post-conflict Central America has twice been raised as a basis for asylum in the United States. The UN High

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32 Recall that in the case of Rosa, a nine-year old girl was impregnated by rape.

Commission on Refugees advocates that "women fearing persecution or severe discrimination on the basis of their gender should be considered a member of a social group for the purposes of determining refugee status."  

Such persecution may include harms unique to their gender such as, but not limited to, female genital mutilation, forcible abortion, *domestic violence that the state refuses to act on* and honour killings. Working from this basis, two women from Guatemala seeking asylum in the United States have presented variations on the classification of Guatemalan women as a "social group". In the case of Lesly Yajayra Perdomo, her legal team argued that women in Guatemala "were murdered at a high rate with impunity," thus she requested asylum “because she feared persecution as a member of a particular social group consisting of women between the ages of fourteen and forty.” While the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals ruled that all women in Guatemala between the ages of fourteen and forty was too broad of a category to qualify as a protected “social group,” the judges of the 9th Circuit appeal court disagreed. The 9th Circuit court argued that because it had previously been determined that gypsies, homosexuals, and Somali women facing genital mutilation qualified for asylum there were grounds to make the same argument for women facing the dangers of femicide.

In a similar vein, the case of Ms. Alvarado has been identified by legal scholars as “the iconic case of domestic abuse as a basis of asylum.” At 16 years old, Ms. Alvarado married a former Guatemalan soldier, Francisco Osorio. Their marriage was characterized by long-term and life-threatening violence, including one beating in which Mr. Osorio tried to induce an abortion while his wife was pregnant. In 1995, Ms. Alvarado went to the United States in search of asylum. In this “unusually protracted and closely watched case” the U.S. Homeland Security Department stipulated that, “while the specifics of the abuse are an important factor in

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35 Ibid. My emphasis.


37 Ibid.

38 Karen Musalo, Director of the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies at Hastings College of the Law, University of California. Quoted in Preston, 2009, A14.

granting refugee status, there is evidence supporting the claim that women fleeing domestic abuse are part of a ‘particular social group’ facing persecution and, therefore, the department ‘continues to view domestic violence as a possible basis for asylum.”40 In this case, the particular social group of "married women in Guatemala who are unable to leave the relationship" was “defined by immutable characteristics and fulfilled the new social visibility and particularity requirements.”41 In agreement with the Department of Homeland Security, the Obama administration also recommended political asylum; thus, on December 10th, 2009, Ms. Alvarado was granted asylum in the United States.

Although striking examples, these two cases may not present enough evidence that all women in post-conflict Central America should be considered a persecuted "social group"; yet, the argument has been put forward in American courtrooms to some noteworthy success. In the cases of overt femicide, there appears to be no defining feature that links these gruesome murders other than the victims' visibility as "women". As the stories in Chapter Two will illustrate, the murder victims vary in age, class, ethnicity and occupation. There is also variation in where the women are from and where they are killed and/or abused. Much of the drug and gang-related male-on-male violence in the region is concentrated in areas known to be dangerous - the capital cities, coastal "high-traffic" drug ports, and smaller cities (typically close to large prisons) that are notorious for gang violence, such as San Miguel in El Salvador. Femicide and intimate partner violence, however, are not concentrated in particular geographical locations that women could "avoid" in order to improve their level of security; in the case of intimate partner violence, the location where this life-threatening violence most often occurs is in a woman's own home. With an estimated 9 out of 10 Guatemalan and Salvadoran women abused in their homes by an intimate partner, the "private" nature of violence against women presents a distinct problem - and, thus, will require different "solutions" - from the "public" male-on-male violence in the region.

Having distinguished the problem of violence against women from the general climate of violence that plagues post-conflict Central America, I now address a second question raised by

40 Ibid.
41 Victoria Sanford, Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, Documents and Information on Rody Alvarado's Claim for Asylum in the U.S. Online: http://cgrs.uchastings.edu/campaigns/alvarado.php#legal
my research focus: if violence against women is a problem worldwide - not merely in post-conflict contexts - then what makes women's right to "life, liberty and security of person" an issue of particular relevance to peacebuilding? Indeed, some feminist peace scholars argue that any society containing violence against women is not "at peace." In the words of Birgit Brock-Utne, "there may be an absence of organized, personal, physical and direct violence (war) in a society and not be an absence of unorganized, personal, physical and direct violence in that same society (for instance wife battering, rape) - in which case we would hold that peace does not exist."42

According to Brock-Utne's broad definition of peace, evidence of violence against women in countries typically considered "peaceful" - such as Canada and the United States - would challenge this categorization. For example, in both the United States and Canada, approximately one in five women will be raped in their lifetime and one in four women will be abused by an intimate partner.43 In Canada, women are more vulnerable than men to intimate partner violence, with a rate of intimate partner violence nearly four times higher than that for men (574 per 100,000 women versus 147 per 100,000 men).44 Between 1974 and 2000, nearly 2600 spousal homicides were recorded in Canada, with more than 75% of these homicide victims being women.45 As in Central America, many Canadian spousal homicides are rooted in a history of intimate partner violence; in fact, between 1991 and 2000, the percentage of spousal homicide cases citing a history of intimate partner violence between victims and perpetrators increased from 53% to 67%.46

Data from the United States shows a similar story, with homicide as a leading killer of young women: in 1999, homicide was the second-leading cause of death among women aged 15 to 24 (second to motor vehicle accidents), and the third leading cause of injury-related death for

43 Center for Disease Control estimates that one in four women in the United States will be abused by an intimate partner in their lifetime and one in five women will be raped. Approximately one million women in the United States are raped each year. See: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/
46 Ibid.
all women 15-44 years old (after deaths caused by accidents and suicide). As in post-conflict Central America, much of this life-threatening violence occurs in the context of private relations; the U.S. Department of Justice finds that, since 1976, the percentage of female murder victims killed by an intimate partner has remained approximately 30%. Also disturbing is the frequency with which American males kill their impregnated intimate partners. Using data collected at both state and national levels, multiple studies have identified intimate partner homicide as the leading cause of death among women who are pregnant or in their first postpartum year.

Violence against women - at all times and in all countries - is problematic and must be addressed. However, like other feminist scholars in peace and security studies, I focus on women's security in post-conflict contexts because there are relationships between warfare, women's insecurity, and post-conflict state reconstruction that require further study. For instance, Hudson et al. show correlations between high rates of violence against women within a state and that state’s high internal instability as well as more bellicose behavior towards other states. There is also some evidence that intrastate conflict correlates with increased rates of gender-based violence within a society. In her study of peacebuilding in Rwanda and Cote d'Ivoire, Hudson contends that “[t]here is a link between gender inequality and violence, and the prevalence of discrimination against women increases the likelihood that a state will experience internal conflict.” In addition, with the increasing deployment of rape as a weapon of war,

conflict-ridden states experience a much higher prevalence of sexual violence than peaceful states.\textsuperscript{52}

Cynthia Enloe connects public warfare and private violence against women, arguing that military service is probably more conducive to violence at home than any other occupation.\textsuperscript{53} Studies corroborate Enloe's view, demonstrating that rates of intimate partner violence are three to five times higher in relationships where one - or both - partners is a post-deployed soldier (often suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder), compared to intimate relationships between citizens who have not experienced war.\textsuperscript{54} In cases of civil war, where there is no clear distinction between "home front" and "war front," research in peace psychology argues that entire nations, and even regions, suffer post-traumatic stress and collective trauma in war's aftermath.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, in cases of post-conflict peacebuilding, there is reason to believe that gendered violence has different underlying causes - related to the violence of warfare - than the gender-based violence plaguing non-transitional states, such as Canada or the United States.

In wartime, widespread insecurity and rampant impunity make women highly vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. Therefore, a significant aspect of peacebuilding must be the improvement of women's security - not only through deterrent and punitive measures (which are perpetrator-focused) but also by fostering a rights-based culture focused on women's equality and empowerment. Nowhere is this argument more obvious than in a case such as post-conflict Central America, which has been deemed a peacebuilding "success," despite women's insecurity and inequality throughout the region. Based on research from Central America (as well as Haiti and the former Yugoslavia), Tracy Fitzsimmons explains some of the key reasons why a state's

\textsuperscript{52} Carter, K. R. “Should International Relations Consider Rape a Weapon of War?”
\textit{Politics & Gender}, September 2010.


transition from war to "post-conflict" often translates into increased levels of violence in the lives of women:

what some may find surprising, and disquieting, is how international and domestic actors may be setting women up for an unpeaceful transition toward democracy and peacetime. Levels of domestic violence, nonpolitical rape, and sexual harassment may actually increase in post-conflict periods as returning soldiers, who are overwhelmingly male, redirect their aggression to their households, demanding a return to prewar societal patterns of interaction and responsibilities. Yet the law and its enforcers offer little protection to women during this period, as they instead focus their energies on political and ethnic violence, riot control, and demilitarization and disarmament. Even when they seek to address nonpolitical violence, their concerns privilege higher-profile organized crime, street crime, homicides, and political corruption.56

Illustrating Fitzsimmons' claims, I use evidence from post-conflict Central America to show that the scope, characteristics and purpose of gendered violence present an obstacle to fostering a rights-based culture - which is a cornerstone of liberal peacebuilding. The problem of violence against women in post-conflict contexts, such as Central America, is exacerbated by the general weakness of the war-torn state. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, states must uphold their "due diligence" to prevent, investigate and punish incidents of violence against women. Yet, as we see with the ban on therapeutic abortion, the states of Nicaragua and El Salvador are the perpetrators of this sexist violation of rights. Although far from perfect in doing their "due diligence" on violence against women, established liberal democracies (such as Canada and the United States) demonstrate a far greater capacity and willingness than their post-conflict neighbours to support women's rights and basic security.57 In part, this is due to a longer history of domestic political stability and greater financial resources, yet it is also due to socio-cultural

56 Tracy Fitzsimmons, "Engendering Justice and Security After War," in Constructing Justice and Security After War, Charles T. Call (ed.), U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 2007, 354. Fitzsimmons categorizes violence against women as "non-political," however, as I point out, some women are targeted for political motivations, such as their participation in organizations supporting women's rights or for their close association with others who do so, such as the wife of the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman.

57 Although service provision is imperfect, Canada and the United States offer many well-established programs and resources for women and children leaving violent relationships (crisis hotlines, shelters, social workers and counselors, medical services and even public money). North Americans have seen a slow decline in males killing their female spouses. Although distinct from IPV, many cases of intimate partner violence result in spousal homicide. This declining spousal homicide rate in North America is due to the changing nature of intimate relationships, increasing gender equality, legislative changes, policy and procedural changes such as specialized domestic violence courts, training of criminal justice personnel and increasing availability of resources for victims. See: Bunge, 2002.
and legal changes that have (slowly) altered gendered power relations and "de-normalized" violence against women. Once again, a state cannot address violence against women by focusing solely on investigating and punishing the perpetrators. States must also work to prevent the violation of women’s rights by focusing on empowering women and shifting the structural and cultural influences that sustain gender inequality.

As forms of gender-based violence, femicide and intimate partner violence result from gendered power imbalances and gendered roles/identities that have normalized this type of rights violation throughout post-conflict Central America; violence against women is therefore a problem of direct violence that is inseparable from Galtung’s structural and cultural violence. Peacebuilding theory and practice will benefit from further research into the connections between these forms of violence, and ways in which grassroots actors work to shift the structural and cultural forces that help normalize - and thus sustain - violence against women. The feminist conception of positive peace I put forth argues that women’s rights and basic security are an essential aspect of peacebuilding. Because most (if not all) post-conflict contexts contain systemic and systematic violence against women, this research will be relevant to other post-war societies.58

*Chapter Layout*

From an international or state-level analysis, it is easy to overlook women's rights and basic security as an indicator of successful peacebuilding. Historically, groups of people suffering systemic and systematic life-threatening violence based on ethnic, racial, or religious lines of identity have presented serious threats to the state; civil wars and genocides have resulted from clashes on these identity “fault lines.” Sex, however, is no such fault-line that divides society in a way that threatens civil war or state failure. Women are not “spoilers” of peace - a reason they are excluded from high-level peace talks and, consequently, why women's rights and basic security needs are often overlooked in the brokering of peace agreements.59 Women are often

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59 The United Nations reports that "women continue to be poorly represented in formal peace processes, although they contribute in many informal ways to conflict resolution. In recent peace negotiations, for which such
associated with being "naturally" peaceful; their efforts in various anti-war protests and peacebuilding activities are the topic of much scholarship.60

From a human rights perspective, the distinct and disturbing qualities of violence against women present an obstacle to peacebuilding that is embedded in - but different from - the overall climate of violence that plagues the region. As a feminist analysis reveals, it is difficult for the top-down, "public" tools of laws and rights to: a) fully address the "private" relations in which gendered violence often occurs, and b) change the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that sustain the gendered power relations and gendered roles that subordinate Central American women. When "top-down" legal approaches to ensuring women's rights prove insufficient in assuring women's rights in post-conflict contexts, how might "bottom-up" (grassroots initiatives) help to close this gap between the promise and practice of women's rights and basic security? Over the course of five chapters, my dissertation provides some answers to this question, arguing that grassroots projects both empower women (through a combination of resources, agency and achievements) and work at a broad, socio-cultural level to try and change the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that sustain gendered violence.

Chapter One begins with a succinct review of two literatures: peacebuilding and feminist security studies. My research speaks to the peacebuilding literature in two important ways. First, my work suggests that scholars and practitioners of peacebuilding re-think the criteria on which we deem a state to be a peacebuilding success or failure. In line with popular peacebuilding approaches of the 1990s, peacebuilding “success” stories - such as Central America - were judged as such because these cases met certain "liberal" criteria (elections, free market economies, and have not slid back into warfare). Yet, within cases of successful peacebuilding, the majority of citizens can remain highly insecure. This tension raises questions

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about the criteria on which we judge peacebuilding efforts as successful, and stresses the importance of cultivating a human rights regime as necessary to a durable peace. 61

After highlighting this tension, I then review peacebuilding scholarship that emphasizes the need for post-conflict states to support human rights. Largely, this aspect of peacebuilding is described as being part of creating "positive" peace (Galtung) or a "thick" peace (Ali and Matthews) in post-conflict contexts. 62 In 1969, Johan Galtung argued that peace research must use broad definitions of “violence” and “peace.” It is necessary for peace researchers to think of “peace” as a situation in which direct, structural, and cultural violence are mitigated. Otherwise, as Galtung cautioned: “Highly unacceptable social orders would still be compatible with peace.” 63 A feminist conception of positive peace builds upon these early roots of peace research, paying special attention to gendered violence. Current theories and practices of peacebuilding that neglect the insecurity of half the post-conflict population are deeply problematic. As comprehensive approaches to peacebuilding include the creation of a regime that supports human rights, peacebuilding scholars and practitioners must research how to protect all citizens from systemic and systematic life-threatening violence - whether such violence occurs in public or private.

There is no singular - or "right" - way to cultivate human rights among a population. Although peacebuilding literature widely acknowledges that creating a "thick" peace has legal, political, socio-cultural, and psychological dimensions, the majority of scholars focus on the state-building (legal and institutional) dimensions of fostering a robust human rights regime. Far less research sheds light on the bottom-up, socio-cultural changes in power relations and

61 Although I focus on violence against women, the cultivation of a more robust human rights regime would also impact the impoverished male youth of Central America who experience pervasive interpersonal male-on-male violence between one another, and are persecuted by police and clandestine security forces as "gang members" (whether this affiliation is true or not). See: International Human Rights Clinic: Human Rights Program Harvard Law School, No Place to Hide: Gang, State, and Clandestine Violence in El Salvador, February 2007, ii. Online: www.law.harvard.edu/programs/hrp/.../FinalElSalvadorReport(3-6-07).pdf

62 Instead of Galtung's negative/positive dichotomy, Tasier Ali and Robert O. Matthews refer to the long-term political, social, cultural, economic and socio-psychological processes of peacebuilding as "thickening layers of peace.” Finding this to be an apt, yet lesser known, descriptive image of the peacebuilding process, I often use the terms "positive" and "thick" peace in combination. See: Taisier Ali and Robert O. Matthews, Durable Peace: Challenges for Peacebuilding in Africa, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 7-8.

63 Galtung, 1969, 168.
identities that must accompany these top-down legal and institutional measures. As Nicola Lacey writes: "If we want, as we surely do, to use the framework of rights to empower women and to dismantle sex-based disadvantage, we must therefore understand the limitations as well as the potential of rights. Clearly, this involves a great deal of context-specific empirical data-collection and institutional analysis."⁶⁴ In this empirical study of three grassroots organizations in post-conflict Central America, my work contributes to Lacey's call for research that helps enrich our understanding of the limitations and the potential of rights around the world.

After reviewing key sources on peacebuilding and human rights, I then turn to scholarship in feminist security studies. This body of literature is important, as my research question focuses on the ways in which bottom-up approaches to cultivating human rights can improve women's security. Similar to human security scholarship (and distinct from the state-based analyses that dominate International Relations scholarship), feminist scholars focus their analysis on the security of human beings.⁶⁵ So, on one hand, my project fits within the general human security agenda, characterized by Barry Buzan as the "securitization of human rights"⁶⁶ and often linked to positive peace.⁶⁷ On the other hand, in taking a specifically feminist approach, my work views humans as explicitly *gendered* beings, and thus differs from most literature on human security which has been critiqued as overly broad in its analysis; as Paris summarizes: "If human security means almost anything, then it effectively means nothing."⁶⁸ A gendered lens sharpens the analytical focus of human security, directing our attention to the role of power and identity in determining the security of men and women in a particular context.

In this study of power relations, and how to change them, a feminist approach highlights a conception of power that is mostly absent from peacebuilding and security studies literature:

empowerment. Contrary to Dahl's oft-cited idea of power as coercive and competitive, 69 "empowerment" is a cooperative form of power. As Papart, Rai and Staudt explain, empowerment “allows us to incorporate notions of power that recognize the importance of individual consciousness/understanding (power within), and its importance for collective action (power with) that can organize and exert power to challenge gender hierarchies and improve women’s lives.” 70 Empowerment is well-suited to a feminist conception of positive peace, as it is a type of power that compliments Galtung’s vision of a peaceful society based on harmony and equity. When we analyze women's security in the positive-sum, relational framework of empowerment, then women can improve their security through a combination of resources, agency and achievements. 71 Women's empowerment can help shift the gendered power relations, roles and identities that normalize violence against women, without constituting a direct "loss" of power for males. On the contrary, as Hudson explains, a “feminist redefinition of power in relational terms, where the survival of one depends on the well-being of the other, would not only enhance women’s security but also that of men, who are similarly threatened by the conventional gendered approach to security.” 72 As my fieldwork shows, empowering women and challenging the gendered identity of machismo will likely affect positive changes in the lives of many Central American males.

In the final section of Chapter One, I explain why I use a feminist methodology and qualitative methods to answer my research question. In brief, this research question requires a feminist methodology because this allows for research that centers on women's lived experiences. A feminist approach to gathering qualitative data is necessary for developing a feminist conception of positive peace for three reasons: a) violence in both the public and private spheres is recognized as an indicator of (in)security; b) women's roles in post-conflict contexts is not conceived in dichotomous terms, thus - without contradiction - women (as individuals and as

69 In International Relations, power is traditionally conceived as zero-sum and in terms of relative gains. See: Robert A. Dahl, “The Concept of Power,” Behavioral Science, 2, July 1957.


a group) can be seen as both victims of post-conflict violence and agents of peacebuilding; and, c) while tracking the quantitative data on violence against women is important (i.e. we want to see a decrease in violence against women where these grassroots projects are active) feminist methodologies explain why this socio-cultural problem, that largely plays out in private gendered relations, is not easily measured. Thus, quantitative methods are neither the best way to understand gender-based violence nor to analyze grassroots projects working to improve women's security in post-conflict contexts.

Providing empirical support for a theoretical merger between positive peace and feminism, Chapter Two evaluates the gap between the promise and practice of human rights in post-conflict Central America from a feminist perspective. In documenting the evidence of pervasive life-threatening violence against women in post-conflict Central America, I raise a challenge to the idea that this region is a peacebuilding "success" story. First, I describe the numerous legal promises made by Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua to protect women's rights and ensure women's security. I then detail the existence of both overt and covert forms of femicide, as well as comparably high rates of intimate partner violence in these three states. Importantly, femicide and intimate partner violence are closely connected in that an estimated 60% of femicides are committed by a (former or current) male intimate partner, and the relationship characterized by a history of intimate partner violence. However, unlike victims of femicide (who are dead), women suffering intimate partner violence have an opportunity to improve their level of security.

After empirically demonstrating that a gap exists between the legal promise and the "on-the-ground" practice of human rights in post-conflict Central America, the third and fourth chapters of my dissertation identify broad strategies and specific tactics for improving women’s security from the "bottom-up". Extensive interview and participant-observation data from three grassroots projects reveal that women suffering human rights violations require a comprehensive approach to improving their immediate security. When top-down approaches to peacebuilding take account of violence in the private sphere, they try to foster human rights through legal means. Legal measures address violence against women from an institutional perspective; in other words, they emphasize deterrence and punishment and rely on police and judicial forces for implementation. As my feminist analysis of post-conflict Central America reveals, this approach is necessary, but insufficient, to address the issue of violence against women.
In Chapters Three and Four, I support my argument that grassroots actors are crucial in a feminist conception of positive peace because they address the power relations and the socio-cultural dynamics from which gendered violence is perpetuated, legitimated, and sometimes encouraged. Understanding that femicide and intimate partner violence are embedded in private relations, yet "normalized" by the larger socio-cultural context of gender inequality, grassroots actors work to effect change at both levels. On the one hand, these projects try to empower women using a combination of resources, agency and achievements; on the other hand, grassroots efforts work to affect change in the broadly-held attitudes and beliefs about masculinity that often result in violent behaviour.

In Chapter Three, I focus my empirical study on two peacebuilding projects aimed at empowering women in order to increase their level of security: Women’s Police Stations in Nicaragua and Nuevos Horizontes, a Guatemalan shelter for women escaping intimate partner violence. Analyzing these examples, I detail the successes and challenges of each in terms of empowering women. Theorizing power as “empowerment” offers a helpful alternative to traditional concepts of power in IR that define power to mean “power-over,” influence, coercion, and/or dominance. Although traditional conceptualizations of power may appropriately characterize inter-state relations, this view of power is of limited use for peace research as its meanings of power are antithetical to fostering non-violent relations between people. Peace research focused on “positive” peace thus requires a different definition of power in order to explain and understand the ways in which women are challenging the gendered power relations that often put their lives at risk. Using Naila Kabeer's three-pronged conception of empowerment as my analytical framework, I use my interview data to show how these two grassroots peacebuilding projects help empower women through a combination of resources, agency, and achievements.

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73 The standard definition of power used in international politics is defined as “the ability of Actor A to get Actor B to do something that B would otherwise not do.” See: Robert A. Dahl, “The Concept of Power,” Behavioral Science, 2, July 1957.

One of the major finding from the field relates to work on "communities of judgment." Within communities of like-minded women, I found that small advances are taken by individuals to safe-guard their human right to security and bodily integrity. In Nicaragua, an influential non-governmental organization run by, and for, Nicaraguan women prioritized the reporting of violent incidents as essential to women’s security; yet, they identified that women would be more likely to report such violence in an all-female environment. To meet this need, Nicaraguans created a number of Women’s Police Stations throughout the country, staffed by female officers, medical examiners and psychologists. In contrast, a group of Guatemalan women determined that meeting the material needs of women should be the main priority in helping women transition out of situations of life-threatening violence. Thus, in 1998, the grassroots program, Nuevos Horizones (New Horizons), converted a building used for refugees during the country’s 36-year civil war into a shelter for Guatemalan women leaving their abusive intimate partners. In working with women at the shelter, Nuevos Horizones then decided that – in addition to the safe refuge, food and clothing already provided – women also required an ideational shift in order to make a permanent transition to a more secure life.

As my interview data show, this ideational shift is characterized by a change in one’s view of violence from “normal” to unacceptable, and is most-often described by those participating in the organization’s programs as “increased self-esteem”. Although rights and laws play an important role in this ideational shift, my research sheds light on how the de-normalization of violence against women, and the positive reinforcement for women to openly challenge, or to leave, a life-threatening relationship, is fostered from within a community of like-minded citizens (i.e. from the “bottom-up”). Not only does women's knowledge of national laws and international rights matter on an individual level, but these new ways of thinking about oneself as a “bearer of rights,” and as entitled to security, are reinforced by a like-minded community of women. In making this argument, I rely on Jennifer Nedelsky’s conception of “communities of judgment,” and use my empirical data from the various women’s workshops facilitated by Nuevos Horizones to support her theoretical vision. Rights matter, I was repeatedly told, because they help women to see themselves differently – as deserving of a life free from violence. Knowing the various rights and laws “on the books” that claim women are worthy of protection, and must not be subject to systemic or systematic violence, does affect the choices individual women make in their everyday lives to improve their personal security. Rights and
laws are therefore important for women’s security, independent of the state’s willingness and/or capacity to exercise its due diligence in protecting women, because they offer a source of empowerment. In sum, the data in Chapter Three make a contribution to debates on rights and their purpose or usefulness in women’s real-world, post-conflict, lives. Women's experiences in post-conflict Nicaragua and Guatemala shed light on the ways in which grassroots projects take the "top-down" legal approach to human rights and make meaning of these laws and rights for women - both as individuals and as a social group.

I then dedicate Chapter Four to studying an organization that targets both young males and females as responsible for reducing levels of violence in their families, communities, and states. The findings in this chapter speak to potential positive changes in both inter-sex, and intra-sex, relations – possibly leading to an eventual spillover effect that may decrease levels of violence between Central American males. Empirically, the focus of this chapter is the organization, Puntos de Encuentro ("Meeting Points" or "Common Ground"), which tries to influence an ideational shift at a broad, socio-cultural, level. In this case, the Nicaraguan feminists who started the organization identified “machismo” as a major factor in the perpetuation and normalization of violence against women in Central America. Gendered violence in post-conflict Central America is not simply a result of interpersonal problems unique to certain relationships, but is a consequence of broadly and deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and beliefs. In Central America, this results in a “hegemonic” type of masculinity widely known as machismo; this gendered identity is largely associated with power and control, often resulting in violent behavior.

As interviews and observations from the organization demonstrate, grassroots actors are using educational social media, or “edutainment,” campaigns to challenge the regionally entrenched connections between masculinity and violent behavior. The organization focuses its efforts on Central American youth, identifying males and females of 14-25 years of age as the “cohort” most open to thinking critically about the influences in their lives (religious, cultural, political, communal) and, consequently, most susceptible to changing their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Specifically, I look at the organization’s production of the popular telenovela, Sexto Sentido (“Sixth Sense”). Knowing that telenovelas are extremely popular in Central America, and that viewers identify with the characters in these dramas, the organization produced their
own “social soap” as a culturally-sensitive strategy for promoting human rights. One plotline, for example, follows a mother and daughter through their experience with violence perpetrated against them by their intimate partner/father. This story-arc is based on the real-life experiences of Nicaraguan women, as told to the show’s writers and creators. Because this grassroots project is deeply attuned to the cultural, political and economic factors that shape violent – and non-violent – relations between women and men, the work of this grassroots project is highly resonant with its Central American audience.

In conclusion, I summarize my theoretical and empirical contribution to peacebuilding and feminist security studies. Theoretically, a feminist conception of positive peace addresses the socially patterned and (often) intentionally organized violence that women experience in both the public and private sphere. Empirically, studying how "bottom-up" approaches cultivate human rights in practice offers a necessary compliment to the numerous "top-down" legal promises put forth as a cornerstone of liberal peacebuilding. Fortunately, the "practice turn" in International Relations is calling for exactly this type of empirical research. I, therefore, make some concluding remarks on how this turn in the discipline may offer a useful frame for my future research on women’s security.

For Central Americans, the promise of human rights was hard-won. Thousands of Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Salvadorans fought - and died - to win the promise of rights and security within their state. Encouragingly, none of these states have reverted back into civil war. Disappointingly, however, decades after such promises were made in each state's peace agreements and post-war constitutions, a robust human rights regime remains elusive. This challenge is not specific to Central America, but is evident in a number of states in Africa (such as Angola, South Africa, Liberia and Sierra Leone), Central Asia (Tajikistan, for example), and it is sure to present itself in other eventual "post-conflict" states, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Sudan. Thus, exploring how post-conflict states can effectively construct a more secure environment - in practice, for all of their citizens - is an important research agenda for the twenty-first century.

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1
"Saving" Liberal Peacebuilding for All:
A Feminist Conception of Positive Peace

“Feminist thinking about peace is not necessarily locked in this war/peace dichotomy. Perhaps because feminists start from the conditions of women’s lives, and because they see how many forms violence and oppression can take, they are more likely to define peace as women’s achievement of control over their lives.”

~ Cynthia Enloe

Merging three bodies of literature - peace studies, peacebuilding, and feminist theory - I put forth a feminist conception of positive peace that centers women's rights and basic security in the peacebuilding process. I argue that peacebuilding theory and practice must focus on the elimination of gendered violence in both the public and private spheres. Currently, the peacebuilding agenda focuses on building liberal democratic institutions and its success is measured by a few (rather superficial) indicators, such as the holding of democratic elections and moves towards international economic integration. The feminist conception of positive peace that I argue for makes clear that such an approach - and its indicators of success - does not adequately address the sources of women's insecurity in post-conflict contexts. Because women's rights and basic security are often violated in their private relations, peacebuilding must also focus on the entrenchment of human rights in private practice. So long as gendered violence is largely excluded from mainstream peacebuilding theories and practices, women will remain significantly insecure - and a robust human rights regime will remain elusive - in contexts that are otherwise regarded as peacebuilding "success stories".

While critical of liberal peacebuilding, I am careful not to dismiss liberalism as the general framework guiding peacebuilding operations. In Saving Liberal Peacebuilding, Paris warns of "unnecessarily delegitimizing the idea of liberal peacebuilding rather than focusing on the modes or methods of liberal peacebuilding.” My research investigates better ways of fostering a robust human rights regime in post-conflict contexts on the assumption that rights are a useful

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path for limiting violence. And although debates about the use (and misuse) of human rights continue, it is clear that "human rights are here to stay." 78 Rooted in the liberal principle of individual freedom, I consider my project to belong to the literature that helps "reinforce the case for reforming current approaches to peacebuilding, without disavowing the broadly liberal orientation of these missions." 79

While I do not propose that all citizens' private interpersonal dynamics are relevant to global security, where social patterns of interpersonal violence are entangled in webs of gendered power relations, then these private relations are an important site for peacebuilding. 80 When patterns of gender-based violence are identified and analyzed, it becomes clear how human rights violations within a patriarchal context are largely ignored, condoned, and - at times - perpetuated by the state. In a deeply patriarchal context, women's universal right to "life, liberty and security of person" will remain elusive unless the factors that contribute to their insecurity are addressed. The key factors are, in my view, gendered power imbalances that subordinate women, and the perpetuation of gendered roles/identities that normalize (and thus sustain) violence against women in both the public and private spheres. To ensure women's equality and basic security in post-conflict contexts will require the "top-down" institutionalization of human rights. This promise of rights fits within current approaches to peacebuilding and requires little - if any - shift in mainstream thinking about the purpose and goals of each mission.81 But, of equal importance, peacebuilding theory and practice must include "bottom-up" efforts that work to: a) change gendered power relations by empowering women through a combination of resources, agency and achievements, and b) change the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that normalize violence against women, and thus sustain gender inequality, in both private and public relationships. 82 This inclusion will require a change in the thinking and practice of peacebuilding, but - as I argue - it is necessary for

82 The key form of private relationships in my research are intimate and/or familial relations, whereas the "public" relationship to which I refer is the relationship between the state and women (as a social group). For example, the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran state policy to ban therapeutic abortion is a manifestation of patriarchy in this public relationship between the state and women.
making the promise of rights in post-conflict contexts more than liberal rhetoric.

I begin this chapter by defining negative and positive peace, as introduced by Johan Galtung, and clarifying how I see these concepts of peace as significant for post-conflict peacebuilding. In Part II, I review peacebuilding literature from mainstream and critical perspectives, to show how both liberal and human security approaches to peacebuilding view the cultivation of a strong human rights regime as fundamental for durable peace. Part III situates my argument for a feminist conception of positive peace within existing feminist literature on peace, security and human rights. It also describes my feminist conception of positive peace, as based in women's empowerment and changing gender roles. Part IV reminds readers of the Central American case study I use to develop my feminist conception of positive peace, and then describes the feminist methodology and qualitative methods employed to carry out my empirical study of peacebuilding projects within the region.

1.1 Peace Studies and Peacebuilding

As the father of peace studies, Johan Galtung's scholarship is foundational to my project. Since the 1960s, Galtung has written and lectured extensively on violence and peace. In a revolutionary move, he divided "peace" into two types: negative and positive. Negative peace represents the conventional idea of "peace" - the absence of widespread violent conflict associated with war. Positive peace is more ambitious, calling for the elimination (or at least the minimization) of all forms of structural inequality as well as the eradication of those cultural beliefs/attitudes that legitimize both direct and structural forms of violence. Although many societies have achieved negative peace, there are few - if any - that have a fully developed "positive" peace. 

83 The achievement of Galtung's positive peace requires an absence of the structural and cultural violence that help legitimize the direct, interpersonal, violence enacted against certain groups of people. Discriminatory structures and institutions constitute individuals "in a way that has a particular structural-political meaning, whether that meaning is religious, ethnic, racial, class-based or gendered" (Galtung, 1969). This hierarchical ordering of citizens becomes "structural violence" when it creates an "avoidable impairment of human needs" (Buzan and Hansen, 2011, 124) for those who find themselves in the disadvantaged position. Culture then acts to reinforce the structural disadvantage of these individuals and to legitimize the consequent direct violence they may face. Cultural violence is thus defined as "any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form" (Galtung, 1990, 291).

84 In a 2012 interview, Gatling defined positive peace as containing two parts: equity ("cooperation for mutual and equal benefit") and harmony (when people "suffer the suffering of others" and "enjoy the joy of others"). See: Galtung, Democracy Now. Published online by Envision Peace Museum. 9 July 2012. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYFn_hSF3wQ
Peace studies literature is related to that of peacebuilding because the way in which we define "peace" shapes the goals of post-conflict reconstruction. However, peacebuilding is distinct from peace studies as it marks a specific stage in the conflict cycle (after preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping, post-conflict peacebuilding is viewed as the fourth stage). Peacebuilding as a topic of study has gained ground as both warfare and post-conflict reconstruction have experienced fundamental changes. Over the past thirty years, intrastate conflicts - in the forms of genocide, civil war, and violent revolutionary movements - have surpassed inter-state wars as the most prevalent form of conflict worldwide. During the 1990s, many of these intrastate conflicts formally ended, but these deeply divided societies faced the continued challenge of building a peaceful and prosperous state. Peacebuilding thus focuses on the reconstruction of highly divisive post-conflict societies.

In 1992, former UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding in his influential treatise, An Agenda for Peace. In his words:

When conflict breaks out, mutually reinforcing efforts at peacemaking and peace-keeping come into play. Once these have achieved their objectives, only sustained, cooperative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems can place an achieved peace on a durable foundation. Preventive diplomacy is to avoid a crisis; post-conflict peacebuilding is to prevent a recurrence.

An Agenda for Peace brought international attention to peacebuilding, appealing to peace researchers and policy-makers alike. In its wake, an unprecedented amount of international attention and resources were dedicated to post-conflict reconstruction; consequently, “peacebuilding” became somewhat of a growth industry among international institutions, national governments, and non-governmental organizations. In 2005, the United Nations established the Peacebuilding Commission - an intergovernmental advisory body dedicated to

85 The process of peacebuilding is distinct from “peacekeeping”; the latter involves “the employment of military, paramilitary or non-military personnel or forces in an area of political conflict. Its immediate purpose is to separate warring factions long enough to allow for negotiations to take place between them.” See: Knight, 2003, 245.
marshalling resources for, and coordinating the operations of, post-conflict peacebuilding.\(^87\) "Every indication," writes Michael Barnett and his colleagues, "is that the demand for peacebuilding will increase further because the long-term concern about ending civil wars has now been joined by the fear that weak states pose a major threat to international stability."\(^88\)

Yet, after analyzing the results of peacebuilding missions it is apparent that for post-conflict contexts to effectively "deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems" presents a long and challenging process. Peacebuilding scholarship has therefore ranged in its foci. Some scholars advocate a structural approach (often referred to as "state-building") focused on developing political institutions and economic policies in line with liberalism. Others argue from a human security perspective, focused more on addressing human needs and development concerns, or on processes of justice and reconciliation. In line with Cynthia Enloe and J. Ann Tickner, those working from a feminist perspective analyze the conditions of women's lives to inform their approaches to peacebuilding, prioritizing women's security as a key indicator of a peaceful society.\(^89\)

In spite of different theoretical approaches to peace and security, peacebuilding operations have mainly been characterized by political and economic changes guided by the liberal principles of political representation and participation, accountable government, and open markets. While these approaches are marked by essential components of durable peace (democratization, marketization, and institutional strengthening) they fail to fully address the socially patterned and intentionally organized life-threatening violence that continues within post-conflict states. This

\(^{87}\) The Peacebuilding Commission is described by the United Nations as "an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict, and is a key addition to the capacity of the International Community in the broad peace agenda. The Peacebuilding Commission plays a unique role in (1) bringing together all of the relevant actors, including international donors, the international financial institutions, national governments, troop contributing countries; (2) marshalling resources and (3) advising on and proposing integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery and where appropriate, highlighting any gaps that threaten to undermine peace." Online: http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/


\(^{89}\) Because patriarchal cultures and institutions legitimize violence against women in both its direct and structural forms, many feminist peace researchers have found Galtung's work particularly salient to their own goal of limiting violence against women. When the problem of violence against women is viewed as having direct, structural and cultural elements, it is evident that a goal of "negative peace" will not effectively improve women's rights and basic security.
is deeply problematic because states that are considered the most "successful" cases of peacebuilding, based on these commonly used indicators, can simultaneously contain "epidemic" levels of violence between citizens. For women living in the post-conflict peacebuilding phase, the "violence of the peace" presents a serious - and distinct - security threat, as women are identified as among those most vulnerable to violence during and after conflict.90

Theoretical work in peace studies can therefore be of great use to peacebuilding scholars. For instance, Galtung's famous distinction between negative and positive peace is referred to throughout the peacebuilding literature. For example, in Durable Peace, Ali and Matthews describe the peacebuilding process moving from "thin" to "thick" peace; or, as “effecting movement from what is sometimes called a condition of negative peace – one in which the principal characteristic is the mere absence of violence – to one of positive peace, a condition of stable and widening shared values.”91 Donna Pankhurst's work on peacebuilding also emphasizes this distinction in highlighting how negative peace is a "limited peace goal" and not to be used as the standard in peacebuilding efforts. Because my own research builds directly upon that of Pankhurst's feminist approach to peacebuilding, I quote her at length:

A 'peaceful' society in this [negative peace] sense may therefore include a society in which social violence (against women, for instance) and/or structural violence (in situations of extreme inequality, for example) are prevalent. Moreover, this limited 'peace goal', of an absence of specific forms of violence associated with war, can and often does lead to a strategy in which all other goals become secondary. The absence of analysis of the deeper (social) causes of violence also paves the way for peace agreements that leave major causes of violent conflict completely unresolved. Negative peace may therefore be achieved by accepting a worse state of affairs than that which motivated the outburst of violence in the first place, for the sake of (perhaps short-term) ending organised violence.92

Governments and international agencies involved in post-conflict reconstruction often remain focused on the establishment of negative peace, as this presents a sufficient challenge in and of itself. Take, for instance, Barnett et al.'s review of peacebuilding missions, from which

90 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 stresses that sexual violence is considered a crime against humanity and, when used as a part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian populations, it impedes the restoration of international peace and security. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1820, 19 June 2008. S/RES/1820 (2008); Available online: http://www.un.org/res1820
they conclude that “[n]early 50 percent of all countries receiving assistance slide back into conflict within five years, and 72 percent of peacebuilding operations leave in place authoritarian regimes.” In comparative perspective, it is easy to see why Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua have all been deemed peacebuilding ”success” stories based on their achievement of negative peace. Nonetheless, many - if not most - Central Americans lack a full enjoyment of human rights and basic security. This case reflects Pankhurst’s concern that achieving this "limited peace goal" leads to a strategy in which other security concerns become secondary, and may produce societies in which prevalent social violence continues. Indeed, efforts to achieve peace have only succeeded in increasing violence and crime in Central America. A brief survey of peacebuilding literature sheds light on the reasons behind this paradox and demonstrates how a feminist conception of positive peace is essential for peacebuilding.

1.2 Approaches to Peacebuilding

First, peacebuilding is largely viewed as an international activity, whereby the United Nations and other external actors help a state transition out of war, to achieve - and then maintain - negative peace. Peacebuilding literature is most interested in short-term measures that mark the beginning of the “post-conflict” period within a state. Peacebuilding comprises both military and non-military functions, including: "the administration of elections; the retraining of judges, lawyers, and police officers; the nurturing of indigenous political parties and non-governmental organizations; the design and implementation of economic reforms; the reorganization of governmental institutions; the promotion of free media; and the delivery of emergency humanitarian and financial assistance."  

As an international activity, peacebuilding operations fall under the purview of actors that are external to the conflict-ridden state (typically the United Nations' Peacebuilding Commission aided by the Foreign Affairs departments of developed states). The role of external actors in peacebuilding is essential, argue Doyle and Sambanis, as UN-led operations have a better record

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of ensuring successful long-term peace than do purely domestic alternatives or international involvement without the UN. In various peacebuilding cases, UN-led operations have proved essential in developing nascent political and economic institutions within the post-conflict state. To various degrees of success, external actors have also worked in synergy with local actors to encourage reconciliation amongst warring parties in hopes of preventing the recurrence of violent conflict.

In each peacebuilding mission, however, external actors face time and funding constraints. Thus, what may begin as a sincere commitment to long-term peace and justice, often ends with a “political quick fix” accompanied by an “early exit strategy.” The result, across peacebuilding cases, has been to construct post-conflict states in the image of a liberal market democracy. Because the introduction of peacebuilding coincided with the end of the Cold War, it was logical to introduce “the perceived triumph of liberal market democracy as the prevailing standard of enlightened governance across much of the world, including places where it had been anathema only a few years earlier.” Consequently, “[p]eacebuilders in the 1990s placed their faith in rapid democratization and marketization as a means of consolidating peace in countries that were just emerging from civil wars.”

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98 Ali and Matthews, 2004, 395. The authors also cite Elizabeth Cousens on this point, who argues that international actors seek “reduced commitment strategies.” Recent evidence of this can be seen with NATO’s "draw down" in Afghanistan and the discussion of the American's exit strategy in Iraq.
100 Ibid, 235. In the words of Paris: “Given the multiplicity of peacebuilding agencies and the absence of a centralized peacebuilding authority, perhaps the most remarkable feature of the peacebuilding operations in the 1990s was that they all pursued the same general strategy for promoting stable and lasting peace in war-shattered states: democratization an marketization. The typical formula for peacebuilding included promoting civil and political rights, such as the right to free speech and free press, as well as freedom of association and movement; preparing and administering democratic elections; drafting national constitutions that codified civil and political rights; training or retraining police and justice officials in the appropriate behavior for state functionaries in a liberal democracy; promoting the development of independent ‘civil society’ organizations and the transformation of formerly warring groups into democratic political parties; encouraging the development of free market economies by eliminating barriers to the free flow of capital and goods within and across a country’s borders; and stimulating the growth of private enterprise while reducing the state’s role in the economy” (Paris, 2004, 19).
The disappointing results of many peacebuilding operations\textsuperscript{101} made clear that the liberal approach to post-conflict state-building did not provide a “one size fits all” model for peaceful development. In his influential book, \textit{At War’s End}, Paris characterizes these peacebuilding methods of the 1990s as “quick and dirty.”\textsuperscript{102} Instead of rapid democratization and marketization, he argues for an approach he calls “Institutionalization before Liberalization” (IBL). Examining fourteen peacebuilding case studies, Paris observes that “immediate liberalization generated a number of destabilizing side effects that endangered the very peace that such policies were intended to strengthen.”\textsuperscript{103} As a corrective, he argues that peacebuilders should be encouraged “to devise methods of avoiding the pathologies of liberalization, while placing war-shattered states on a long-term path to democracy and market-oriented economics.”\textsuperscript{104} The way to do this, Paris says, is to construct strong, effective political and economic institutions before implementing extensive liberalizing reforms. By prioritizing institutions, “peacebuilders should be able to bolster the ‘conflict dampening’ qualities of societies that host these missions, and in so doing, increase the likelihood of a successful, gradual, and peaceful transition to stable market democracy over the longer term.”\textsuperscript{105}

In the case of post-conflict Central America, Paris attributes ongoing regional violence to weak domestic institutions that cannot adequately manage conflicts sparked by the political and economic competition that comes along with newly "open" processes and systems (elections and free market economies).\textsuperscript{106} In his view, “unbalanced growth will not reduce the enormous disparities of wealth and well-being that have traditionally fueled unrest in these countries”\textsuperscript{107} but will reinforce profound social inequality, thus reproducing the very sources of civil war, repression, and revolution within the region. In general, I agree with Paris’s prescription to prioritize building effective institutions, and to slowly introduce the competitive political and economic processes of democratization and marketization to fragile, post-conflict

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\textsuperscript{101} Peacebuilding missions in the 1990s include those in Central America, but also in Bosnia, East Timor, Haiti, Kenya, Rwanda, Somaliland and Uganda. All of these missions presented unforeseen challenges.
\textsuperscript{102} Paris, 2004, 8.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 235.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Paris, 2004, 112-134.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 134.
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states. Strong institutions provide mechanisms to deal with social conflict and competition in non-violent ways, and thus are essential for maintaining negative peace. By creating and enforcing laws that uphold citizens' universal right to equality and security, strong political and judicial institutions can also play a role in fostering positive peace. As noted in the 2009 report of the UN Secretary-General, while we need more analysis on the reasons a particular society plunges into mass violence while its neighbours remain relatively stable, "it is evident that States that handle their internal diversity well, foster respect among disparate groups, and have effective mechanisms for handling domestic disputes and protecting the rights of women, youth and minorities are unlikely to follow such a destructive path. Respect for human rights, therefore, is an essential element of responsible sovereignty."108

Accordingly, fostering human rights is important for both negative and positive peace. This lends further support to the idea that both concepts of peace are pursued in tandem, not (as has been mistakenly assumed) in a hierarchical order to deliver negative peace first, then to pursue the second-order priorities of positive peace. To prioritize an institutional approach to peacebuilding, focused on mediating political and economic competition, is to over-determine the capacity and the willingness of the state in assuring its citizens' security. UN-led interventions over the past twenty-five years, and the international adoption of the Responsibility to Protect at the 2005 World Summit, remind us that in many cases of intrastate conflict the state (and its operatives) have long been the source of its citizens' insecurity.109 Peacebuilding research has, therefore, highlighted the importance of cultivating a strong human rights regime as part of post-conflict reconstruction; however, the cultivation of a rights-based society requires more than a transformed public sphere.

Over time, peacebuilding has also incorporated a human security perspective - a perspective that allows for analyses of the individual and her intimate/familial relationships within the private sphere. In being “people-centered,” human security is “concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much

access they have to market and social opportunities – and whether they live in conflict or in peace.”

The United Nations Development Programme defines human security as “first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities.”

Encompassing a range of threats, human security emphasizes human protection, development and human rights in both public and private relations.

Because peacebuilding aims to address the 'root causes' of conflicts, there is considerable conceptual overlap between human security and peacebuilding. Scholars from various critical perspectives, such as Cockrell and Lederach, have expanded upon the structural orientation of peacebuilding, encompassing equality and social justice, improved relationships, and meeting of basic needs as essential elements of reconstruction. In consort with this scholarship, United Nations special advisers who live and work in post-conflict contexts also contend that: "Peacebuilding is intimately linked to the creation of human security" which "presupposes a holistic approach that will produce a positive peace". Incorporating a human security perspective, writes the Special Adviser on Africa, has led UN-operatives to pose questions such as "What kind of peace?" and "Security for whom?" In so doing, "especially in post-conflict settings, our attention was immediately redirected to the need of a societal engagement on the nature and provision of peace and security." By 2005, with the establishment of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, "Our referents for peace and security shifted from an

111 Ibid.
114 Ibid, 4.
exclusive focus on the state to incorporate that of its citizens, particularly those most vulnerable during and after conflict: refugees, internally displaced persons and women and children."

At the international level, an enhanced public commitment to ensuring women's rights and basic security in peacebuilding is evident. Yet, challenges "on the ground" remain. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325, an eighteen-point agenda advocating the broad participation of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Resolution 1325 "called on all actors who negotiate and implement peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective in considering the needs of women and girls post-conflict and in supporting local women’s peace initiatives." Welcomed by feminists, Resolution 1325 was regarded as "highly significant because it is the first time the Security Council has devoted an entire session to debating women’s experiences in conflict and post-conflict situations." Unfortunately, two independent experts' reviews of Resolution 1325's impact reveal that little has changed "on the ground" for women living in post-conflict societies. Because the responsibility for implementing change is "top-down" (resting with UN member states and UN agencies) "[UN Resolution 1325] means very little to women in conflict zones unless they know about it and have the security, resources and political space to organize and access decision-makers." The United Nations is well-aware of its continued struggle to protect and empower women in post-conflict contexts. A 2009 set of recommendations for the "UN System" in current and future peacebuilding missions plainly states that: "Both protection and empowerment of citizens are important aspects of a human security approach and must be fore grounded in peacebuilding activities" and the UN Peacebuilding Commission must

115 Ibid, 4.
"[e]nsure that women's voices are heard and that their interests are addressed in peacebuilding initiatives."\textsuperscript{119}

As this example shows, achieving human security - and women's security, in particular - through traditional "modes and methods" of liberal peacebuilding remains a challenge. Calls to protect and empower citizens are important, but peacebuilding needs more information on the "best practices" for doing so at a grassroots level. If the UN Peacebuilding Commission takes seriously the recommendation to protect and empower citizens, it will mean that peacebuilding needs more research into how human security and liberal approaches can be aligned. Among those scholars theorizing for an "emancipatory" peace, Richmond calls for peacebuilding to produce "an emancipatory version of human security that empowers a local renegotiation of the liberal peace through the state-building process."\textsuperscript{120} Rather than external actors directing long-term peacebuilding operations, this "local renegotiation" would create an internally sustainable peace as it "reflects the needs of everyday life in post-conflict, development settings".\textsuperscript{121} However, as with much of the human security and/or emancipatory-focused writing on peacebuilding, more empirically-driven research is needed and "more precision would be welcome."\textsuperscript{122}

While international institutions and external donor-states will remain integral to peacebuilding, peace research from a human security perspective requires scholars and practitioners to focus on local actors inside post-conflict states and examine how their actions support and/or violate the rights and security of others. My research speaks to human security in showing that how individuals deal with life-threatening violence in their private relations sheds light on how institutionalized “top-down” conceptions, such as human rights, gain traction amongst post-conflict populations from the “bottom-up”. Applying a feminist lens to the post-conflict context of Central America reveals that, in addition to the typically “public” prescription of human rights and security, peacebuilding also requires projects addressing

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} Paris, 2010, 356.
“private” interpersonal relations and the structural/cultural issues (such as constructions of masculine and feminine identities) that are associated with control over, and violence against, women.

Strong institutions can certainly help in fostering human rights and security, but without citizen “buy-in” their effectiveness will remain limited. As both scholars and international institutions analyze the failures of external approaches to post-conflict state reconstruction, evidence mounts for the case that “peacebuilding is essentially a domestic activity.”

Citizen "buy-in" is crucial for women's security because most life-threatening gender-based violence occurs in the context of private (intimate or familial) relations. To make women's rights and basic security a reality in post-conflict contexts requires the translation of these public promises into non-violent behaviour practiced in private, gendered, relations. Filling this "gap" between the promise and practice of rights, creates important opportunities for civil society. Defined by the World Bank Report, civil society is "political space, where governance and development (including peace building) goals are contested." Civil society is crucial for increasing "community buy-in" to the peacebuilding process; as identified by the Report, key actors include: "Community based organisations, institutions and initiatives (women and youth groups, self-help groups...)

My field work reinforces the importance of these actors in cultivating women's rights and basic security in the private sphere by a) empowering women to effectively change gendered power relations, and b) challenging patriarchal gender roles and identities that normalize violence against women. In focusing on three grassroots projects operating to improve women's security in post-conflict Central America, I respond to Paris' call for "more precision" in elucidating how local actors can negotiate the liberal peace in ways that are gendered and culturally-specific. I focus on the improvement of human rights and human security within private relations and how this process necessitates broader changes in gendered power relations and gendered identities. From my research at the grassroots level, I argue that bottom-up

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123 Ali and Matthews, 2004, 408.
125 Ibid.
approaches to changing power and identity are necessary - but understudied - complements to the top-down measures put forth through institutions.

As a complement to peacebuilding theories and practices from liberal and human security approaches, post-conflict contexts must also be analyzed from a feminist perspective.126 In line with liberal and human security analyses of post-conflict societies, a feminist analysis encourages scholars and practitioners to work towards a concept of peace that mandates a strong human rights regime. What makes a feminist analysis of peacebuilding distinct is its view of individuals as explicitly gendered beings. As Hudson argues, men and women - as gendered beings - experience violence in distinct ways and will, therefore, have different criteria for what defines peace and security.127 A focus on gender-based violence focuses our attention on rights violations in the private sphere. As half the post-conflict population, the rights of women must be upheld – both as a top-down “promise” from the state and in “practice” between citizens’ interpersonal relations. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 is merely one example of the various international, regional and national conventions, in which the promise of women’s rights and basic security is made clear. Yet, socially patterned (systemic) and intentionally organized (systematic) violence against women remains pervasive in post-conflict states and regions. Thus, we have a problematic gap between the promise and the practice of women’s human rights in post-conflict contexts. Knowing that peacebuilding is a process including pressures and activities from both the top and bottom, this raises questions about how, exactly, grassroots initiatives help to bridge the gap between the (public) promise and (private) practice of women’s human rights in post-conflict contexts. This is an important research agenda because although “[n]urturing a human rights culture through the establishment of and support for human rights organisations is a common mechanism used in peacebuilding […] there is often a tendency for women's rights to be left out in human rights work.”128

A feminist analysis of post-conflict contexts adds value to both liberal and human security

128 Pankhurst, 22.
analyses because it views the public and private spheres as operating on a continuum - not as dichotomous realms of activity. Because “existing theories tend to focus on public life – either formal institutions or the market, both of which are associated with men and male political behavior – a focus that includes the private sphere provides a new vantage point from which to analyze the gendered micro/macro linkages that constitute international politics and economics.”

The traditional view of the public and private as separate spheres has highly gendered consequences. As Tickner reminds us, “the public/private distinction, upon which the modern western state was founded, has set up hierarchical gendered structures and role expectations, that impede the achievement of true gender equality.” Applied to peacebuilding, a rigid separation between the public and private realms of human activity not only impede gender equality, but create a false separation between public and private violence.

When starting peacebuilding research from the private sphere, what becomes newly visible are not only the ways in which violence is both a public and private issue, but also how human rights can be a vehicle to cross-over the public/private divide. Riane Eisler’s work on gender and human rights supports the view of a continuum between the public and private spheres. In her words, “human society is based, first and foremost, on the relations between the female and male halves of humanity and on their relations with their sons and daughters. Our very first lessons about human relations (and thus also about human rights) are learned not in the public but in the private sphere.” It is within private relations, conditioned by the cultural context in which they are situated, “where people learn to respect the rights of others to freedom from violence, cruelty, oppression, and discrimination.”

Human rights as crucial for peace in the private sphere is not merely a theoretical claim in feminist literature, but has been recognized by the international collection of activists, scholars, and institutional representatives who joined forces to pen the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. As the Platform clearly states: "the realization of the human rights of women necessitates not

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130 Tickner, 2005, 17.
131 It is widely contended across feminist work in security studies that private and public violence are connected. See, for example: J. Ann Tickner, Gender in International Relations, 1992.
133 Ibid.
only equality and development but also freedom from violence – that is, peace – in both the public and private spheres.”

My research on peace in the private sphere sheds light on ways to implement human rights, as grounded in real world, relational, and gendered practices. This avenue of research - focused on private security - makes grassroots actors newly visible as "agents" of peacebuilding. In the following section, I will situate my research within existing feminist scholarship, develop my own feminist conception of positive peace, and explain why this conception of peace is relevant - and, in my view, necessary - for peacebuilding.

1.3 A Feminist Conception of Positive Peace as Essential for Peacebuilding

Before elaborating on feminist peace research, I will define some key terms used when working from a "feminist perspective". First, the term “gender" is understood as a socio-cultural construction which defines certain characteristics as “masculine” or “feminine” and these definitions can vary across culture, race, class, and even age group. (Gender is not to be conflated with "sex" which refers only to biological distinctions between male and female.) Due to an uneven, gendered, power distribution, “masculine activities are more highly valued or privileged than feminine activities in most of the world […] Thus, the social construction of gender is actually a system of power that not only divides men and women as masculine and feminine but typically also places men and masculinity above women and

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135 Feminists - writ large - work from a variety of perspectives and, therefore, conceive of equality in very different terms. In brief, feminist work from a realist perspective "is interested in the role of gender in strategy and power politics between states. Liberal feminist work calls attention to the subordinate position of women in global politics and argues that gender oppression can be remedied by including women in the existing structures of global politics. Critical feminism explores the ideational and material manifestations of gendered identity and gendered power in world politics. Feminist constructivism focuses on the ways that ideas about gender shape and are shaped by global politics. Feminist poststructuralism focuses on how gendered linguistic manifestations of meaning (strong/weak, rational/emotional, and public/private dichotomies) serve to empower the masculine, marginalize the feminine, and constitute global politics. Postcolonial feminists, while sharing many of the epistemological assumptions of poststructural feminists, focus on the ways that colonial relations of domination and subordination established under imperialism are reflected in gender relations, and even relations between feminists, in global politics and academic work. Ecological feminism, or “ecofeminism,” identifies connections between the treatment of women and minorities on one hand and the nonhuman environment on the other.” Quoted at length, but for good reason, from: Laura Sjoberg, “Introduction to Security Studies: Feminist Contributions” in Security Studies, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2009, 189.

femininity.”¹³⁷ From a feminist perspective, inequality and inequity between men/masculinity and women/femininity stems from patriarchal culture. *Patriarchy*, defined herein as “systems or structures of exploitation that normalize socially constructed gender differences in ways that reproduce and legitimate male domination,”¹³⁸ becomes an operational force in distributing power hierarchically and in defining "appropriate" gendered roles for males and females. With reference to Galtung’s forms of violence, patriarchy is a form of *structural* violence that leads to policies and practices that discriminate against women. Patriarchy is also a form of *cultural* violence that serves to legitimize direct acts of violence against women’s bodies, as well as the indirect *structural* violence of unequal power and resource distribution that privileges men while subordinating women.¹³⁹

Feminists have long been concerned with peace and security, and - like myself - many have used Galtung's conceptions of negative and positive peace as their starting point. Among the pioneers in developing feminist conceptions of peace, the work of Birgit Brock-Utne, Betty Reardon and Charlotte Bunch stands out. Both Brock-Utne and Reardon develop feminist conceptions of Galtung's negative and positive peace. For Brock-Utne, in addition to the negative/positive categories of peace, it is important to add two more distinctions: one between organized and unorganized violence, the other between the micro (individual) and macro (collective) level. In effect, the threshold for negative and positive peace is broadened. For instance, rape, intimate partner violence, and child abuse are forms of direct violence that must be eradicated - or at least minimized - for a society to claim the achievement of negative peace (see Figure 1.1). In her view, "even the negative peace concept can get unwieldy if one includes in it what I see as a quite essential feminist perspective on the concept [...] What if one million husbands beat their wives? That must also be a clear case of personal violence, even of a collective kind [...] In the negative peace concept I want to include the absence of collective

¹³⁷ Ibid, 30-31.
personal violence against women, termed 'war' by [radical] feminists.\textsuperscript{140}

**Figure 1.1: Brock-Utne's Negative and Positive Peace\textsuperscript{141}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negative Peace</th>
<th>Positive Peace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of personal, physical, and direct violence</td>
<td>Absence of indirect violence shortening life span</td>
<td>Absence of indirect violence reducing the quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unorganized</strong></td>
<td>(1) Absence of wife battering, rapes, child abuse, street killings</td>
<td>(3) Absence of inequalities in micro-structures leading to unequal life chances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organized</strong></td>
<td>(2) Absence of war</td>
<td>(4) Absence of economic structures built up within a country or between countries so that the life chances of some are reduced. Effects of damage on nature by pollution, radiation, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{140} Brock-Utne, 1989, 43.
\textsuperscript{141} Table reproduced from Birgit Brock-Utne, *Feminist Perspectives on Peace and Peace Education*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1989, 47.
For Brock-Utne, "peace is a state where both negative and positive peace exist and where no violence can be found in any of the six cells we have outlined. According to this thinking we cannot say that there is peace in a society where human rights are violated or resources distributed so unevenly that some people die from malnourishment."\(^{142}\) Although each cell of her Table is logically independent from the others, empirical relationships between them certainly exist. For instance, "there may be an absence of organized, personal, physical and direct violence (war) in a society and not be an absence of unorganized, personal, physical, and direct violence in that same society (for instance, wife battering, rape) - in which case we would hold that peace does not exist."\(^{143}\) Seeing as no society has fully eliminated intimate partner violence and rape, for Brock-Utne, there is no existing achievement of negative peace - never mind the attainment of positive peace.

Betty Reardon puts forth a similarly broad perspective on violence and peace. Peace, in her view, includes an end to conflict and war, but also an end to all forms of violence (which she defines as "avoidable and intentional harm"). For Reardon, peace means an end - globally - to all forms of "avoidable and intentional harm" enacted upon women and children as well as harm done to plant and animal species. The achievement of peace thus "requires the conceptualization of, policy making for, and implementation of objectives and strategies for social development that are based upon the fulfillment of human needs and the health of the planet."\(^{144}\)

For Reardon, the foundations of positive peace are to be found in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). "Should we need indicators of the conditions of justice and equity that comprise positive peace," argues Reardon, "we need only refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an inventory of factors that deny human freedom and impede the fulfillment of security needs."\(^{145}\) The authors of the Charter "presupposed that 'the scourge of war' could be avoided only if the dignity and worth of the human person, including equal rights of men and women, could be affirmed, international law maintained, and social

\(^{142}\) Brock-Utne, 1989, 66.
\(^{143}\) Ibid.
\(^{144}\) Reardon, 1993, 5.
\(^{145}\) Ibid, 6.
progress and better living standards promoted." Learning from history, it seemed that in the absence of these conditions war was more likely to occur. Charlotte Bunch reinforces Reardon's argument, also considering the rights listed in the UDHR as appropriate "indicators" of positive peace." Bunch makes a helpful connection between human rights, human security and positive peace, defining 'human security' as "a way to describe an integrated vision of positive peace, human rights, and development." Once again, a feminist conception of positive peace can align liberal peacebuilding ideals (human rights) with human security goals.

These key feminist writings on peace research have greatly influenced my own conception of positive peace. Like Brock-Utne, I consider all forms of violence against women (including her "unorganized, micro-level violence" in Cell 1) as a pressing security issue. My work diverges from hers, however, in that I maintain Galtung's original use of negative peace as the absence of widespread violence associated with war. Peace theorists such as Brock-Utne and Reardon have developed broad conceptions of peace, their writings driven by a normative commitment to a world without violence. While I share their hope for a peaceful world, my particular project focuses on conceptions of peace that could be useful for better peacebuilding practice in post-war societies. It is therefore helpful to see the formal end to war as its own achievement - an achievement largely due to the efforts of preventative diplomacy, peace-making, and peace-keeping initiatives. Inspired by Reardon and Bunch, I focus on Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - women and men's equal right to "life, liberty and security of person" - as a fundamental "indicator" of positive peace in post-conflict contexts. In theory, the protection and promotion of human rights as part of peacebuilding is not very controversial. The challenge, as I will illustrate, is in finding ways to make these rights a meaningful reality (i.e. a behavioural practice) in the quotidian lives of a post-conflict population. For women, this emphasis on human rights practice will largely require attention to private behavior in their intimate and familial relationships.

Focused on the establishment of a rights-based culture that minimizes violence against

146 Ibid, 8.
148 Ibid.
women in post-conflict societies, I situate my research most closely within the peacebuilding scholarship of Cheryl de la Rey, Dyan Mazurana, Susan McKay and Donna Pankhurst. In further developing the feminist conception of positive peace put forth by others, I fill a gap within the peacebuilding literature that has been identified by Pankhurst. As she summarizes, “none of the common approaches to peacebuilding take on the challenges of the feminist project of transforming gender relations, as they do not tend to consider how to work towards positive peace in the wider sense.”

Theoretically, the feminist conception of positive peace that I put forth supports Mazurana and McKay's gendered definition of peacebuilding:

Peacebuilding includes gender-aware and women-empowering political, social, economic and human rights. It involves personal and group accountability and reconciliation processes which contribute to the reduction or prevention of violence. It fosters the ability of women, men, girls and boys in their own cultures to promote conditions of non-violence, equality, justice and human rights of all people, to build democratic institutions, and to sustain the environment.

From this perspective, all peacebuilding cases require a targeted analysis of the ways in which ongoing violence is gendered, accompanied by a documentation of the successes and challenges of projects working to address gender-based violence in post-conflict contexts.

Empirically, my findings from post-conflict Central America build upon the South African study conducted by Cheryl de la Rey and Susan McKay. In their article, the authors use statements from 16 female leaders who participated in a "dialogic workshop" to describe how peacebuilding in South Africa is a gendered process. The authors find that the prevention of violence is an important component of the participants’ peacebuilding - especially violence toward women. "Of particular interest," write the authors, "is the inclusion of domestic violence in a women's discussion on peacebuilding [...] Yet, domestic violence is not typically viewed as a key aspect of post-conflict peacebuilding.”

Because violence against women is not confined

150 Pankhurst, 2003, 167. Pankhurst’s article explores the false assumptions at work in an “women’s environmental project” and cautions against three fundamental errors commonly made in “women and development” or “women’s peacebuilding” grassroots projects: they assume women’s labor is free, they do not include men, and they assume women benefit automatically from these “community activities” when results are actually quite mixed.
152 Cheryl de la Rey and Susan McKay, 150.
to South Africa, but exists in all post-conflict states, the authors suggest that future peacebuilding research should explore whether "the satisfaction of basic human needs" and "the prevention of violence against women" are priorities for women in other contexts.\textsuperscript{153} My dissertation offers a direct, and extensive, response to this call for future research. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, women living in post-conflict Central America also prioritize the prevention of violence against women - and, intimate partner violence in particular - as a component of peace. The feminist conception of positive peace that I argue for is focused on the entrenchment of women's right to "life, liberty and security of person" in the private sphere. It includes two major areas of focus: women's empowerment and changes in gendered roles/identities that normalize violence against women. I will now discuss each of these in turn.

\textit{Empowerment}

As a fundamental and well-documented assumption of this project, "patriarchal systems that discriminate against women and girls contribute to the eventual expression of direct violence. If we are serious about achieving peace, then we must be committed to women’s empowerment."\textsuperscript{154} To reshape the gendered power relations that currently discriminate against women is crucial for transforming private sites of gendered violence into sites of peace and security. But what, exactly, do I mean by empowerment? Again, feminist scholarship is of great help in defining this concept of power. Conceptualizing power as “empowerment” offers a conception of power that is necessary for theories of positive peace. This alternate conceptualization is necessary as a counterpoint to more traditional conceptions of power that view power as finite and operating in a zero-sum game - all of which encourages competitive and controlling behaviors.\textsuperscript{155} While Dahl’s concept of power is useful for theories of war, it is antithetical to theories and practices of positive peace that emphasize equity and harmony. Mainstream concepts of power are also problematic because they obscure the ways in which women can be powerful actors in peacebuilding and security efforts. Peterson and Runyan describe how conventional definitions of power make women - as individuals and as a social group - largely insignificant:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid, 150-151.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Mazurana and McKay, 2001, 138.
\end{itemize}
Conventional definitions of power stress that to have power, to exercise control over others, one must have certain resources at one’s disposal. For an individual, this often means possessing a lot of physical strength, money, and/or property. For a state, this usually means possessing a strong military, a highly industrialized economy, and/or significant natural resources. Persons or states lacking any or all of these attributes are seen as less powerful or even powerless. According to this conventional definition of power, women seem largely powerless.\footnote{Peterson and Runyan, 1999, 114. Emphasis added.}

Thus, “top-down” concepts of power fail to capture the networks of power operating below the state-level, and traditional concepts of power within IR preclude a comprehensive analysis of “what power is” and “how power works” in private, gendered, relations.\footnote{Interestingly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has advocated for an “empowerment” approach to addressing peace and security needs in Afghanistan. Claiming that the “transitional period is the crucial point when the cornerstones for sustainable peace are laid” the Commissioner notes that compatibility between protection and empowerment strategies is necessary. While top-down “protection” strategies are important, he argues, issues in the case of Afghanistan have underscored that “the immediate human insecurity such as physical violence, the lack of livelihood and social protection and human rights abuses at the micro-level had to be addressed, using the strategies of protection and empowerment.” (18) “For the long-term aim of realizing human security, a state structure which meets the responsibility to protect has to be put into place and the ownership of this process by the people must be ensured, taking various forms of empowerment and ultimately creating a constituency for peace.” Specifically, “the UN – and eventually external interventions as whole – needs to place its role in an overall framework of conflict transformation within which protection and empowerment strategies are attempted.” See: Yuka Hasegawa, “Is a Human Security Approach Possible? Compatibility between the Strategies of Protection and Empowerment,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol. 20, No.1, 2007.}

Empowerment, on the other hand, offers a concept of power that is more appropriate for fostering the private relations necessary for positive peace. While there are multiple definitions of empowerment, its core components include a view of power as fluid, relational, and connected to one's ability to influence the shared norms and discourses that shape one's socio-cultural context. As Papart, Rai and Staudt argue, empowerment “allows us to incorporate notions of power that recognize the importance of individual consciousness/understanding (power within), and its importance for collective action (power with) that can organize and exert power to challenge gender hierarchies and improve women’s lives.”\footnote{Jane L. Parpart, Shirin M. Rai, and Kathleen Staudt, “Rethinking em(power)ment: an introduction,” in Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and development in a global/local world, London: Routledge, 2002, 7-8.} According to this definition, women can be powerful. To identify the existence - and analyze the effects - of this power within, power with, and power to, I find Naila Kabeer’s conception of empowerment most helpful. For Kabeer, empowerment has three identifiable components: agency,
resources, and achievements. *Agency* represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect; *resources* are the medium through which agency is exercised; and, *achievements* refer to the outcomes of agency. Agency, in its empowering (or “power to”) form “refers to people’s ability to make and act on their own life choices, even in the face of others’ opposition.”

As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, women in post-conflict contexts do not have many material resources at their disposal, yet they do have the *ideational* resource of human rights. When individual women participate in workshops that discuss their universal rights, and the national laws in place to support these international promises, these women gain a sense of *power within*. In communities of like-minded women, this individual consciousness becomes a source of collective action (*power with*). As these ideational shifts are accompanied by the material resources of responsive police and/or safe shelter (where women can go to increase their physical security), women have the *power to* improve their lives and challenge the gender hierarchies that normalize violence in private relations. By reporting intimate partner violence to Women's Police Stations, or moving themselves and their children into a shelter, or by participating in women's rights workshops and affirming their own right to a life free from violence, women help disturb the patriarchal scripts of post-conflict Central American society. Because gender-based violence is a key manifestation of women's subordination - but also a way to maintain male power privilege - the more women who are empowered to leave private relations defined by violence, and to work in consort with other women, violence against women becomes less "normal" and women's subordination increasingly challenged. Eventually, should enough individual women access this combination of resources, agency and achievements - women's empowerment could generate broad changes in the security of women as a social group.

Of great significance, a feminist conception of empowerment does not operate as a sexed "zero-sum game" of power-sharing, whereby women's gains represent men's losses. Rather, a "feminist redefinition of power in relational terms, where the survival of one depends on the well-being of the other, would not only enhance women’s security but also that of men who are...

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159 Kabeer, 2005, 14.
similarly threatened by the conventional gendered approach to security." As I show in Chapter Four, the hegemonic masculinity present in post-conflict Central America is characterized by autonomy, physical strength and aggression - thus acting as a driving force behind the high rate of violence against women but also the astonishing number of male-on-male homicides that plagues the region. Right now, violence has purchase as a form of power in Central American society; should men find themselves less able to exercise that power over women, then it may very well feel like a loss of power to many (if not most) men. However, redefining power in relational terms presents a fundamental ontological shift whereby individual autonomy is contextualized by the complex web of relations in which we are each situated.

While some relations are characterized by "zero-sum" competition and subordination, there are many human relations operating in a "positive-sum" framework of care and responsibility towards others. As Fiona Robinson persuasively argues, relations of care are those that sustain human life and are thus essential to fostering human security - for men, women and children - within post-conflict contexts. In this view, empowering women is part of the human security project as it fosters an appreciation for care as both a fundamental aspect of human existence and an important feature of contemporary citizenship.

Whereas I see the strengthening of women's rights as an important - even necessary - part of post-conflict peacebuilding, I also agree with Robinson's doubts about the effectiveness of a rights-based approach in addressing "the nature of constitutive conditions of women's gender

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161 In losing the "power" of violence (and thus losing a key mechanism to subordinate women) men sometimes react by increasing the amount and intensification of violence against women. This "backlash" has been evidenced in response to women's rights movements worldwide. See, for example, Donna Pankhurst, "Post-War Backlash Violence against Women: What Can "Masculinity" Explain?", Gendered Peace: Women's Struggles for Post-War Justice and Reconciliation, London: Routledge, 2007; Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991.
162 A relational ontology is based on the view that "subjectivity is constructed relationally and that the substance of morality is to be found in the practices of responsibility that emerge from within these relations." See: Fiona Robinson, The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Security, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011, 113.
163 Fiona Robinson argues that a critical, feminist ethics of care can provide a comprehensive ontological and normative framework for conceptualizing human security in a way that is sensitive to gendered power relations and identities. See: "The Importance of Care in the Theory and Practice of Human Security" in Journal of International Political Theory, 4(2), 2008, 167-188.
164 Robinson, 2008.
roles."\textsuperscript{165} In her words, "I would argue that the continued reliance on individual human rights - albeit women's individual human rights - may be problematic if the goal is to understand \textit{how people actually experience threats to their security}.\textsuperscript{166} The grassroots projects that I researched make good use of the "autonomy-ontology" underlying international human rights; the idea of women as rights-bearing "atomistic individuals" is useful as an ideational tool to a) bolster self-esteem, b) set new personal boundaries about the types of treatment that are acceptable in a relationship, and c) highlight the importance of self-care (particularly in being able to continue to care for others). Nonetheless, I would characterized all three grassroots projects as "advocating" for women to strengthen this \textit{idea of themselves} as an individual, autonomous (female) self within their "taken-for-granted" role as care-givers and the relational ontology in which each woman makes decisions that affect her own security and that of her family. For example, as detailed in Chapter Three, grassroots efforts provide women with material and ideational resources that help them (and often their children) to leave situations of life-threatening violence and/or seek out more care-full relationships. New feminist networks of empowerment are "nested" within this post-conflict region that, otherwise, remains intensely patriarchal and violent (from the household to the state-level). For their potential to foster human security, these nested communities are significant in the larger peacebuilding process. I return to this important point in the dissertation's conclusion, arguing that such grassroots efforts are key players in feminists' efforts to make peacebuilding "about building and rebuilding relationships to ensure that adequate care is given and received."\textsuperscript{167}

\textit{Gendered Roles}

The second part of my feminist conception of positive peace is that gendered roles and identities must change. Gender relations, as defined by Donna Pankhurst, "include the ways in which the social categories of male and female interact in every sphere of social activity, such as those which determine access to resources, power, and participation in political, cultural, and

\textsuperscript{165} Robinson, 2008, 175.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Robinson, 2011, 118.
religious activities.” Furthermore, “gender also denotes the social meanings of male and
time, and what different societies regard as normal and appropriate behaviour, attitudes, and
attributes for women and men.” Gendered behaviours affect women's security when it is
considered socially appropriate for men to be aggressive and women to be subordinate. As
Betty Reardon explains:

Most societies encourage women to be dependent and submissive and men to be
dominant and aggressive. This is not to say that all men and women behave in such
manner, but that when they do, their behavior is considered normal, reinforced by a
society that has internationalized these perceptions. When these behaviors reach
points of excess and exaggeration, it is very likely that aggressive, violent behaviors
will erupt, and the weak will be victimized and dominated. Social norms and laws
regulate these behaviors, but the resulting values and attitudes that are produced and
perpetuated are seldom checked.

The feminist conception of positive peace that I put forth thus emphasizes projects that
work to change the (private) attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of citizens so that they fall in line
with public norms and laws that admonish violence against women. The impressive amount of
empirical evidence found in Joshua Goldstein’s comprehensive study, Gender and War, lends
support to the claim that gender roles are closely intertwined with the larger systems of war and
peace. Goldstein demonstrates that, throughout history and across cultures, it is men who
commit vastly larger proportions of violent acts (including warfare); yet, it is evident that
neither women nor men are inherently violent creatures. This cross-cultural study on the
gendered nature of war roles concludes that: “Gender roles adapt individuals for war roles, and
war roles provide the context within which individuals are socialized into gender roles. For the
war system to change fundamentally, or for war to end, might require profound changes in
gender relations. But the transformation of gender roles may depend on deep changes in the
war system.” My research on grassroots efforts to challenge and change patriarchal

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168 Pankhurst, 2003, 166.
169 Ibid.
170 Reardon, 1993, 45.
gendered roles in the private sphere thus has broader implications for the more mainstream concerns of International Relations and Security Studies.  

Although my research starts from women's lived experiences, and their particular security concerns, a gendered analysis pays attention to the relationship between men and women, as well as how constructions of masculinity and femininity are at play in creating more dangerous, or more secure, contexts. In this respect, my work on gendered roles and identities in post-conflict Central America most closely relates to that of Mo Hume and Marysol Asencio who study connections between gendered identities and violence in Latin American communities. Hume argues that post-war violence in El Salvador is legitimized by a culture of masculinity; he states: "The normalization of violence in the El Salvador context affects individuals' ability to recognize this harmful force, particularly its gendered expressions, which have become embedded in the construction of both men's and women's identities." A 2003 Salvadoran survey helps convey the endurance and pervasiveness of such gendered characteristics, as 61.3 of respondents agreed that "women represent love and weakness and men intelligence and strength." These socially prescribed roles dominate throughout post-conflict Central America and are detrimental to women's security, as "[v]iolence, drinking, and womanizing have become so bound up with dominant constructs of maleness that they are seen as natural." This "natural" connection between masculinity and violence creates a regional narrative, suggesting that "men have more 'right' to use violence than women because their gender identity prescribes the use of force."  

Violence in both the public and private spheres is interwoven with these widely accepted
- and practiced - gendered roles. One example of the "public" normalization of violence against women is that "rape was systematically excluded from the Truth Commission Report in El Salvador, despite the evidence of such crimes having taken place." In private contexts, gender-based violence is so pervasive (and functional) that Central Americans are slow to recognize its manifestations as actual "violence". As a way for men to "discipline" their wife, intimate partner violence is not only a "natural" expression of masculinity, but the violence - or threat of violence - serves to reinforce gendered power relations (male domination/women's subordination) in the private sphere. For example, in a self-help group for men convicted of intimate partner violence, Hume found that:

  few men recognized their use of violence as their reason for having to attend the weekly sessions. Instead, many blamed their partners for reporting them to the authorities [...] One man offered as an explanation for having murdered his wife that he had found her with another man. This was an attempt not only to rationalize the horror of his act but to achieve some kind of empathy with the other men in the group.

Marysol Ascencio's article, "Machos and Sluts," helps to explain Hume's findings. In her study of Latino gendered roles, when women "deviate" from their socially constructed gender scripts - as they did in Hume's examples by reporting intimate partner violence to authorities (seen as "strong" or "disloyal" to their family) or to engaging in sexual relations outside of their marriage (seen as sluts) - then men's already legitimate use of violence is even more understandable. In short, women need punishment for their deviant behaviour, and men exert violence in order to return the balance of power in their favour (meaning for himself as an individual in his private gendered relationship, but also as part of reinforcing the general dominance of heterosexual males).

For the state to recognize gendered violence, such as rape and intimate partner violence, as "real" violence is only part of the solution. Because violence against women in the private sphere is so closely intertwined with the gendered roles and identities that normalize - and even

178 Ibid.
179 As Meg Luxton summarizes, this "private tyranny" allows even the most powerless man (in the public sphere) to hold power in his private relations.
encourage - its manifestation, it is "urgent to address not only the multiple forms of violence but the processes by which they are internalized and reproduced [...] Considering the family and community as sites in which identity is formed but also as sites of violence makes it possible to challenge accepted categories of history and draws out elements of a national [and regional] gendered culture." As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the Nicaraguan grassroots organization, Puntos de Encuentro, tries to challenge (and change) these socio-cultural gendered roles and identities that effectively normalize and sustain violence against women in the private sphere. Their innovative telenovela is broadcast throughout post-conflict Central America; its characters and plot-lines present a direct challenge to traditional gender roles and the "natural" link between masculinity and violence. With an ever-growing audience of Central American youth (ages 19-24), it is possible that their "social soap opera" could change the private attitudes and beliefs of individual men and women that currently perpetuate (heterosexual) male dominance and often result in violent behaviour.

1.4 Methodology and Methods

The under-development of positive peace precludes a comprehensive analysis of security in post-conflict contexts; yet, this avenue of research is criticized as vague and unworthy of pursuit. As Knight explains:

The problem, however, with this ‘positive peace’ notion of peacebuilding is that it is perceived by some as too abstract and idealistic to be of much use to practitioners. Since there is very little intersubjective agreement on what constitutes the root causes of violent conflict, it is difficult, according to the critics of the ‘positive peace’ approach, to develop appropriate programmatic strategies for addressing this problem.\(^\text{183}\)

Critics of feminist work on peace identify a similar problem: “Gender debates do not offer direct insights into a particular concept of peace associated with gender.”\(^\text{184}\) My feminist conception of positive peace focuses its analysis within the (often private) gendered relations that influence women's security. From a “bottom-up” perspective, changing the attitudes, beliefs and

\(^{182}\) Hume, 2008, 63.
\(^{183}\) W. Andy Knight, 2004, 247. This critique is also echoed in Barnett et. al. 2008.
behaviours that normalize violence against women is a valuable way of privately upholding the public promise of women's right to life, liberty and security of person across post-conflict Central America.

In the case of post-conflict Central America, each state is acting peacefully beyond its borders and no civil war rages within its borders; however, this “peace” has not resulted in a region of secure citizens. Considering the achievement of an enduring “negative” peace as well as basic political and economic neoliberal indicators, “[s]everal commentators have characterized some or all of the operations in Central America as ‘success stories’ for international peacebuilding.” From a human rights perspective, however, this success is questionable. Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua have demonstrated a public commitment to eradicate, or at least limit, the extreme violence in private gendered relations. This regional case is, therefore, rich with interesting tensions that require closer analysis. Because all post-conflict contexts struggle with cultivating a robust human rights regime (in general), and contain serious problems with violence against women (in particular), my feminist conception of positive peace could very well be generalizable for peacebuilding theory and practice, worldwide.

The call for more ethnographic work on women, peace and security remains strong. In 1999, Mazurana and McKay wrote that “[d]etailed, ethnographic data is also required, for without it is not possible to sufficiently understand the meaning of women’s peacebuilding activities or to fully assess the actual or potential value or impact.” In their research, the authors examine meanings of peacebuilding at UN, NGO, and grassroots levels, concluding that women’s peacebuilding is culturally and contextually based. Women’s peacebuilding interests

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are likely to be shaped by local and regional concerns and their actions located at community

In 2011, Carol Cohn re-emphasized the call to action, as few researchers over the past
twelve years have taken on the challenge of empirically-driven field work. In Cohn’s words:

I also hope that feminists interested in war, peace, and security will undertake much
more field-based, ethnographic research (whether the “field” is an insurgent’s camp,
a refugee camp, or the Pentagon). This should, in turn, also facilitate more
participatory research agenda setting from the ground up, so that the very definition
of what counts as a “security concern” or a cause of insecurity might come to look
very different.\footnote{Carol Cohn, “Feminist Security Studies: Toward a Reflexive Practice,” Politics and Gender, 2011, 585.}

My goal was to answer these calls for carefully collected empirical findings from a post-conflict
setting. From these findings, I then constructed a theoretical approach to gendered peacebuilding
that is grounded in women’s daily lives – in projects aimed at changing gender relations to be
less violent. Using lessons from grounded theory\footnote{Grounded theory emphasizes “collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the
data themselves.” See: Kathy Charmaz, Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative
2001.}, I started by observing baseline, real-world
practices in the everyday lives of women in post-conflict Central America from which I
generated some valuable ideas for better peacebuilding theories and practices. Situated
within a post-conflict context, in which universal human rights must merge with culturally
specific and gendered notions of peace and peacebuilding, my dissertation conducts participatory
research from the ground up. Peacebuilding research in the private sphere is significant, for, as
Porter reminds us:

At the grassroots level, peace-building is understood as all the processes that build
positive relationships, heal wounds, reconcile differences, restore esteem, respect
rights, meet basic needs, enhance equality, and are democratic, inclusive, and just.
In the aftermath of violence, good relationships are important; there is a particular
need to be treated with dignity and compassion.\footnote{Porter, 2003, 258.}
While it would be interesting to incorporate a quantitative study comparing pre-war and post-war levels of violence against women, the data is simply not available. As Rosenberg reminds us: "The same factors that lead to high levels of interpersonal violence - lack of economic development; weak social, political, and judicial institutions; social disturbances; and warfare - also adversely affect nations' ability to collect data and to address the causes or consequences of this violence." In all states, violence against women is grossly under-reported, but finding accurate statistics in post-conflict contexts presents additional challenges. Moreover, even when we do have data on rates of violence against women, it is unclear what, exactly, we are "seeing." For instance, increased rates of women reporting life-threatening violence does not mean that more women are being abused. The increased rates of reporting can, instead, mean that more women are gaining trust in the abilities of the police and judicial system to protect their right to security. Or (as was the case in Nicaragua from 2007-2010) more incidents of intimate partner violence being reported may also be a result of more police stations opening in rural areas, meaning that victims of intimate partner violence no longer have to travel long distances to report incidents of violence and are more likely to do so.

Because of the nature of the problem, it is therefore not a feasible research design to "measure" the success of grassroots initiatives as linked to a decrease in rates of violence against women. My research design is therefore not based on an explanatory (causal) design, but rather falls into an approach based on what Hollis and Smith call “understanding”.

Using feminist methodologies, and qualitative methods, my project sheds light on the central question: How might grassroots (or bottom-up) initiatives help to bridge the gap between the promise and practice of women’s human rights in post-conflict contexts?

Methodologically, I employed what Tickner describes as an “ethnographic style of individually oriented story-telling typical of anthropology.” For Tickner, feminist research is guided by four methodological criteria. Feminist research 1) Asks feminist questions; 2) Uses women’s experiences to design research that is useful to women; 3) Requires reflexivity from the

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192 Hollis and Smith (1998) discuss the differences between social science research aimed at “explaining” versus that aimed at “understanding”.
researcher; and, 4) Considers knowledge as a form of emancipation. Led by “a commitment to finding women and their concerns," the point of feminist research "is not only to know women, but to provide a fuller and more accurate account of society by including them." Researching the daily "practices" of violence and peace in gendered relations provides a strong empirical base for my theoretical claim that peacebuilding processes must include violence in the private sphere as part of their mandate. By asking feminist questions and hearing women's stories, we see women as both victims (and survivors) of violence as well as agents of peace. In hearing how human rights shift women's thinking - and, at times, their actions - which increases their security, we can conceive of human rights as a source of empowerment.

These connections between rights, empowerment and security inform the feminist conception of positive peace that I put forth throughout my dissertation. Porter explains that for many women living in post-conflict contexts, peace is not an abstract goal. Rather, "[m]any women become peace-builders in everyday contexts, struggling to meet the urgency of ordinary daily needs." Emphasizing the micro or “bottom-up” approach to peacebuilding as crucial for encouraging women's agency has typically been central in feminist Scholarship. An ethnographic approach to the study of women's empowerment is appropriate, as this "power within" is best identified by women's own sense of self and changes in their behaviours. As Kabeer points out, a key location to find women who can speak to the effectiveness of empowerment is the grassroots level. In her words:

empowerment strategies for women must build on ‘the power within’ as a necessary adjunct to improving their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and make decisions […] Grassroots non-governmental organizations tend to be less rule-governed and their face-to-face interactions

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197 As Tickner also emphasizes: "Whereas much of IR is focused on explaining the behavior of states, feminists are motivated by emancipatory goals – investigating the often disadvantaged lives of women within states or international institutions and structures in order to change them. Starting its investigations from the perspective of the lives of individuals on the margins who have never been the subject matter of IR, feminist analysis is often bottom-up rather than top-down. Feminists in IR are linking the everyday lived experiences of women with the constitution and exercise of political and economic power at state and global levels.” See: J. Ann Tickner, “Gendering a Discipline: Some Feminist Methodological Contributions to International Relations,” in *Signs*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2005, 2177-78.
with their constituencies have given them both a greater advantage in promoting innovative strategies and less scope for sidestepping the issue of women’s subordination. 198

Just as Kabeer relies on interviews and participant-observations methods in her development-focused research in India and Bangladesh, I also found these methods best-suited for my field work in post-conflict Central America. Using qualitative data of women’s experiences with violence and security, I find this evidence more persuasive as we know what we’re "seeing." In Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua I interviewed women and men belonging to these different groups: victims of private gendered violence, employees and volunteers working in grassroots organizations, police officers in Nicaragua’s Women’s Police Stations, government employees working in the offices dedicated to women’s issues and programs (The Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development, or ISDEMU, in El Salvador; the National Coordination Unit for the Prevention of Family Violence and Violence against Women, or CONAPREVI, in Guatemala; the European Union’s Gender Representative housed in Managua, Nicaragua).

Members of these groups had one thing in common - all had personally or professionally encountered gendered violence in the private sphere. They differed on many points, however. For example, participants ranged in age (from 20-62 years old) and in their connection with women’s rights and gendered violence in the private sphere. The questions I asked varied with each interview, as I employed an unstructured, open-ended format to facilitate more "natural" rapport with each participant. In some cases, I conducted multiple interviews with the same participant. This multi-conversational approach was of particular use with survivors of intimate partner violence living at the Guatemalan shelter, Nuevos Horizontes, as it helped develop a sense of trust and confidence between the participant and myself. In retrospect, I believe this approach - combined with my volunteer hours at the shelter caring for the women’s children when they attended appointments with the on-site psychologist, lawyer and/or job training sessions - all facilitated the sharing of painful experiences with intimate partner violence. 199 While an

198 Kabeer, 1994, 229.

199 Tami Jacoby reflects on her own involvement with her research participants - including her volunteer work - as inseparable from her "academic" observations. Jacoby reflects on the concept of "objectivity" in feminist IR research and determines the benefits of volunteering in the field typically outweigh the drawbacks. See: Jacoby,
imperfect process, I aimed to be reflexive about my role as the "researcher," and the resulting power relationship between myself and my participants, throughout my field work.²⁰⁰ (See Appendix 1 for the Discussion Guide used in each interview and Appendix 2 for a complete interview list).

I was hoping to find out more about the problem of private gendered violence in post-war Central America and how these particular societies are addressing their continued (and worsening) problems with post-conflict violence. I was interested in the state response, but as I traveled the region - became increasingly interested in the impact of grassroots actors. After being offered generous access to three grassroots projects addressing violence against women, in the private sphere, and from the "bottom-up," I realized that this would become the core of my project. One of my main findings is that the indicators of security most commonly used for post-conflict peacebuilding are best applied for assuring peace in the public sphere, but ignore the ways in which security is fostered in private relations. Examples of the evidence presented in Chapters Three and Four include statements of enhanced perceptions of security, increased sense of self-worth, and statements of ideational changes that challenge - and may, over time, shift - dominant norms about violence against women.

Thinking back, one of my most surprising findings was the important role that international rights play, at an ideational level, in women's lives. I entered the field as a critic of liberal peacebuilding, but found that core ideals of liberalism - such as universal human rights - can translate "on the ground" in context-sensitive and gendered ways. Liberal peacebuilding does not, I realized, preclude "gendered" projects that aim to improve women's human security. Research from Women's Police Stations, Nuevos Horizontes, and Puntos de Encuentro sheds light on the role of feminist grassroots projects in making meaning out of the international right to "life, liberty and security of person" in the real world experience of Central American women.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 173.
1.5 Conclusion

In post-conflict Central America, there is a gap between the public commitment to uphold women's rights and ensure basic security and the private practice of life-threatening violence against women. In this context - as is the case in other post-conflict cases, such as South Africa - gendered power relations and gendered roles work to normalize violence against women, thus preventing a rights-based culture to flourish. Like their South African counterparts, Central American women also identify private violence - and the assurance of private security - as part of post-conflict reconstruction. Researching violence and security in the private sphere, I gained some theoretical insights for a feminist conception of positive peace grounded in the work of grassroots peacebuilding projects. My research unveils strategies that seem to genuinely “disturb” the gendered power relations and gendered roles that have left women in post-conflict settings highly insecure.

Despite the public condemnation of violence against women and the public recognition of the importance of women's empowerment, the problem persists because of gendered roles and power relations. As a result, a full response to violence against women must challenge gendered power structures and patriarchal roles. I studied the successes and challenges of three grassroots projects in trying to effect such changes by empowering women and by challenging the gendered roles that normalize violence against women. Although my empirical findings from these three projects offer a contribution to peacebuilding, the theoretical premise of my thesis is nothing new. As recognized in the 1945 Preamble to the United Nations Charter, in order "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and to "practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours," the Peoples of the United Nations must "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."
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Public Promises/Private Violence: Femicide and Intimate Partner Violence in Post-conflict Central America

"You don’t see male victims looking like that [...] They don’t cut them up in pieces like they do the women." 201

*Guatemalan Women's Rights Activist*

"Every time the body of a dead woman appeared, at least four families would come to see whether or not it was their loved one." 202

*Program Coordinator*
*Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace*

"He who loves you, beats you." 203

*Common Latin American Expression*

2.1 Introduction

Most scholarship considers post-conflict Central America to be a success story for liberal peacebuilding. Yet, from a human rights perspective, this claim to peace is questionable, as the region contains ongoing, egregious, violations of citizens' human rights. Evaluating this case from a feminist perspective reveals a severe gap between the states' promises to cultivate a human rights regime and the actual practice of ongoing, systematic (intentionally organized) and systemic (socially patterned) violence against women. I argue that the normative and legal frameworks defining women's rights at international, regional and national levels are well-intentioned to protect civilians from persecution. However, when translated into the lives of women, these norms and laws prove necessary, but insufficient, to guarantee - in private practice - what they promise. This is problematic for peacebuilding efforts because women's rights and basic security are a necessary part of the broad human rights regime required for "positive" peace in post-conflict contexts.

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In this chapter, I use the examples of femicide and intimate partner violence to illustrate the gap between the promise and practice of women's right to "life, liberty and security of person" in post-conflict Central America. I first list the various international, regional and national-level promises made by Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua to uphold women's rights and ensure their basic security. Once I have established the public "promise" of women's rights and security, I then show the actual, on-the-ground, practice of human rights violations in the region. The intentionally organized and socially patterned nature of life-threatening violence faced by Central American women acts as evidence to support my claims that: a) a gap exists between states promising and providing security to women, b) this gap presents a major obstacle to the human rights regime necessary for positive peace, and c) femicide and intimate partner violence persist due to gendered power imbalances and deeply entrenched patriarchal roles/identities that normalize violence against women. I then describe the international community's increasing use of the concept of "due diligence" in trying to close this gap between the promise and practice of women's rights and security. Employed by the United Nations and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, due diligence holds states responsible for violence committed in the private sphere. Although helpful in pressuring states to investigate, punish and prevent violence against women committed by private actors, I argue that due diligence is yet another top-down measure that cannot fully address the gendered power relations and gendered roles that help sustain violence against women. I therefore conclude this chapter by summarizing how top-down approaches to cultivating a robust human rights regime in post-conflict contexts are necessary, but insufficient. This conclusion raises the research question at the heart of my empirical fieldwork presented in the following two chapters: How might bottom-up approaches help to bridge this gap between the promise and practice of women's right to security in post-conflict Central America?

2.2 The Public Promise of Protection: Women's Right to Security

"The specific experiences of women must be added to traditional approaches to human rights in order to make women more visible and to transform the concept and practice of human rights in our culture so that it takes better account of women’s lives."\(^{204}\)

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Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua have ratified numerous international and regional conventions on human rights, thus demonstrating a firm commitment to cultivating a human rights regime. All three states are party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights (1978), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987). Under the universal rubric of "human rights," women's right to equality, security, liberty, and bodily integrity is enshrined in these international instruments.

Additional conventions - dedicated solely to pressuring states to ensure women's rights and basic security - have been developed by the international community, and ratified by these three post-conflict states. For example, in ratifying the 1982 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), all three post-conflict Central American countries acknowledge their specific responsibility to uphold women’s rights and equality. In 1993, pursuant to CEDAW, the United Nations General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Developed in response to CEDAW's failure to include violence against women as a form of "discrimination," this declaration addressed the General Assembly's concern about "the long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women." Of particular relevance to cultivating a feminist conception of positive peace, the General Assembly explicitly states that "violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace." To better achieve this tripartite of "equality, development and peace," the Resolution encourages UN special agencies to "[c]onsider the issue of the elimination of violence against women, as appropriate, in fulfilling their mandates with respect to the implementation of human rights instruments." In raising awareness and alleviating the problem of violence against women, states are encouraged to "[f]acilitate and enhance the work of the women's movement and non-

governmental organizations and cooperate with them at local, national and regional levels.” In line with my argument, the UN also believes that addressing violence against women requires coordination and cooperation between "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches.

At the regional level, the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women* (commonly referred to as *Belém do Pará*) was ratified in post-conflict peacetime by Guatemala (1995), Nicaragua (1995), and El Salvador (1996). Because it is the only regional-level, binding, treaty in the world directed solely at eliminating violence against women, *Belém do Pará* has been cited as a model for other regions for a binding treaty on violence against women. As its preamble affirms, “violence against women constitutes a violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and impacts or nullifies the observance, enjoyment and exercise of such rights and freedoms.” Paying special attention to the fact that much of the life-threatening violence experienced by women occurs in the context of private (intimate and/or familial) relations, Chapter II, Article 3 explicitly states that: “Every woman has the right to be free from violence in both the public and private spheres.”

*Belém do Pará* helps ensure the states' responsibility to uphold women's rights and basic security, as found in the post-conflict constitutions of Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. The constitutions of all three states recognize a continuum between the public and private spheres, placing a high value on the family as the fundamental unit of society and claiming public responsibility for violence committed in private relations. For example, Guatemala’s post-war constitution, we find the state “recognizing the family as the primary and fundamental genesis of the spiritual and moral values of the society.” “The State of Guatemala is organized to protect the person and the family; its supreme goal is the realization of the public good.” Of

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209 Article 4 (p).
210 The law defines “violence against women” in its various forms: physical, psychological/emotional, sexual, and in terms of unequal economic/property rights. However, while all types of violence against women are important peacebuilding issues, I focus solely on direct, physical violence that poses a threat to life security.
211 Report of the Secretary-General, *Advancement of women: In-depth study on all forms of violence against women*, United Nations, 6 July 2006, 06-41974 (E) 310806, A/61/122/Add.1
212 These rights include: the right to have her life respected; the right to have her physical, mental and moral integrity respected; the right to personal liberty and security; the rights to have the inherent dignity of her person respected and her family protected (Belem do Para, 1994, II; Art. 4).
notable interest, Chapter II, Article 56 entitled *Measures to Check the Causes of Family Disintegration* claims: “Measures against alcoholism, drug addiction, and other causes of family disintegration are declared to be of social interest. The State will have to take adequate measures of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation to make said actions effective for the well-being of the individual, family, and society.” The post-war Constitutions of El Salvador and Nicaragua also establish the family as the fundamental basis - or "nucleus" - of society and, as such, will have the protection of the State.213 In El Salvador, this means that the state "shall dictate the necessary legislation and create the appropriate organizations and services for its integration, well-being and social, cultural, and economic development." For Nicaraguans, the family not only has the right to state protection, but their constitution explicitly mentions that women's rights and equality must be upheld within these private relations. “Family relations rest on respect, solidarity and absolute equality of rights and responsibilities between the man and woman.”

These constitutional statements make clear that a commitment to universal human rights, in general, and women's rights, in particular, are embodied in the national legislation of post-conflict Central American states.214 The public promise to protect citizens from human rights violations, in both the public and private spheres, is found at national, regional and international

213 See: The Constitution of El Salvador, Chapter II: Article 2; and The Constitution of Nicaragua, Chapter IV: Articles 70 and 73.

214 As the Nicaraguan constitution reads: “In the national territory every person enjoys state protection and recognition of the inherent rights of the human person, the unrestricted respect, promotion and protection of human rights and the full exercise of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights…”214 Similarly, “El Salvador recognizes the human person as the origin and the end of the activity of the State, which is organized to attain justice, judicial security, and the common good […] In consequence, it is the obligation of the State to secure for the inhabitants of the Republic, the enjoyment of liberty, health, culture, economic well-being and social justice.”214 In promoting non-discriminatory practices of protection and security, “all persons are equal before the law” and, regardless of sex, all citizens have “the right to life, physical and moral integrity…and to be protected in the conservation and defense of the same.”214 In the case of Guatemala, “It is the duty of the State to guarantee to the inhabitants of the Republic life, liberty, justice, security, peace, and the integral development of the person.”214 “In Guatemala, all human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights. Men and women, whatever their civil status, have equal opportunities and responsibilities.”214 See: The Constitution of Nicaragua, Article 46 of the Nicaraguan Constitution, available at: http://www.constitution.org/cons/nicaragu.htm; The Constitution of El Salvador, Title I, Sole Chapter, The Human Person and the Ends of the State, Article I; TITLE II, CHAPTER I: INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND THEIR REGIME OF EXCEPTIONS; FIRST SECTION, INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, Article 2 and 3; and, The Constitution of Guatemala, Title I, Chapter I: Article 1 and 2; Title II, Chapter 1, Article 4.

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levels. Yet, evidence of femicide and intimate partner violence in post-conflict Central America shows that - in practice - these laws amount to little more than a list of broken promises.

2.3 The Private Practice of Violence against Women

Twenty years after the signing of formal peace agreements, post-conflict Central America is one of the most violent regions in the world. To get a sense of the pervasive danger faced by all Central American citizens, we can look at homicide rates. The World Health Organization categorizes anything above 10 homicides per 100,000 people as evidence of “epidemic” levels of violence; all three Central American "post-conflict" states have homicide rates that - throughout their entire "peace time" - categorize their societies as such. In 2004, for example, the average international homicide rate was 7.6 deaths per 100,000 people. That same year, the average rate in Central America was 29.3 homicides - a ranking that placed Central America second only to Southern Africa.\(^\text{215}\) In 2008, Guatemala and El Salvador tied for the third highest homicide rate in the world – 52 per 100,000. In 2009, seventeen years after war's end, El Salvador had the highest homicide rate in the world, with a total 4,365 murders (75/100,000).\(^\text{216}\)

For all citizens living in post-conflict Central America, the climate of insecurity has persisted long after war's end. Yet, Central American women face a type of violence that is disturbing and distinct in its gendered quality. "Violence against women" is defined as "any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere."\(^\text{217}\) This includes violence “within the family or domestic unit or within any other interpersonal relationship,” “in the community,” and violence “that is perpetrated or condoned by the state or its agents regardless of where it occurs."\(^\text{218}\)

In post-conflict Central America, the most pervasive forms of violence against women are overt femicide, covert femicide, and intimate partner violence (IPV). These types of

\(^{217}\) Convention of Belém do Pará, Chapter I, Articles 1 and 2, 1994/95.
\(^{218}\) Ibid.
gendered violence constitute a violation of women's right to "life, liberty and security in person," and thus present a problematic "gap" between the promise and practice of women's rights and basic security in post-conflict Central America. In order to understand the nature and scope of this violence against women, I present the most accurate statistics available, from the most reliable sources, on the prevalence of femicide and intimate partner violence in post-conflict Central America. When reading these statistics, one must keep in mind that “because of the sensitivity of the subject, violence against women is almost universally under-reported. Thus, these finding may be more accurately thought of as representing the minimum levels of violence that occur.”

Overt Femicide

The term femicide can be traced back to the 1800s, when it was used to signify “the killing of a woman.” Over a century later, Diana Russell and Jane Caputi introduced “femicide” into both scholarship and activism as “the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women.” “Femicide,” argues Russell, “is the ultimate end of a continuum of terror that includes rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery (particularly in prostitution), incestuous and extra-familial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery; sexual harassment; [...] forced motherhood (criminalizing contraception and abortion) [...] Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides.”

For the purposes of my research, a helpful distinction is to be made between “overt” and “covert” femicide. Alongside the overt rape, mutilation, and murder of women sustained by informally entrenched gender power relations, femicide also includes more covert life-ending violence against women that is institutionalized by the state as formal policy.

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221 Caputi and Russell, 1990, 34. However, in recognition of the global reality that girls and female infants are victims of sexist murder, Russell and Harmes recently replaced “women” with “females”, and, in accordance, replaced “men” with “males” because boys and male youth are included among the perpetrators of femicide. The definition of femicide the authors now employ is: “the killing of females by males because they are female”
In the 1990s, the term femicide *(femicidio)* gained popular recognition from the case of Ciudad Juarez, in which Mexican women working in the *maquiladoras* (sweat shops) systematically disappeared and were then found assassinated - often when traveling home from work after dark. While the Juarez case gained attention in both international media and academic scholarship, human rights advocates point out that rates of femicide are far more extreme in the post-war states of Central America. Over a ten year period (1993-2003), there were 370 women killed in the infamously violent Ciudad Juarez (population 1.5 million). Yet, in Guatemala (population 14 million) 383 women were murdered by men in the single year of 2003. By 2008, the annual number of female homicides in Guatemala reached 722. From 2009-2012, this number has remained consistent, with approximately 685-720 Guatemalan females murdered per year. Overall, between 2000 and 2012, more than 6000 Guatemalan women have been murdered in their home state (see Figure 2.1). In the same time period (2000-2012), there have been over 3000 violent deaths of women in El Salvador (population 6 million). Between 2001 and 2012, approximately 890 women have been violently and deliberately killed in Nicaragua (population 5 million).

To place these Central American figures in an international context, I refer to a report that details the prevalence of overt femicide across 44 countries. In 2006, throughout the Americas, an average of 19.14 (per one million) women were violently and deliberately killed; in Central and South America, however, there were 45.39 femicides per million women. In 2006, El Salvador and Guatemala had the highest prevalence of femicide in the Americas; by 2012, El Salvador had the highest rate of female murder in the world (see Figure 2.2).

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223 Johanna Ikonen, *Feminicide: The Case of Mexico and Guatemala*, European Parliament Joint Public Hearing, Brussels, 19 April 2006. This data has its origins in findings collected by the Committee on Feminicide in Guatemala, a group of investigators organized in 2006 who were responsible for researching the extent of femicide in the country and subsequently offering recommendations to the national government. One result of their efforts was the 2008 *Law Against Femicide*, which is discussed later in this section.

224 48 mujeres asesinadas en Nicaragua en primera mitad del 2012


226 So as not to dismiss the relatively low number of overt femicides in Nicaragua - as compared to Guatemala and El Salvador - several points must be made. First, taking a regional approach to security and peacebuilding in Central America requires consideration of the domino effect of violence against women. There seems to be a "copy-cat" pattern of overt femicide trickling south, from Ciudad Juarez in Mexico down through post-conflict Central America. This pattern of femicide "travelling" could result in a rising number of Nicaraguan females being murdered over the next few years. Second, with the C-4 agreement increasing the facility (and thus the amount) of travel in the region, women of one country have been killed while visiting or working in a neighbouring state.
One particularly horrific example is the case of Luz Marina Aragón, a 44-year-old Nicaraguan woman, who was murdered and chopped into pieces while working in Guatemala. Her remains were then put into plastic bags and cardboard boxes and scattered around Guatemala City. Third, and perhaps most important, is the point that despite fewer females being murdered in Nicaragua, the human rights regime promised by the Nicaraguan state remains elusive in practice.

A deeper look into these violent murders reveals evidence of the gendered nature of overt femicide. Rueda, an expert on Guatemala's post-war violence, argues:

these femicides cannot be explained purely in terms of a 'general climate of violence', rather, account must be taken of discrimination and of a local social and economic context that is unfavorable to women (especially indigenous women), as well as high poverty rates, women's economic dependence, gangs, and the failure to disarm the illegal security forces and clandestine security apparatuses.\(^\text{228}\)

In the case of El Salvador, gendered power distribution also underlies the socially patterned nature of violence against women. “Without a doubt,” write Herrera and Ugarte, “an enormous number of violent acts against women [in El Salvador] are based in gender relations, to say the power relations between men and women, in the “sobrevaloracion” (over-valuing) of masculinity and the inferiority of femininity that gives social permission to men to mistreat, dominate, control and punish women.”\(^\text{229}\)

The unequal, gendered distribution of power not only makes women the more "vulnerable" targets of violence, but also affects the ways in which female murders are executed (as compared to male-on-male homicide). Distinct from the male-on-male homicides that plague post-conflict Central America, many female murders in the region are marked by misogynistic interpersonal violence, such as rape, torture, dismemberment and mutilation. In a report detailing the 722 Guatemalan women murdered in 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council notes: “The majority of women killed are between 16 and 30 years old, and are killed by strangulation. Approximately 14 per cent of victims show signs of torture, and approximately 13 per cent show signs of sexual abuse.”\(^\text{230}\) As Angelica Gonzales of Guatemala’s Network to Oppose Violence Against Women explains, “sexual aggression, mutilation of body parts like breasts, torture, and the dumping of victims in empty lots are trademarks of the killings.”\(^\text{231}\) For example, in one

\(^\text{228}\) Rueda, 2007, 5.
\(^\text{231}\) Quoted in Ruhl, 2007, 206. This report is the 2007 update to an ongoing investigation by the Centre for Gender and Refugee Studies at the University of California’s Hastings College of the Law. Information is therefore a compilation of both Getting Away With Murder, 2005 and Guatemala’s Femicides and the Ongoing Struggle for Human Rights, 2006. All available online: http://cgrs.uchastings.edu
particularly horrific week, three legs, a head, and an arm were found in a town near Guatemala City; medical examiners later matched these limbs to the dismembered thoraxes of two girls, about 11 and 16 years old, that had been left in a separate location. Since 2004, Guatemala has a monthly average of 50-54 women who are tortured, mutilated and/or raped before being slain. A 2003 United Nations report revealed a similarly troubling pattern of life-ending violence against women in El Salvador, whereby the hundreds of female murders that year "followed a general pattern in which victims were between the ages of 15 and 20 years of age, they disappeared and were later found murdered in public parks and wasteland around San Salvador."  

One effect of (and possible motive behind) widespread femicide in Central America is to undermine the equality measures promised to women by the post-conflict state. A report on femicide by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights concludes: “these assassinations are meant to signal to women to watch out and to return to the private sphere of home and their familial duties. As women have taken on more public roles and are viewed as in competition with men, they are told to abandon the public arena and to give up on civic participation.” Hierarchical, gendered power relations - and a conception of gendered power relations as operating in a competitive, "zero-sum" game - creates a context of discrimination that makes women, as a social group, the targets of socially patterned violence. The femicide epidemic in post-conflict Central America is not only a result of the ways in which patriarchy flows between the public and private spheres, but is also related to the ways in which "wartime" violence flows into "peacetime". For example, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Yakin Erturk, claims that many instances of overt femicide display an extension of war tactics. In her findings: "The mutilated corpses showed signs of rape and torture, and in some cases decapitation. According to interlocutors the pattern of the killings was reminiscent of executions by death squads operating in the 1970s, when bodies were left in the street with signs of torture to terrorize the communities." In their research on Guatemala, both

235 Sanford, 2008, 118.
Sanford and Ruhl make a similar link between the state's wartime violence and its "post-conflict" femicide epidemic. Allegations abound that members from clandestine security operations, paramilitary groups and the PNC (national police force) have committed femicide.\textsuperscript{237} Clandestine groups are a post-war phenomenon, described by Sanford as "the remnants of illegal armed groups that operated in cooperation with the military intelligence apparatus during the internal armed conflict."\textsuperscript{238} In Guatemala, very few officers trained in, and responsible for, state-sponsored violence during the 36-year long civil war were brought to justice – and many of them continue to serve within government police or private security forces. In Sanford’s words, "[During the civil war] the state trained killers to rape, to mutilate, and to murder women during the war. These killers and rapists are free."\textsuperscript{239} Ruhl echoes Sanford, noting that the tactics used to torture and kill female victims often replicate those used in wartime violence. For instance, during Guatemala's civil war, an act of sexual violence committed against a Mayan woman constituted a form of “victory” for the army.\textsuperscript{240}

To deflect attention from claims that the state is directly, or indirectly, responsible for a number of femicides, government officials have attributed the problem to rampant gang violence. For instance, in 2004, then-Guatemalan President Berger publicly claimed that “in the majority of [femicide] cases, women had links with juvenile gangs and organized crime.”\textsuperscript{241} Yet, the sexual violence and mutilation that accompany many femicide cases do not reflect "typical" tactics associated with gang violence. As Sanford points out, gang members typically commit murder with the use of firearms and leave dead bodies in the place they are killed as a territorial marker. Furthermore, the secretive moving - and disposing - of dismembered body parts in various locations, requires resources beyond the reach of gang members (who are typically young and impoverished).\textsuperscript{242} In Ruhl's analysis: “Blaming the skyrocketing numbers of

\textsuperscript{237} Estimates place about 120,000 private security officers and an additional 300,000 police officers as part of the post-conflict national police force.
\textsuperscript{238} Sanford, 2008, 18.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid, 118-19.
\textsuperscript{241} Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, 2006, 14. President Berger later retracted this statement.
\textsuperscript{242} Ruhl, 2007, 214.
murdered Guatemalan women on the victims, and implying that their murders are the result of their involvement with gang or other illegal activity, is a clear indication of a lack of commitment to locating and bringing the perpetrators to justice."

For the President to dismiss women's widespread insecurity as a serious issue is a display of the entrenched sexism within Guatemalan society. As the European Parliament's Rapporteur Raül Romeva i Rueda contends: "The intention [of Berger's statement] being to cast doubt on their [victims'] credibility, reduce the cases to isolated events and distract attention from what really matters, in other words security, the right to life, and the dignity of the murdered women and girls."

With so few femicide cases investigated, it is difficult to identify the "real" perpetrators. On one hand, gangs have claimed responsibility for some overt femicides - particularly in, and around, the capital cities of Guatemala City and San Salvador. On the other hand, state-related groups have also been identified as responsible for some of these grotesque female murders. For example, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (jointly established by the United Nations and the Guatemalan government in 2008) was mandated to investigate and disarticulate clandestine organizations known to be responsible for human rights abuses. In 2005, when Erturk evaluated 153 cases of violence against women in El Salvador, she found that 77 cases were murders, and the remainder were cases of rape (although, in 22 of the murder cases, the victim had also been raped or sexually abused). As Erturk reports: "In cases where the perpetrator had been indentified, 32.3% of the crimes were committed by professionals, versus 16.1% for which gang members were responsible [...] the majority of the perpetrators were family relations to the victim."

Findings from both Guatemala and El Salvador thus "challenge official claims that gangs are the primary perpetrators of violence against women"

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244 Rueda, 2007.
245 In 2003, as a sign of upholding its responsibility to protect its citizens, the Guatemalan government made an agreement with the UN in which it promised to establish a commission for a formal investigation of clandestine, state-related groups. Yet, showing a continued state unwillingness to uphold its duty, this commission met with strong internal opposition as Guatemala’s Constitutional Court claimed provisions in the agreement were "unconstitutional," and its ratification was ultimately blocked by a similarly reluctant Congress. See: Sanford, 2008, 120.
and suggest that states must shift gears, acknowledging that in the majority of cases it is *men known to the victim* who are the perpetrators of violence against women.”

Shifting blame for women's insecurity in post-conflict Central America among gangs, state-related clandestine groups of professionally trained killers, and the female victims themselves, has a number negative consequences for establishing a strong human rights regime. First, blaming gangs is a way for the state to perpetuate an image of male youth as "dangerous," and thus legitimize its persecution of the large, disenfranchised, male population. In Sanford’s view, "blaming gangs for the killing of women becomes a reason to carry out social cleansing on poor, young men." Second, debating whether gangs or state-related groups are "most responsible" for femicide diverts attention from the actual primary location of women's insecurity: private, often intimate, relations. Following Erturk's breakdown of femicide cases where the perpetrator had been identified, in most cases, the victim's life was ended by someone known to her. A successful strategy to address femicide must, therefore, do more than seek out - and punish - the gang members and state-related clandestine groups responsible for murdering women. Rather, strategies must consider the ways in which patriarchy operates on the continuum between the public and private spheres, addressing both the social character of the killing of women (as a product of relations of power between men and women) and the ways in which gender inequality translates into violent private relations. Such a strategy would more effectively address the causes of women's insecurity; it would also improve the security of those disenfranchised, virtually powerless, male youth wrongly blamed for the femicide epidemic in Guatemala and El Salvador.

In addition to gendered power relations, patriarchal gendered roles and identities also affect the relatively high rates of femicide in post-conflict Central America. This is particularly evident in the ways in which femicide cases are (not) investigated and perpetrators (not) punished. The post-conflict police forces of Guatemala and El Salvador remain poorly trained, largely unaccountable, and - considering these states have some of the highest homicide rates in the world - are overwhelmed by their work load. Based on Rueda's analysis of post-conflict

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247 Ibid. My emphasis.
248 Current demographic statistics place 35-40% of the Central American population under the age of 15 years old, and over half of the region lives below the poverty line.
249 Sanford, 2008, 18.
250 Ibid, 112.
Central America, The European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality concludes that “the main obstacle facing the state institutions that have been created is lack of financial and human resources.”

For instance, in 2004, Guatemala’s Special Prosecutor for crimes against women had a staff of 6 people to investigate approximately 80 femicide cases. Moreover, poor training and a general lack of human and financial resources contribute to Guatemala’s single-digit prosecution rate for murder (of both males and females). As an official from the Office of the Special Homicide Prosecutor confirms, “prosecutors have no material evidence in 95 percent of cases due to poor police work and a lack of forensic evidence. Because crime scenes are mishandled from the beginning, even those cases that make it to a prosecutor’s desk have little chance of resulting in a conviction because of lack of evidence.”

However, a lack of state capability (resources) is only a partial explanation for the lack of proper investigation into femicide cases. A lack of *willingness* is also evident. As the United Nations charges:

> There are 5,000 or more killings per year, and the responsibility for this must rest with the State. Guatemala is not a failed State and is not an especially poor State. The reason that extrajudicial executions are widespread is a distinct lack of political will. Important legislation is not enacted. Necessary budget allocations are not made. Guatemala faces a choice: realize the vision of the Peace Accords or fall back on the brutal tactics of the past. On the one hand, Guatemala can choose to implement a working system of criminal justice based on human rights. On the other hand, Guatemala can resort to militarized justice, the execution of suspects by the police, and impunity for vigilante justice.

In my analysis, the lack of investigation into, and punishment for, female murders are affected by gendered power relations and gendered roles/identities. Stigmatization of female victims by
the authorities is noticeable through a pattern of devaluing victims because of how they dress (for example, making specific note of belly-button rings, women wearing sandals, or tattoos), their workplace, their religious affiliations, or their personal relations. In Sanford’s view, addressing femicide in Central America will require social, legal and political changes that "hold responsible not only the male perpetrators but also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny. Impunity, silence, and indifference each play a role [in the continuance of femicide].”

Again, because so few female murders are investigated, it is difficult to determine how, exactly, state and judicial structures "normalize misogyny." However, one femicide investigation, brought before the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman's office, provides rare insight into the negligent and discriminatory investigation processes of femicide cases. The 2005 rape and murder of 19-year-old law student, Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz, remains unsolved; when the victim's parents lobbied the Ombudsman to review the investigation procedure, the Office's Report shed light on why the case remains unresolved. The report highlights numerous flaws in the procedures carried out by the National Civilian Police (PNC), the Public Prosecutor’s Office, and judicial authorities. Among the Ombudsman's key findings, when the victim's body was found abandoned on a city street - shot in the head and covered with bruises and traces of semen - no rigorous forensic examination was conducted. Instead, all but one piece of clothing worn by Ms. Velásquez the night of her murder were returned to the family. In-depth testing of key parts of the scene of the crime was never done. Moreover, authorities failed to look into important evidence and failed to promptly follow up on key witnesses or possible leads. According to reports given to the Ombudsman, a number of potential witnesses were only interviewed for the first time in June 2006 (ten months after the murder took place).

In my analysis of the Ombudsman's report, certain "flaws" of the investigation are distinctly gendered. For instance, despite the victim's parents having identified their daughter's body, the forensic report listed Ms. Velásquez as a "Jane Doe" for almost two months. This

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255 Sanford, 2008, 112.
example of gross negligence can be attributed to the victim's physical appearance, which did not fit with traditional gendered stereotypes of what constitutes a "good woman" in Guatemalan society. As the report reads: "According to a PNC investigator in the Criminal Investigation Unit, the scene of the crime was wrongfully processed because Claudina was initially classified 'as a victim whose murder should not be investigated.' Claudina was categorized as a 'nobody' by the authorities because she was wearing sandals and a belly button ring." As a consequence, police failed to promptly open an investigation into her rape and murder, which greatly reduced the chances of identifying the perpetrators. The Ombusman's investigation also reveals "that the scene of the crime was tampered with prior to the arrival of the Public Prosecutor’s Office and personnel responsible for processing the crime scene." Furthermore, "[a]lthough the authorities present at the scene of the crime had determined that Claudina’s body showed signs of rape, her clothes, with the exception of the sweater she was wearing the night of the murder, were handed back to the family and never processed for evidence. Her fingerprints and residue under the fingernails were not collected until Claudina's wake [at the funeral home]." As summarized by the Washington Office on Latin America: "The investigation of Claudina [Isabel Velásquez Paiz's] murder was negatively influenced by the prejudices and discriminatory attitudes of the authorities handling the investigation […] the State failed in its obligation to respect and guarantee the right to life, security and due process."258

In 2005, the year of Ms. Velásquez's murder, a total of 665 women were deliberately killed in the state of Guatemala. Only 30 of these cases were investigated; four of these investigations resulted in a trial. No arrests were made in 97% of the cases, and, in total, two convictions were

257 Other examples of incompetence and/or negligence include the failure to perform adequate forensic tests and analysis, such as inaccurately analyzing bullet ballistics and failing to test for internal trauma or fully identify and record all external injuries. The forensic report also recorded the time of death as seven to eleven hours after the autopsy was performed. Moreover, investigators did not interview key witnesses, such as those friends with the victim the night she was killed (thus, failing to rule out if any of these people had recently fired a gun and failing to collect evidence from the inside of their vehicles). Nor did the police follow-up on any leads offered by the victim's parents; in fact, her parents were interviewed a month after her murder and other potential witnesses were not interviewed until ten months after the murder (June 2006). See: The Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office (PDH), The Investigation Into Reported Violations of Due Process in the Case of Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz, October 2006. Published online by the Washington Office on Latin America. Available at: http://www.wola.org/publications/claudina_isabel_velasquez_paiz

258 The Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office (PDH), The Investigation Into Reported Violations of Due Process in the Case of Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz, October 2006. Published online by the Washington Office on Latin America. Available at: http://www.wola.org/publications/claudina_isabel_velasquez_paiz
handed down. ²⁵⁹ A closer look into the actual processing of the Velasquez case reveals how much pressure the victim's parents had to place upon authorities in order to have their daughter's murder be one of those few cases investigated. The Velásquez case provides rare, and important, insight into how a patriarchal culture, and the resultant gender roles, can influence femicide investigations.

Fortunately, under the direction of Supreme Court President Beatriz De Leon, new efforts in judicial training are evident. Unfortunately, however, critics say the two-day "sensitivity" courses given to the judges, on issues such as ethnic and gender-based violence, are insufficient for systemic change. ²⁶⁰ In the current context of post-conflict Central America, there is near-complete impunity for killing a woman; thus, more severe - and consistently applied - punishment for perpetrators of femicide would certainly help as a deterrent. Yet, when looking at the crime through its basis in gendered, often private, relations it is clear that punitive measures are not the "answer" to this social problem. Punitive measures will have to be complemented by effective preventative measures in order to foster a robust human rights regime in this post-conflict context.

Overt femicide results from - and helps to sustain - gendered power relations that disfavor women; moreover, well-established patriarchal roles and gendered identities affect the ways in which femicide is (not) prevented, investigated and punished by post-conflict Central American states. Amnesty International’s most recent Regional Report on Latin America speaks to the continually rising rates of reported gendered violence in post-conflict Central America - and the concurrent decreasing age of the victims. The Report states: “The number of reported cases of domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, and the killing and mutilation of women’s bodies after having been raped, rose in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Haiti. In several countries, in particular Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, data suggested that more than half these victims were girls.” ²⁶¹ Although my research focuses on women (18 years

²⁵⁹ The 4% statistic is from MSF, women’s sentencing rate is documented by Guatemala’s Network to Oppose Violence Against Women and Amnesty International and cited in Ruhl, 2007, 208.
²⁶⁰ Ruhl, 2007, 212. Current courses are only two days long, whereas there are proposals to run three-month courses that enable a more complete educative process.
of age and older) the fact that gendered violence also affects girls is salient, particularly with regards to gendered power relations in the private sphere. As the next section makes clear, sexual violence within the family colludes with sexist state policy banning abortions in the case of rape, effectively demonstrating how gendered violence operates on a continuum between the private and public spheres to the great detriment of equality and security for women (and girls).

Covert Femicide

I begin this section with the story of Rosa, which illustrates the highly contentious nature of therapeutic abortion in Nicaragua:

In 2003, a nine-year old Nicaraguan girl known as "Rosa" became pregnant after being raped. Rosa's parents believed that in carrying this child to term, Rosa would suffer undue physical and psychological harm; thus, they petitioned a panel of three doctors to have the pregnancy terminated by abortion. This medical panel was meant to determine whether or not the pregnancy posed a threat to the mother's life, as this was the only condition upon which an abortion (often termed a "therapeutic" abortion) could be legally granted. After hearing Rosa's case, the panel offered an ambiguous ruling, deciding that the nine-year old's life could be in danger from both carrying the child to term and by having an abortion. Rosa's parents took this decision to mean that an abortion was permissible, thus, Rosa was taken to a private clinic where the procedure was performed.

As a consequence of this abortion, Rosa and her parents were excommunicated from the Catholic Church. Nicaraguan officials were split on the legality of the abortion. The Attorney General, Maria del Carmen Solorzano, said the abortion did not break any laws because it was carried out to save the life of the girl. Meanwhile, Health Minister, Lucia Salvo, called the abortion a crime and threatened to bring charges against the family and the doctor who performed the procedure. Women's rights activists from within Nicaragua's Network of Women against Violence celebrated the fact that charges were never pressed and hoped this much-watched case would "open a space for the Congress to debate the strict nature of the abortion laws and consider new, more liberal laws on abortion."

Instead, three years later (in 2006), President Daniel Ortega and his government instituted a complete ban on abortion, including all therapeutic abortions to save the mother's life - which had been legal in Nicaragua for the previous one hundred years.

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262 Interview, K17.
263 Kampwirth explains the political (opposed to religious or moral) basis of the ban as follows: “The FSLN’s newfound opposition to therapeutic abortion does not indicate an ideological shift to the right. What it does show is that, after a decade and a half out of power and close to a decade of political pacts with the right […] the FSLN was quite willing to oppose its former base in the women’s movement, to say nothing of the vast majority of Nicaragua’s medical establishment, if that is what it took to return to power.” Karen Kampwirth, “Abortion, Antifeminism, and the Return of Daniel Ortega: In Nicaragua, Leftist Politics?” in Latin American Perspectives Vol. 35, No. 6, November 2008, 127.
El Salvador and Nicaragua are two of the six states, worldwide, that ban abortion without exception. As defined by Russell and Harmes, these states are guilty of perpetuating covert femicide. In their words: “The concept of femicide includes covert forms of woman-killing such as women being permitted to die because of misogynistic attitudes and/or social institutions. For example, wherever women’s right to choose whether to be a mother is not recognized, thousands of women die every year from botched abortions.”

Legal provisions allowing "therapeutic abortion" are often interpreted to allow three exceptions to the overall ban: a documented rape, danger to the pregnant woman’s life, or severe damage to the fetus. Approximately 97% of the world’s states allow therapeutic abortion, including most Catholic states (such as Ireland and Latin American states that neighbour El Salvador and Nicaragua). It is therefore clear that “[a]ccess to therapeutic abortion is a universally accepted principle which transcends cultural differences, religious creeds and political ideologies. In most countries, legislators have taken the framework of human rights into account, but at its heart, therapeutic abortion is a matter of common sense and humanity.”

Both El Salvador and Nicaragua did not criminalize therapeutic abortion until many years into their post-conflict phase - El Salvador placed a total ban on abortion in 1998 (six years after their 1992 peace accords) and Nicaragua in 2006 (sixteen years into "peacetime"). For both states, a re-opening of their Constitutions allowed for amendments recognizing the human person as deserving state protection from the moment of conception. In addition to these constitutional amendments, the "embryonic" right to life was newly protected in each state’s Penal Code which resuled in abortion – under any circumstance – being a criminal offense. As UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Yakin Erturk, plainly states: “In this amendment, the rights of the foetus have been prioritized over a women’s right to life, health and well-being.”

Post-conflict abortion policy in both El Salvador and Nicaragua is a state-perpetuated, and thus intentionally organized (or systematic), violation of women’s right to life, liberty and

264 Chile, Dominican Republic, the Holy See, and Malta are the other states to have a total ban on abortion. See: United Nations, World Abortion Policies, 2011, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
security of person. This policy obstructs the establishment of the human rights regime necessary for positive peace, as “blanket abortion bans are incompatible with international human rights obligations, including obligations on the rights to life, health, and non-discrimination. Their imposition can, and often does, have serious effects on the lives and health of women and girls.”

Due to the criminal nature of therapeutic abortion, reporting and collection of accurate statistics is impossible; yet the most reliable data on the topic come from intergovernmental and non-governmental fact-finding missions. The 2007 Pan-American Health Organization’s comprehensive study of abortion in Nicaragua explains the consequences of banning therapeutic abortion from a medical (opposed to political or moral) standpoint. Among its detailed findings, the report gives a sense of the number of impregnated females dying, daily, from the denial of care. According to 2005 data (when therapeutic abortion was legal, thus data more easily collected), 21 women per day solicited medical attention from the Public Ministry of Health due to a miscarriage. Since the criminalization of abortion, women are reluctant to seek medical care as doctors may question whether their miscarriage is of "natural" causes or due to self-inflicted methods of pregnancy termination. In addition to miscarriages, one woman a day confronted an ectopic pregnancy (when the fetus starts developing outside the uterus) that required an abortion, and every two days, an abortion was necessary for either a molar pregnancy (when the fetus develops abnormally into a "hydatidiform mole") or a pregnancy complicated by cancer. Women suffering from an anencephalic fetus (where a major portion of the brain has failed to form) have described themselves as feeling like a “walking coffin” because the baby has no chance of survival and will often be stillborn or die within a few hours or days of birth.

Under current laws, women facing any of these pregnancy-related complications are forced to carry the child to term or face legal charges. In reality, however, many women seek abortions despite their illegality. Commonly referred to as “back-alley abortions” these are clandestine

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270 Pan-American Health Organization, 2007, 14. Cancer complications arise from several sources. At times, the fetus is growing tumors while in other cases, a woman with cancer becomes pregnant but must terminate her pregnancy in order to engage in the necessary radiation treatment.
procedures executed by doctors who not only place their career at risk, but face imprisonment if caught. In resource-poor, post-conflict countries, terminating a pregnancy through such clandestine methods presents immense health risks for the women undergoing such treatment.²⁷² Because pregnancy only affects female citizens, the ban on therapeutic abortion is an obvious form of violence against women. The ban is also a form of gender-based violence due to the law's basis in gendered power relations that allow policy-makers to devalue women's lives and control women's bodies. Moreover, long-established gendered roles/identities that associate females primarily with a reproductive capacity, and exalt women's role as "good" (i.e. subservient) wives and nurturing mothers, reinforce the public popularity of the law. Speaking to law's blatant sexism, inherent in the fact that it does not infringe upon the rights of men and boys, Amnesty International claims:

The revised penal code is gender-discriminatory, denying women and girls treatment which only they need. Only women and girls risk physical and mental suffering or losing their lives as a result of delays in or denial of medical treatment if complications arise during pregnancy. Only women and girls are compelled to continue a medically dangerous or unwanted pregnancy or face imprisonment. Only women and girls suffer the mental anguish and physical pain of an unsafe abortion, risking their health and life in the process.²⁷³

Another facet of this violence being embedded in gendered power relations is the fact that an alarming number of unwanted pregnancies in the region result from males enacting rape and/or incest upon their less powerful female counterparts. These forms of sexual violence are directed at women, but also - disturbingly - at young girls within a man's family. The 2008 records from a reputable Nicaraguan women’s NGO demonstrate that nearly all reported violence against women involved a form of aggravated sexual assault; furthermore, several rapes

²⁷² Although it is virtually impossible to distinguish how many women seek out clandestine abortions for therapeutic reasons (because the pregnancy resulted from rape or carrying the fetus to term threatens their own life), it is worth noting that the general mortality rate from illegal abortions in developing states can be as high as 400 per 100,000 procedures (compared to a mere 6 deaths per 100,000 abortions in cases of developed states with legalized abortion). A ban on therapeutic abortion thus leads to an increase in the number of women seeking these "back-alley" procedures, which likely results in a higher female death rate than if the total ban on abortion was lifted.

that year resulted in girls as young as 9 and 10 years of age becoming pregnant. I quote a 2009 Amnesty International report:

[R]ape victims who become pregnant as a result of the crime in Nicaragua are faced with an unconscionable choice: either continue the pregnancy to full term, regardless of the risks to her life, health or well-being or seek an unsafe backstreet abortion risking her life, health and possibly imprisonment. In a country where there are high rates of sexual abuse and at least 50% of rape victims are girls aged 18 or under, this is a particularly appalling situation.

In El Salvador, a similar problem of male domination over females - expressed through sexual assault - is evident. In this context, gendered power dynamics combine with the well-established gendered roles of males as sexually virulent and females as subservient wives/mothers to allow for widespread sexual abuse within private, familial relations. I again refer to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, who summarizes the problem as follows: "Data on child abuse and incest is limited owing to the social taboo attached to such crimes. I did receive specific testimonies revealing that such abuses are disturbingly widespread […] The relatively unstable nature of matrimonial unions puts children particularly at risk of abuse by their natural or stepfathers. A daughter may also be perceived as a legitimate sexual replacement for her mother if the mother is sterile."

A gendered analysis of family dynamics points to the widely accepted male role as "ruler" of the household and one who displays his sexual power through procreation. When faced with a sterile wife, men are seemingly "permitted" to use another female in his private sphere to fill the role of sexual partner and bearer of his children. Gendered power relations that place men as dominant in the private sphere, and gendered identities that associate masculinity with aggressiveness and sexuality, are both factors that play into high levels of intra-familial sexual violence. As a form of gendered violence, sexual assault is significant in and of itself; yet, in this discussion of covert femicide, rape and incest are important as acts that - in some cases - lead to unwanted pregnancy. In Nicaragua and El Salvador, females suffer a "double

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274 Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia, “¡Ni una muerta más, exijo vivir sin violencia!” Monitoreo/Medios Escritos, Violencia Intrafamiliar/Abuso Sexual, 2008.
victimization" of the gendered power relations and roles that underlie widespread sexual assault compounded by the misogynistic law that then forces them into a powerless position where they must carry the child to term. Although males suffer sexual abuse, they are not impregnated due to rape and/or incest, thus spared the physical, psychological and emotional effects that women and girls face in being forced to carry a child to term. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, available statistics likely represent the minimal amount of women and girls affected by this gendered violence; nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that between 2005 and 2007, 1,247 Nicaraguan girls were reported to have been raped and/or to have been the victims of incest. Of these crimes, 198 (16%) were reported to have resulted in pregnancy; 172 of these impregnated girls were between 10 and 14 years of age.277

Faced with gendered discrimination in both the private and public spheres, many impregnated women and girls (try to) commit suicide. For instance, Nicaraguan “maternal mortality figures for 2007 and 2008 found that the principal causes of adolescent maternal mortality were the consumption of poison and pre-eclampsia.”278 In El Salvador, a similar trend is evident; pregnant teenage girls poison their wombs with agricultural pesticides, hoping to either induce an abortion or commit suicide. If the pesticide does neither, the girls “would rather report the cause of their resulting hospital visit as ‘attempted suicide,’ which is not as felonious a crime nor as socially unbearable as abortion.”279 These fears are not exaggerated as the legal consequences for females seeking abortion and the doctors (male and female) performing the procedure are becoming increasingly harsh.280 Later-term abortions are now reclassified as “aggravated homicide,” thus, “[i]f an aborted fetus is found to have been viable, the higher charge can be filed. The penalty for abortion can be as low as two years in prison. Aggravated homicide has a minimum sentence of 30 years and a maximum of 50 years.”281 Medical or

278 Reported by the Ministry of Health to Amnesty International, 2009, 24. Eclampsia is defined as “A condition peculiar to pregnancy or a newly delivered woman, characterized by fits followed by more or less prolonged coma.”
280 Article 144 of the Nicaraguan Penal Code punishes women who perform abortions on themselves, stating that “a woman who intentionally causes her own abortion or consents to an abortion carried out by someone else, will receive a penalty of one to two years in prison.”
281 Hitt, 2006. The issue of proving “viability” is controversial; however, as Hitt reports, the rule of thumb is “if an aborted fetus weighs more than 500 grams, or a little more than a pound, then you can argue that the fetus was viable.”
health professionals found guilty of assisting in an abortion face one to three years in prison and removal of their license to practice for two to five years.\textsuperscript{282}

For their banning of therapeutic abortion, the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran states have been charged by four different United Nations bodies as being in violation of international human rights in addition to violating the Convention Against Torture.\textsuperscript{283} El Salvador has been chastised by the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the Economic and Social Council’s Commission on Human Rights for “the severity of the current law against abortion in the State Party, especially since illegal abortions have serious detrimental consequences for women’s lives, health and well-being.”\textsuperscript{284} The United Nations Committee Against Torture charges Nicaragua as being in clear violation of the Convention Against Torture, which Nicaragua ratified in July 2005 and signed its amendments in 2009.\textsuperscript{285} As Widney Brown reports:

The [UN Committee Against Torture] is sending a clear message to the Nicaraguan state: So long as the complete ban with no exceptions is in place, you will be in breach of your international legal obligations to protect human rights [...] If this complete ban were to stay, women and girls would continue to be at risk of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Such inaction would show a cruel indifference to the physical pain, psychological anguish and lack of human dignity this law causes women and girls in Nicaragua to suffer by denying and thwarting their access to essential medical treatment during pregnancy.\textsuperscript{286}

Members of the United Nations Human Rights Committee asked Nicaraguan representatives how, if Nicaragua were a secular state, a ban on abortion could be reconciled

\textsuperscript{282} Article 144; Nicaragua Penal Code.
\textsuperscript{283} The UN Human Rights Committee, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the UN Committee Against Torture have all formally stated that the Government of Nicaragua is in breach of their international legal obligations. In addition, the European Union formally denounced the Nicaraguan state for violating human rights and threatened to cut its substantial financial aid to the country. An official press note from the 27 EU Member States reads: “In the context of the Partnership Agreement negotiations between European Union and Central American countries, calls for Nicaragua to be reminded of the fulfillment of the principles of respect of the State of Law, democracy and Human Rights, defended and promoted by the European Union.”
\textsuperscript{285} The \textit{UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment} was signed in New York on 10 December 1984; however, Nicaragua did not ratify the convention until July 2005. Notably, however, Nicaragua has been quick to sign onto the Conventions more recent amendments in 2002, ratifying the optional protocol on 25 February 2009. For the Convention itself and a list of those states on board see: http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-9&chapter=4&lang=en
with secularity. The delegation responded “that though the state is secular, the social reality is that 90 percent of the country’s people profess Christianity, implying that the laws reflected the value choices of a majority of Nicaraguans. The delegates added that if there came a time when a majority desired to change the country’s abortion laws, they could do so via the political process.” Democratic government is a cornerstone of liberal peacebuilding; yet, democratic rule does not correlate to policies that uphold rights, equality or security. As Autesserre persuasively argues, the "obsession with holding elections" channels interests and resources away from local peacebuilding, which can ultimately "doom" international peacebuilding efforts. In the context of a patriarchal culture, democratic rule can further limit women's rights and basic security as governments can (and do) pass laws - by large majorities - that discriminate against women and violate their right to life, liberty and security of person.

Considering the strong anti-feminist position of Ortega's government, a "top-down" democratic reversal of the ban seems highly unlikely. In fact, the initial institution and

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287 The 2007 vote to renew the ban on therapeutic abortion and its criminalization was passed 66 in favor to 3 opposed. See: Piero A. Tozzi, “Nicaragua pressured on abortion by UN Human Rights Committee” in The Nicaragua Post, 31 October 2008, 4. Furthermore, according to La Prensa (a major Nicaraguan newspaper), a spokeswoman for the organization "Women's Network Against Violence" denounced the vote, chastising the country for "going back a century." She explained their organization would not even consider appealing the law to the nation's Supreme Court because the court's judges are all from the two main parties of the country, which voted to maintain the penal code; and, the two state offices for women both supported the bill’s passing in 2006 and its re-instatement two years later.

288 Séverine Autesserre, "Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, Local Violence, and International Intervention," International Organization, 63, Spring 2009, 275-76. Using the Congo as her case study, Autesserre reveals how the constant neglect of local tensions - and a focus on the national and international levels of analysis - result in peacebuilding failures. Rooted in organizational culture, Autesserre does not find the UN's approach to interventions and peacebuilding surprising; nonetheless, she criticizes "the routine adoption of tools and procedures inappropriate for conflict situations, such as an obsession with holding elections. The understanding of violence as a normal feature of life [in places such as the Balkans and for Africa as a whole…] often leads international actors to perceive as normal the massive human rights violations they witness, until unusually shocking events take place" 276.

289 Speaking to the power politics behind the legislation in Nicaragua, Kampwirth explains that “the FSLN’s (Ortega’s Sandinista Party) new-found opposition to therapeutic abortion does not indicate an ideological shift to the right. What it does show is that, after a decade and a half out of power and close to a decade of political pacts with the right […] the FSLN was quite willing to oppose its former base in the women’s movement, to say nothing of the vast majority of Nicaragua’s medical establishment, if that is what it took to return to power.” Karen Kampwirth, “Abortion, Antifeminism, and the Return of Daniel Ortega: In Nicaragua, Leftist Politics?” in Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 35, No. 6, November 2008, 127.

290 Karen Kampwirth, Latin America's New Left and the Politics of Gender: Lessons from Nicaragua, New York: Springer, 2011. One example of the Ortega government's anti-feminism is its relationship with women's organizations operating in the state. One fund dedicated to "the full citizenship of women" and administered by Oxfam has been called "Satan's fund" and "evil money" by Ortega's wife and spokesman, Rosario Murillo. See page 25 for a detailed explanation of one stand-off between the government's efforts to investigate (and shut down) the operations funded by this foreign aid.
renewal of the ban on therapeutic abortion “was only possible with the concurrence of parliamentarians from the party currently in power, including among them the current Director and Sub Director of the national institution responsible for the advancement of women.” Moreover, Rosario Murillo (the President's wife and official spokesperson) has publicly claimed a "low intensity war" between the Nicaraguan state and "junk feminism" which supports therapeutic abortion. In Murillo's well-publicized view, this "junk" or "false" feminism is "in the hands of women who neither live as women, nor know the feminine soul, individual or collective. They ignore our daily battles; they are not the flesh and bone of a woman. They have no family ties or stable affections; they disdain those blessed ties of unconditional affection, indispensible for healthy human development." In one particularly famous radio broadcast, Murillo tried to undermine feminist activism within Nicaragua - including the work of the Matagalpa Women's Cooperative and The Nicaraguan Women's Association, which has campaigned to legalize therapeutic abortion - by associating these feminists' views with two contentious groups: the Somoza regime (against whom the Sandinista Revolutionaries fought so hard to overturn), and Americans (the United States backed the Contras - the "Old Society" - throughout the Sandinista Revolution). In her words: "Their [these feminists'] values represent the Old Society, exclusive, unjust, and impoverishing…[and countries] where men and women…prefer to raise pets instead of children, and depopulate and disharmonize the Earth."292

The ban on therapeutic abortion through democratic means demonstrates how an international "obsession" with elections as the core of liberal peacebuilding is misguided. Autesserre's findings from the Congo speak to the case of post-conflict Central America, where elections have proved to be a poor mechanism for ensuring women's rights and basic security.293

In a highly patriarchal state, where local culture, tradition and religious beliefs are important,

293 In the Congo, this frame included four key elements: international actors labeled the Congo a “postconflict” situation; they believed that violence there was innate and therefore acceptable even in peacetime; they conceptualized international intervention as exclusively concerned with the national and international realms; and they saw holding elections, as opposed to local conflict resolution, as a workable, appropriate, and effective tool for state- and peacebuilding.
women's equality and security cannot be viewed as an "import" or "foreign" idea. Rather, grassroots efforts from within the state may be more effective at fostering a rights-based culture that ensures the basic security of women and girls.

The Women's Cooperative of Matagalpa is one such grassroots initiative. One activist, Lola, recounted the story of one rural woman who came to the Cooperative in search of assistance. With the support of her husband, this woman asked the Cooperative to help her obtain a clandestine therapeutic abortion because she had been diagnosed with cancer. Lola has often shared this woman's story with Nicaraguans who support the ban on therapeutic abortion:

Some people think [the ban] a good idea because it's the right position for a Catholic country to take. I give them this example: what about this woman who is pregnant and has been diagnosed with cancer? If she gets radiation, it might save her life; but she's not allowed to get the radiation if she's pregnant. And, she can't get an abortion and then get the radiation because that's illegal. So, what can she do? She is going to die of cancer when there is a treatment available? This woman has three other children, I explain to people [...] So, what happens to the kids if their mother dies of cancer? What happens if she carries the baby to term, then gets the radiation, but it's too late? Now she's dead. She's left three kids, and this new baby, without a mother. Is this how 'good Catholics' think Nicaragua should work? It's terrible.294

Since 2005, the Matagalpa Cooperative has run plays, featuring local adolescent girls and women, that tell stories related to pregnancy and abortion. The plays use different storylines to show the complex reasons that women (and girls) seek a therapeutic abortion; the scripts that I was privy to in my fieldwork stressed that Nicaraguan girls often get pregnant from sexual violence enacted by men with whom they often have a familial or intimate relationship. As Lola recounts, "We [the Cooperative] explain how women are dying from preventable causes and dying because of a change in the law. We try to use examples that complicate the issue [of abortion]. We keep the focus on human rights."295 This approach is perhaps well-advised, as Colombia recently overturned their ban on therapeutic abortion in light of rights-based arguments. Explaining how a ban on therapeutic abortion presents a state-based violation of human rights, the Constitutional Court of Colombia argued the following:

It is hard to imagine a more serious violation…a woman who becomes pregnant as a result of rape cannot be legally required to act as a heroine and take on the burden

294 Interview, N12.
295 Interview, N12.
that continuing with the pregnancy entails. Nor can her fundamental human rights be disregarded as would be the case if she were required to carry the pregnancy to term against her will, turning her into a mere instrument of procreation…she cannot be obliged to procreate nor be subjected to criminal sanctions for exercising her constitutional rights while trying to lessen the consequences of the crime of which she was the victim.  

I asked Lola, whether or not, after three years of running plays in small communities, she saw a change in public opinion. Her response was mixed, and she referenced the Colombian case:

Some [people] begin to see the issue as more complicated than 'the murder of innocent babies'. We [Nicaraguans] don't naturally think about the woman's perspective. Women's experiences are invisible, left out of the picture. Our plays put pregnant women as the center of the story - we try to make the pregnant woman a protagonist. The audience has to relate to her pain, understand her hard choices. Yes, that is very important. Having an abortion is difficult. I think you have to hit people over the head with the idea that women's lives matter, that sexual intercourse carries so much risk for women […]

Discussions after the play show that we get through to people - at least in that moment. I am not sure if one play changes anyone's politics just like that [snaps her fingers] but it's a start. It is frustrating because I am a Catholic […] Ortega overturned the law we had for more than one hundred years. Were Nicaraguans bad Catholics for those hundred years? Are the Colombians bad Catholics [because they now allow therapeutic abortion]? It's not logical. It's all politics.  

To effectively counter the government's position that women's rights and basic security are a feminist "import," appeals to gender equality and human rights must be seen as "authentically" Nicaraguan or Salvadoran. International pressure from the United Nations and the European Union has done little to persuade either state to overturn the ban on therapeutic abortion. It therefore appears that reinstating the right to life for women and girls in post-conflict Central America will have to come from citizens pressuring their elected officials from the bottom-up. As the Matagalpa Cooperative aims to provoke critical thinking among rural populations, their plays are one example of grassroots efforts to effect change in citizens' attitudes and beliefs from the "bottom-up". International actors may thus be advised to adopt a two-prong strategy for limiting covert femicide in post-conflict Central America: on one hand, continue bringing

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297 Interview, N12.
awareness to the human rights issue by condemning the practice through Resolutions and threats to cut aid; on the other hand, divert resources to directly support grassroots organizations, such as the Matagalpa Women’s Cooperative, that try to cultivate deeper and wider shifts in gendered power relations and patriarchal roles from the "bottom-up”.

*Intimate Partner Violence*

In 1985, Gelles and Cornell observed that “we do not commonly think of the family as society's most violent social institution. Typically, family life is thought to be warm, intimate, stress-reducing, and the place that people flee to for safety.”

Yet, in the case of violence against women, the type of relationship between aggressor and victim is most often an intimate partner – typically a spouse, common law partner, ex-husband or ex-boyfriend. In over 80% of reported cases of intimate partner violence, the site of violence is the home of the victim.

I define intimate partner violence as limited to “violent behavior occurring against adult and adolescent women in the context of an intimate heterosexual relationships, with or without legal sanction of marriage.” "Violent behavior" includes physical, sexual and/or psychological violence; as demonstrated throughout the extensive literature on intimate partner violence (oft-cited as "IPV"), most times these types of violence are not exercised in compartmentalization but exist simultaneously in an abusive relationship. In the developing world, male partners enacting violence against their female partners constitutes 85-90% of reported IPV cases.

Thus, while adolescent and adult males are victims of intimate partner violence, I focus on

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299 In Nicaragua, this statistic is supported by data collected by RED de Mujeres Contra la Violencia, http://www.reddemujerescontralaviolencia.org.ni/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=106&Itemid=5; in El Salvador, similar data are presented by ISDEMU; in Guatemala, CONAPREVI support this claim as do my own findings from interviews in Nuevos Horizontes.


302 Fischback and Herbert, 1997, 1163. Intimate partner violence is reported in same-sex intimate partner relationships in the Euro-American literature; however, there is virtually no information on homosexual and lesbian battering in the developing world, thus I focus on heterosexual intimate relationships.
women because females are disproportionately affected by violence in the private sphere. One of the main reasons that women are disproportionately victimized by intimate partner violence is because of historically unequal power relations between men and women.” 303 Patriarchal distributions of power generally serve to privilege males, while “women's poverty and lack of empowerment, as well as their marginalization resulting from their exclusion from social policies and from the benefits of sustainable development, can place them at increased risk of violence.” 304

As with femicide statistics, when presenting data on the prevalence of intimate partner violence, we must keep in mind that the “same factors that lead to high levels of interpersonal violence – lack of economic development; weak social, political, and judicial institutions; social disturbances; and warfare – also adversely affect nations’ ability to collect data and to address the causes or consequences of this violence.” 305 To add to the challenges of data collection in war-torn, developing states, most Central American women do not report their experiences with intimate partner violence to the police. For example, a Nicaraguan study estimated that “80 per cent of the women reported that they had not sought help outside the family for their abuse, and only 14 per cent had ever reported the violence to the police.” 306 Thus, although state-run offices are making a more concerted effort to keep statistics on rates of intimate partner violence, they can only report cases that have been filed.

In Guatemala, one of the most reliable collectors of statistics on violence against women is a network of women’s organizations called RED de la Mujer. In their estimate to Amnesty International, this Women's Network reported that “nine out of every ten women have been

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304 Ibid.
305 Rosenberg et al, 758. In trying to explain the difference, Ellsberg and her colleagues find the most important differences in data collection concerned ethical and safety procedures and the interview setting, indicating the prevalence estimates for violence are highly sensitive to methodological factors and that under-reporting is a significant threat to validity. See: Mary Ellsberg, Lori Heise, Rodolfo Peña, Sonia Agurto, and Anna Winkvist, “Researching Domestic Violence Against Women: Methodological and Ethical Considerations,” in Studies in Family Planning, 32, 1, 2001, 1-16.
victims of violence within the home.” In El Salvador, Erturk found women’s organizations estimating that, similar to Guatemala, 90% of women suffer from domestic violence. “In Nicaragua, domestic and sexual violence is the most common form of violence. Recent statistics show that 70% of women have suffered physical violence at some time in their lives. The numbers range, depending on the region within the state and depending on the method of data collection. For instance, in the Nicaraguan case, the National Autonomous University of Leon found that out of 360 women aged 15-49 years, 52% claimed they had suffered physical abuse at the hands of their intimate partner at some point in their lives; 1 in 4 of these women had suffered such physical violence within the 12 months preceding the survey. Meanwhile, in Managua (Nicaragua's capital city), one study revealed that 70% of women have lived with physical intimate-partner violence at least once in their life. Half of these women claimed to have suffered physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the twelve months preceding the survey.

Although a relationship characterized by intimate partner violence does not automatically give evidence to an eventual murder (femicide), there is evidence that violence within private relations can - and often does - escalate over time. Approximately 60% of female murders are committed by the victim's previous, or current, intimate partner; in many investigations, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator was characterized by a history of violence. In some cases, this history of intimate partner violence only comes to light after the wife or girlfriend's murder, as friends, family members, and neighbours testify they were aware of violent episodes between the couple (previous to the murder). In other cases, the female victims themselves are found to have reported incidents of intimate partner violence to the police. For

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example, between January and June of 2012, 48 Nicaraguan women were murdered by a man known to them, and at least 14 of these victims had previously filed a report detailing their victimization from intimate partner violence with a Women's Police Station.\textsuperscript{312} In 95\% of Nicaraguan femicide cases, the murderer was a husband, former husband, partner, former partner, boyfriend or father.\textsuperscript{313} Although many cases remain unresolved and the perpetrators remain at large, there is little mystery surrounding who is responsible for those murders preceded by a history of intimate partner violence - particularly those spousal murders committed in smaller towns and villages.

As several women explained during the course of my fieldwork:

We know who murders these women. In small villages people know everyone and what everyone does. When a woman is killed and then her husband is suddenly gone…it’s obvious, no?\textsuperscript{314}

People talk. I’m not surprised when I hear a woman is finally killed by their spouse. After years of stories, I’m not surprised. Men even go drink rum and brag about it. It’s sad. A hard life.\textsuperscript{315}

It’s the same thing over and over. Some women get hit and hit for years. Some women get hit and eventually die from it. It [the violence] is much worse in some families and we [the neighbours] know who is really dangerous.\textsuperscript{316}

Femicide and intimate partner violence are forms of violence based in gendered power relations and normalized by patriarchal roles that identify women as "naturally" subservient and males as "naturally" aggressive. Common Latin American expressions, such as "He who loves me, beats me" or "a man holds his wife's reins," help establish male control over the private sphere. As a result, men are given social permission to enact violence upon their intimate partners. Although Central American states have made numerous public promises to protect the family and ensure women's equality and security, socially patterned and intentionally organized violence against women persists at alarming rates. One way to close this gap between the

\textsuperscript{314} Interview F2.
\textsuperscript{315} Interview F3.
\textsuperscript{316} Interview C6.
promise and practice of women's rights and basic security is the concept of "due diligence," which allows the international community to hold states responsible for the violation of women's rights in both the public and private sphere. By exerting international pressure on states, due diligence offers a potentially fruitful avenue to close the gap between the promise and practice of women's rights and basic security in post-conflict Central America.

2.4 Due Diligence

Public recognition of women's rights and basic security is of absolute importance in fostering a culture of rights in post-conflict contexts. Yet, as I have demonstrated through the case of post-conflict Central America, there is a problematic "gap" between the public codification of women's rights and the socially patterned and, at times, intentionally organized, practice of femicide and intimate partner violence. One reason that laws and rights promising women's security are insufficient to prevent violence against women is because many - if not most - of these human rights violations take place in the private sphere. As Thomas and Beasley point out, “international human rights law is law that binds states, not law that binds individuals […] the focus of human rights law on states and the fact that domestic violence, and other abuses of women’s human rights, are often committed by private individuals at present necessitate a complicated analysis to demonstrate state accountability.” Due diligence is one measure aimed at holding states responsible for the acts of private individuals, and acts of violence against women in particular.

Due diligence gained international prominence in 1988, as the Velasquez-Rodriguez case was decided by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The Court found the Government of Honduras to be responsible for violating human rights in the case of disappearances. In its decision, the Court found that an illegal act which violates human rights, but is committed by a private person, does lead to state responsibility if it is proven that the state failed to uphold its "due diligence" in preventing, investigating and/or punishing the rights violation. In its decision, the Court writes:

The State has a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent human rights violations and to use the means at its disposal to carry out a serious investigation of violations committed within its jurisdiction, to identify those responsible, to impose the appropriate punishment and to ensure the victim adequate compensation. This obligation implies the duty of State parties to organize the governmental apparatus and, in general, all the structures through which public power is exercised, so that they are capable of judicially ensuring the free and full enjoyment of human rights.\textsuperscript{318}

The \textit{Velasquez-Rodriguez} case focused on the disappearance of Honduran citizens, but its decision had wide-reaching effect for those wishing to pressure states to assume more responsibility for violence against women within their borders. For international law to offer the concept of "due diligence" as a legal avenue between the public and private spheres provided a new way for international bodies to pressure states to prevent, investigate and punish rights violations in the private sphere. In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly’s \textit{Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women} instructed states to pursue, “without delay,” a policy of eliminating violence against women. In so doing, states must “[e]xercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons”\textsuperscript{319}

By 2005, due diligence had become a key concept for international actors - mainly within the United Nations, but also used by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights - to maintain pressure on member states for improving their record of limiting gender-based violence in both the public and private spheres. "No longer are human rights guarantees restricted solely to the public sphere," wrote the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, "They likewise apply to the private realm, including within the family, and oblige the State to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish violations therein."\textsuperscript{320} When applied to gender-based violence, “States have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish the perpetrators of violence against women and girls and to provide protection to the victims, and that failure to do so violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment of their human rights and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[319]{Article 4, United Nations General Assembly Resolution, December 20th, 1993, A/RES/48/104}
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fundamental freedoms." Then-UN Secretary General Kofi Anan identified the "perpetrators" as including “a broad range of individuals and entities, such as intimate partners and other family members; casual acquaintances and strangers; neighbourhood and community institutions; criminal gangs […] The use of the standard of due diligence underlines the State’s duty to protect women effectively from such violence.”

In 2006, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) reviewed gendered violence in Guatemala, expressing their concern about rates of femicide and intimate partner violence. Their report highlights the state's lack of due diligence (and not a lack of material resources) to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women. In their words:

The Committee is deeply concerned about the continuing and increasing cases of disappearances, rape, torture and murders of women, the engrained culture of impunity for such crimes, and the gender-based nature of the crimes committed, which constitute grave and systematic violations of women’s human rights. It is concerned about the insufficient efforts to conduct thorough investigations, the absence of protection measures for witnesses, victims and victim’s families and the lack of information and data regarding the cases, the causes of violence and the profiles of the victims.

The Committee is concerned about the prevalence of domestic violence against women, the lack of effective access to justice for women […] and the lack of social awareness about and condemnation of violence against women and girls within the country.

CEDAW's position has since been reinforced by other international bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which has also denounced the Guatemalan state for their lack of due diligence. In 2001, 15-year-old María Isabel Franco was reported by her mother as "disappeared". Several days later, Franco's body was found; the victim had been raped, stabbed, and strangled. Franco's hands and feet were tied with barbed wire and her fingernails bent backward. The perpetrator(s) had placed her body in a bag and abandoned her in an empty lot in Mixco, an area outside of Guatemala City. This case gained international

322 Report of the Secretary-General, Advancement of women: advancement of women: In-depth study on all forms of violence against women, United Nations, 6 July 2006, 06-41974 (E) 310806, A/61/122/Add.1
attention when the victim's mother, Rosa Franco, criticized The Public Prosecutor's Office for failing to conduct a proper investigation of her daughter's murder, citing their failure to examine the list of phone numbers on María's cell phone and not following up on the anonymous tip received about the suspects' place of residence. Eighteen months after Franco's murder, in response to mounting pressure, officials tried to inspect the scene of the crime but it had been burned. Frustrated by this incompetency, Franco lodged a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that demonstrated the Guatemalan state's violation of Article 7 of the Convention of Belém do Pará - the Article listing due diligence as a "Duty of the State".324 The Commission's report on the Franco case publically criticized Guatemalan authorities who failed to provide a comprehensive investigation into Franco's murder and denounced the Guatemalan State for their lack of due diligence.325

In some ways, due diligence has been used by the international community to effectively pressure Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua to improve their record of investigation and punishment of violence against women. For instance, in 2008, the Guatemalan government unanimously passed the Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women,

324 Belém do Pará is the only treaty to have entrenched mechanisms for "implementation" and "protection". These mechanisms allow the presentation of individual and/or collective petitions that contain evidence of a state failing to execute their due diligence in preventing, investigating and punishing all forms of violence against women. Evidence is first presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and, subsequently, to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Both mechanisms have proved invaluable to keeping the issue of violence against women on the agendas of Latin American states. The Mechanism to Follow up on the Implementation of the Convention released its most recent hemispheric progress report in 2008, and the publication of two area-focused reports followed in 2010. The Mechanism for Implementation has its own website, where its previous publications and current working reports can be found. See: http://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/convention.asp

325 Under the Convention's section, "Duties of the States," Article 7 details "due diligence" as follows: The States Parties condemn all forms of violence against women and agree to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, policies to prevent, punish and eradicate such violence and undertake to: a) refrain from engaging in any act or practice of violence against women and agree to ensure that their authorities, officials, personnel, agents, and institutions act in conformity with this obligation; b) apply due diligence to prevent, investigate and impose penalties for violence against women; c) include in their domestic legislation penal, civil, administrative and any other type of provisions that may be needed to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women and to adopt appropriate administrative measures where necessary; d) adopt legal measures to require the perpetrator to refrain from harassing, intimidating or threatening the woman or using any method that harms or endangers her life or integrity, or damages her property; e) take all appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to amend or repeal existing laws and regulations or to modify legal or customary practices which sustain the persistence and tolerance of violence against women; f) establish fair and effective legal procedures for women who have been subjected to violence which include, among others, protective measures, a timely hearing and effective access to such procedures; g) establish the necessary legal and administrative mechanisms to ensure that women subjected to violence have effective access to restitution, reparations or other just and effective remedies; and h) adopt such legislative or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to this Convention.
which categorized both femicide and intimate partner violence as particularly gendered crimes. Under Chapter 2, Article 3, “femicide” was defined as: the violent murder of a woman, occurring in the context of unequal power relations between men and women, an exercise of gender power relations not in favor of women. “Power relations” were further elaborated as “manifestations of control or domination that are conducive to the submission and domination of women” and explicitly cited as a "cause" of both femicide and intimate partner violence. In addition to gendered "power relations," culture and religion were explicitly mentioned as factors that have in the past (but would no longer) act as defenses for legitimizing violence against women. As Chapter 4, Article 9 states: in these types of crimes against women, no defendant can invoke cultural or religious customs or traditions as a justification or to exculpate themselves from perpetrating, inflicting, consenting to, promoting, instigating or tolerating violence against women. Within the law's text, “violence in both public and private environments” was now equally susceptible to charges under this law. For the first time, criminal charges for "private" violence were adopted (5 to 12 year sentences for those convicted of physical or sexual violence, and 5 to 8 year sentences for psychological violence327) and state responsibility for creating support systems to survivors of intimate partner violence was clarified (including shelters and access to legal aid). In 2012, using the Guatemalan law as their model, both El Salvador and Nicaragua passed their own new laws against femicide and intimate partner violence.328

As a response to calls for improving their "due diligence" on violence against women, all three states have made legal and institutional changes to address the violation of women's right to security. Pressure for these new laws was not only "top-down" (international pressure on the state) but also from the "bottom-up." At a recent public appearance in Toronto, Sandra Ramos (Nicaraguan founder and director of the Maria Elena Cuadra Movement for Working and Unemployed Women), explained how women's grassroots activism was instrumental in the development and institution of the new law against femicide. Nicaragua is "very male-

326 My translation.
327 Articulo 7, Ley Contra el Femicidio y Otras Formas de Violencia Contra la Mujer, 2008.
chauvinist and patriarchal," Ramos said. The law thus clarifies the political nature of female murders, defining the crime of femicide as "the killing of a woman by a man simply because she is a woman" in "the context of unequal power relationships between men and women." Ramos stressed that "the law recognizes that there is hatred of women and strongly penalizes physical violence against them." Her organization drafted the new law on violence against women; when Ramos formally presented the completed draft law in 2010, the document was backed by signatures of twenty thousand women - thousands of whom rallied to urge its adoption. "We carried out a big campaign in the streets to get the law passed. We mobilized workers and communities to respect women and support the law," Ramos said. It is estimated that more than 10,000 women demonstrated in favor of the law, and 2,500 women victims of violence gave testimony in its support. "It took two years, but finally the three branches of state power - executive, legislative, and judicial - all agreed to pass the legislation. There was political will in the government to do this, but without us it would have been much more difficult." These legal changes demonstrate state capability - and willingness - to investigate and punish women's insecurity within the region. The way in which these new laws are written demonstrates a strong understanding of gender-based violence as perpetrated in both the public and private spheres, and an understanding of the gendered power relations in which violence against women is rooted. More emphasis on due diligence as a way to limit violence against women in post-conflict Central America could, indeed, help increase the number of cases investigated and reduce the discriminatory nature of the investigation process. Yet, while investigation and punishment for acts of violence against women are necessarily state-led (thus, "top-down") functions, the prevention element of due diligence cannot be fully addressed by a "top-down" approach. The states of post-conflict Central America have previously committed to upholding women's rights and basic security in their constitutions, in the regional Convention of Belem do Para, and in their ratification of international human rights treaties. New - and more strict - laws on femicide and intimate partner violence may demonstrate a better understanding of

330 Ibid.
331 Ibid.
the roots of gender-based violence and reinforce state commitments to improve women's rights and basic security. However, the international and state-level response has, thus far, over-emphasized the ability of investigation and punitive measures to effectively limit violence against women in highly patriarchal contexts.

This approach is misguided, I argue, because it pays insufficient attention to "bottom-up" prevention strategies - strategies that may be better positioned to effect long-term changes in the structural causes of violence against women. As the 2006 UN Secretary General's Report, Advancement of women, states: “The standard of due diligence therefore requires a State to act with the existing means at its disposal to address both individual acts of violence against women and the structural causes so as to prevent future violence.”

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This expansion of "due diligence" supports my feminist conception of positive peace; for post-conflict states to prevent violence against women requires more than investigating and punishing individual acts of violence "after the fact." In my view, the two key structural causes of violence against women are gendered power relations that favor males, and the patriarchal roles/identities that serve to "naturalize" male dominance over, and violence against, women. With gendered rights abuses often perpetrated in the context of private relations, and committed by a broad range of actors, including intimate partners and family members, there is "preventative" work to be done on many levels. To prevent future women's rights abuses, "public" legal and institutional changes are necessary, but so are changes in the "private" attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of citizens. Under "due diligence," the states of post-conflict Central America are to be held responsible for the "structural causes" of violence against women within their borders. Consequently, as part of meeting the internationally-mandated "due diligence" standard, states must provide adequate support to "bottom-up" grassroots projects that are helping to challenge, and change, the gendered power relations and patriarchal roles that underlie the socially patterned and intentionally organized violence against women witnessed in this chapter. Weaving a much-needed path between the international, national and interpersonal - often intimate - levels of analysis, "due diligence" provides an important tool in bridging the

332 My emphasis. Report of the Secretary-General, Advancement of women: advancement of women: In-depth study on all forms of violence against women, United Nations, 6 July 2006, 06-41974 (E) 310806, A/61/122/Add.1
gap between the public promise and private practice of women's rights and basic security. As the following two chapters demonstrate, grassroots actors are crucial in helping to prevent violence against women at both the individual and structural levels; thus, in line with meeting the international standard of due diligence, post-conflict Central American states are required to support such projects.

Due diligence is a significant international-level tool in pressuring state-level responsibility for preventing the violation of women's rights in both the public and private sphere. Public recognition of women's rights being violated in private relations is newly visible in post-conflict Central America - mainly in the 2008 and 2012 laws on Femicide and Violence against Women. In practice, however, due diligence risks becoming yet another broken promise for women's rights and basic security. More laws (public promises) condemning femicide and intimate partner violence have not yet correlated with a reduction of violence against women in the region. In this chapter, I have shown a variety of examples from Central America where the state is far from upholding its due diligence on violence against women. In cases such as the Guatemalan justice system failing to properly investigate and punish femicide cases (when they are capable of doing so), or the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran statewide ban on therapeutic abortion (which is an intentionally organized violation of women's right to life, supported by the Nicaraguan government's heavily anti-feminist rhetoric), or the fact that intimate partner violence is endemic to the region of post-conflict Central America, over-emphasizing the state as the newly "responsible" or "diligent" actor in limiting violence against women is misguided. In 2012, El Salvador and Nicaragua instituted new laws against femicide and violence against women - emphasizing violence within the private sphere; yet, these laws coexist with a ban on therapeutic abortion, a policy which four United Nations' bodies and the European Union have condemned as a state-based human rights violation and a form of sex-selective torture. Tensions such as this require deeper and wider changes in the patriarchal context of the state; namely, changes in gendered power relations that disfavor females and the gendered roles/identities emphasizing "natural" connections between femininity as submissive, emotional, and caring/mothering while masculinity is associated with aggressiveness, rationality and virility.

Because post-war states are often (perhaps always) resource-poor and institutionally weak, they may be incapable of applying due diligence in the prevention, investigation and punishment
of violence against women; when a post-conflict state is both resource-poor and highly patriarchal, incapacity is also met with unwillingness. As such, international (external) actors involved with the peacebuilding process are well-advised to seek out, and support, grassroots initiatives working to prevent violence against women from the "bottom-up." As evidenced in the following chapters, even (and, perhaps especially) in highly patriarchal states, grassroots actors can be key players in preventing future acts of violence against women. In post-conflict contexts, where the state is under "reconstruction," there are vast opportunities to (re)shape institutions, laws, and norms to better support the state's due diligence in upholding human rights and ensuring security for women and girls. When trying to bridge the gap between the promise and practice of women's rights and basic security, grassroots initiatives offer a necessary compliment to the "top-down," legal and institutional approaches. As part of post-conflict reconstruction efforts, external actors must support those internal actors working to empower women and challenge patriarchal gendered roles from the "bottom-up". This support can be offered through a direct channeling of resources and/or by pressuring the post-conflict state itself to uphold its due diligence.

When a state fails to protect the human rights of a subset of its population - an ethnic minority, for example - and the security of this group is routinely violated, then the state's failure to cultivate a human rights regime is evident. Peace requires the protection of rights and basic security for all; thus, putting in place a human rights regime must include the protection of women's rights. Using due diligence as a tool, both external and internal actors involved in the peacebuilding process can effect positive changes in women's rights and security within post-conflict contexts. In so doing, the state's human rights regime will become more robust, the security of both female and male citizens will undoubtedly increase, and steps are taken to "save" liberal peacebuilding for all.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how the violation of women’s right to life, liberty and security of person is a pervasive issue in the patriarchal, post-conflict context of Central America. Recalling that post-conflict Central America is often touted as a “successful” peacebuilding case, it is particularly telling that during the region's post-war, peacetime phase, women have faced an increase in life-threatening violence. Rates of overt femicide remain persistently high, both
Nicaragua and El Salvador instituted a complete ban on therapeutic abortion, and intimate partner violence is estimated to affect anywhere from 50-90% of Central American women. As the examples of femicide (both overt and covert) and intimate partner violence demonstrate, women’s rights and basic security is violated in both the public and private spheres. Presenting an avenue between the public and private, due diligence is a concept that connects public and private security. Studying human rights practice from a bottom-up perspective can highlight other significant actors in the peacebuilding process. In this way, it is perhaps possible that human rights can help move us past the public/private divide. As Eisler rightly contends, “it is only when we begin to apply a single standard to human rights violations, whether they occur in our intimate or international relations, that we see how the distinction between the public and private spheres has prevented the application of human rights standards to the most formative and fundamental human relations.”

Cultivating a private, interpersonal, “on-the-ground” response to the socially-patterned and intentionally-organized violence against women in Central America may help to close this "gap" between the promise and practice of women's rights and basic security in the region. In the next two chapters, I present my field work from three Central American grassroots projects aimed at changing gendered power relations by empowering women, and challenging patriarchal gendered roles that normalize violence against women. By empowering women and working to re-define gendered roles and identities from the "bottom-up", these grassroots projects are essential actors in building the robust human rights regime required by positive peace.

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Empowering Women from the "Bottom-up": Women's Police Stations and Nuevos Horizontes

The heart of my argument is that a feminist conception of positive peace is necessary for strengthening women's rights and basic security in post-conflict contexts. The conception of peace that I put forth aims to eliminate sources of insecurity in both the public and the private sphere. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, limiting gendered violence in private (often intimate) relations requires more than "top-down" legal and institutional changes. Grassroots projects offer a necessary compliment to "top-down" peacebuilding efforts; working from the "bottom-up", grassroots efforts effectively challenge - and change - the gendered power relations and patriarchal gender roles/identities that normalize violence against women.

This chapter presents my field data from two grassroots projects helping to empower women in post-conflict Central America: Women's Police Stations throughout Nicaragua, and the shelter for women seeking refuge from intimate partner violence, Nuevos Horizontes (Nuevos Horizontes), in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Using Naila Kabeer's three-part concept of empowerment, I organize my analysis of each project into three sections: resources, agency and achievements. My empirical evidence suggests that laws and rights function as “ideational” resources, contributing to a change in women’s self-perception and agency, and, consequently, impacting their choice to leave life-threatening situations. In the context of feminist positive peace, this improvement in women's security is an achievement. This segmented analysis of women's empowerment from the "bottom-up" is of particular value for peacebuilding, as it sheds light on the successes and challenges in translating my feminist conception of positive peace from theory to practice. Both projects highlight the ways in which rights and laws become meaningful to women - as individuals, and in community.

3.1 Women’s Police Stations

Due diligence emphasizes the state's responsibility to protect women from violence in the private sphere. Improving women's rights and security requires state-based legal and institutional changes. A 2008 UN report recognizes the importance of specialized police and judicial responses to gender-based violence:
Much of the work which is undertaken to respond to the challenges of violence against women focuses on private violence in families and relationships, and is rightly concerned with legislation, criminal justice responses and enforcement. This includes the development of specialized court services, protocols and training of police, prosecution, and judiciary, as well as strengthening support to victims.\(^{334}\) However, not all states allocate resources to the development of such specialized services - despite there being an evident, and overwhelming, need. In Guatemala and El Salvador, for example, there has been a concerted effort, post-conflict, to include more females in the regular state police forces. Distinct from the gender mainstreaming approach, Nicaragua took a different route in their post-conflict peacebuilding phase, creating specialized Women’s Police Stations to "respond to the unique needs of women survivors" and to "play a role in raising awareness about women’s rights and women’s security needs within the community." As official police "units", Nicaraguan Women’s Police Stations (WPS) have the "top-down" legal and institutional mandate to uphold and enforce state laws on violence against women. Yet, in its daily operations, the WPS mainly effect change in women's rights and security from the "bottom-up."

The unique ways in which this police force operates is due, in large part, to its beginnings in grassroots feminist organizing. As a brief historical summary, the first Women’s Police Station opened in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1985, as a response to the demands of women suffering widespread intimate partner violence. In Nicaragua, the WPS were modeled after those in Brazil, created as a response to women’s organized call for action on women's rights and basic security in this post-conflict context. Women's groups viewed the WPS as a way for the state's commitments on paper (to improve women's security, to address discrimination against women, and allow women to exercise their rights) to gain real traction, and effect real change, among the local population.\(^{335}\) The WPS offers a good example of a project working to bridge the gap between the promise and practice of women's rights in post-conflict Central America.


\(^{335}\) Patrick Kavanagh, Seeking Justice: Women's Police Stations in Latin America, Online: http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-142294-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html
In 1993, a pilot project began, launching the first Nicaraguan “Women’s and Children’s Police Stations” (Comisarías de la Mujer y la Niñez). Five years later, there were 12 stations across the country (3 of those located in the capital city of Managua), and by 2000, there were 14 centers nationwide that had served thousands of women. Between 2001 and 2004, 21 new police stations were opened. When I left the field in 2010, there were a total of 32 WPS in operation throughout the country; on the current (2013) UN Women website, the organization cites a total of 59 Women's Police Stations in Nicaragua. As a major achievement for women's rights and security, Nicaragua boasts “a higher percentage of women police officers, more women officers in the highest ranks, the most institutionalized system of women’s police stations, and the most extensive police training on gendered crimes in Central America.”

In post-conflict Nicaragua, the WPS were created “with the intent of not only expressing their commitment to women’s rights and providing a means to defend them, but also as a way to disseminate the police’s new mandate as an institution at the public’s service.” The participation and influence of Nicaraguan women's groups in the creation - and continued operations - of the WPS has been noted as particularly unusual in its breadth and intensity. (In other post-conflict cases, such as Sierra Leone, Women's Police Stations were established by the United Nations as part of the peacekeeping mission.) In Nicaragua's post-war years, the women's movement has been highly fractured and contentious; yet, the creation of WPS is accredited to a surprising coalition of otherwise hostile groups based on their common stance towards intimate partner violence. Included in this noteworthy coalition were six grassroots

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336 These stations were concentrated in urban areas, with the opening of six new stations in Managua, as well as some smaller towns, including: Carazo, Granada, Masaya, Malpaisillo, Chinandega, Estelí, Matagalpa, León, Jinotega, Nueva Segovia, Chontales, Boaco, Somoto-Madriz, Bluefields y Puerto Cabezas.

337 In some cases, it is reported that Nicaragua has 37 WPS, but I use the number of 59 as it is from the United Nations. See: UN Women, "Promising Practice Case Study: Women’s Police Stations in Latin America: An Entry Point for Stopping Violence and Gaining Access to Justice, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Nicaragua," http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/1093-womens-police-stations-units.html; and Almachiara D’Angelo y Yamileth Molina (PATH) and Nadine Jubb, (CEPLAES), Mapeo de las Comisarías de la Mujer y la Niñez en Nicaragua, 2008, Acceso a la justicia para mujeres en situación de violencia: Estudio comparativo de las Comisarías de la Mujer en América Latina, 2008. Online: www.ceplaes.org.ec/AccesoJusticia/


feminist organizations and seven state agencies. These women’s organizations were bonded by the fact that legal changes had strengthened the laws against intimate partner violence, yet “those laws were only paper promises as long as victims of intimate partner violence were afraid to go to the police station, which were mainly staffed by men who had not been trained to address such issues.”

Because of these beginnings, the WPS thus operate through a "joint management model" involving the employees of the WPS, the government public policy institutions for "women's issues", and the network of grassroots feminist organizations that played a large part in establishing the separate police units. In a 2008 assessment of the WPS, this joint management model was recognized as "an important strength because the entities coordinated on administrative-financial issues and/or integrated service delivery [...] in Nicaragua, the joint management of the WPS was also recognized as a contribution to democratic governance." Due to this coordination between the state and grassroots organizations, a feminist perspective informed the stations’ overall mission. As Ellsberg explains, the WPS “was initiated as a joint endeavor between the police force, the governmental National Women’s Institute (INIM) and the alternative women’s health centers, to improve women’s access to treatment and prevention efforts.” In this partnership, the police officers at the WPS handle the legal aspect of each case (i.e. record the report of violence and, when necessary as part of evidence collection, an on-site medical exam is performed by a female doctor). After proper documentation and evidence collection, the WPS then refers women to local women's organizations for further psychological and emotional support. As a complement to Nicaragua's regular police stations, the main goal of WPS is the provision of specialized handling of sexual and intimate partner violence cases; they are credited with providing a "human touch" (calidad humana) to police treatment of all persons

341 Within this coalition, one could find Sandinista-created groups such as AMNLAE and the Nicaraguan Women’s Institute (INIM), the non-partisan Pro-Familia which dated back to the pre-revolutionary Somoza 1970s, a health centre, and FUNIC-MUJER which was founded by a woman who served with the American-friendly contras in the 1980s. See: Kampwirth, 2004, 68.


343 Jubb et al., 2008, 33.

requesting assistance. In each office I visited, posters advertise the WPS mission as “creating a safe and special place in order to protect the physical and psychological integrity of victims.” The primary tasks of the WPS are three-fold: 1) raising awareness of intimate partner violence as a punishable offense; 2) reducing the impunity surrounding acts of sexual and physical violence; and 3) ensuring victims of intimate partner violence have access to legal support and justice.

a) Resources

In post-conflict states, where resources are precious, making trade-offs between investment projects is common practice. As Erturk explains:

Conflict, war and the security agenda have impoverished societies as they have made trade-offs between military spending and spending for development and human rights protection, particularly that of women. Post-conflict reconstruction may thus involve privatization of public services and infrastructure that regresses women’s rights by placing greater burden on their labour in the household, as well as the establishment of political and legal systems with limited or no significant participation by women.

In 2003, the Nicaraguan government spent $30.8 million (or 1.2% of its Gross Domestic Product) on military expenditures. In this same year, the Women's Police Stations struggled to find resources to stay afloat. Five years later, when I conducted field work at the WPS in Granada, Masaya, Matagalpa, and Estelí, all locations reported being overwhelmed with victim complaints and under-resourced. Each station was expected to process (hundreds, and in some cases, thousands) of complaints with a single type-writer and a staff of approximately four women. The offices in Granada and Masaya, however, were pleased to have been given a new truck dedicated for their unit, as requests for house visits (often to rural pueblos) were dramatically increasing with cell phone use rapidly spreading across the country.

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347 Ellsberg et al., 1997.

348 Interviews B23 and B24.
To improve women's rights and basic security, the main resources provide to women by the WPS are legal information and access to justice under the law. The Women's Police Stations offers a responsive commission where women are guaranteed to report their experience with violence to another woman. This team of female officers is meant to provide an educated and empathetic audience for women seeking legal assistance for such a sensitive matter as reporting violence inflicted by an intimate partner or other family member. As mentioned, women who visit a WPS are also referred (as needed) to local branches of partnering women’s centres; these grassroots partnerships are crucial in providing long-term support and access to psychological counseling. In coordination with WPS, a forensic examination is also provided by a specially appointed female medical examiner.

The greatest legal resource available to both the officers and the women victimized by intimate partner violence is Law 230, (formally known as the 1996 Law Against Violence Against Women). Until Law 230 (1996) and the 2008 Penal Code reforms came into effect, physical abuse against an intimate partner could only be prosecuted if it resulted in visible injuries that required at least 15 days to heal. Due to this provision, at least half of reported intimate partner violence cases were settled by the police through non-binding “peace agreements” in which both partners agreed to refrain from violence. Consequently, only a small percentage of the most severe cases ever reached a courtroom, and even then, convictions were rare. Moreover, in the few cases where a judge did convict the defendant, jail sentences were minimal - and were often exchanged for fines as low as US $10. In some cases, I found evidence that such payoffs continue. As Pamela, a woman living in the small town of Matagalpa, recounts:

349 Law 230 passed eleven days before the 1996 national election, thanks to the unprecedented public support and pressure mobilized by Nicaraguan Women Against Violence Network. As a result of their efforts, the debate was introduced ahead of schedule as an ‘urgent priority’ and so much public support had been mobilized for the bill, that “to vote against it would have been tantamount to endorsing violence against women, which no politician was willing to do in an election year.” The vote was, therefore, unanimous. For a detailed version of the process, see: Mary Ellsberg, Jerker Liljestrand and Anna Winkvist, “The Nicaraguan Network of Violence Against Women: Using Research and Action for Change” in Reproductive Health Matters, No. 10, November 1997, 89.
I didn’t pay anyone myself. But, I know someone who did so her husband could escape jail. I understand why. She needs her husband because he has a job. [I ask if this couple has children] Yes, four or five. They need to eat. You understand, no?\textsuperscript{351}

Evidence of payoffs comes up again in a conversation with Tonia, a volunteer at a women’s organization. In her words:

It [payoffs] happens all over Nicaragua. You can buy anything. How do you think Ortega is President? If you can pay to be President then you can pay to get out of jail. Ortega paid for both! [Referring to the infamous charges that Ortega’s stepdaughter, Zoilamerica Narvaez, laid against him in 1998 for sexual abuse and rape from the age of eleven.\textsuperscript{352}] Especially for hitting a woman. Especially if she doesn’t die. A few years ago, this wasn’t even a crime! [I ask: “Who do you pay?”] The judge, usually. It depends who your family knows.\textsuperscript{353}

Law 230 (and its 2008 Penal Code Reforms) contain three important provisions:

1) Allowing women to seek protection from their abusive partner, such as prohibiting the offending partner from entering the woman’s home or workplace (i.e. introducing restraining orders), restoring a woman to her home if she had been ousted, demanding a replacement of damaged property, and ordering the confiscation of weapons.

2) Changing the definition of intimate partner violence from “any alteration or damage to a person’s health which leaves a physical mark on the human body” (and, these marks had to be visible for 10 days in order to file an official complaint) to “any damage caused to a person’s physical or psychological integrity.”

3) Existing judicial practice of applying the minimum penalties to all crimes of assault committed between family members changed. The existence of family ties between offender and victim could now be defined as an “aggravating circumstance”, warranting a maximum sentence of six years in prison.

In penning Law 230, grassroots women’s organizations were widely consulted, as these were the people who best understood women's needs; in some cases, I was told that the Network against Violence Against Women drafted nearly the entire legal text.\textsuperscript{354} One example where the law's creators show a real understanding of effective state response to violence against women is in the decision not to increase prison sentences (of maximum six years) for the crime of assault.

\textsuperscript{351} Interview N15.
\textsuperscript{352} Initially, efforts to prosecute the case were blocked by Ortega’s immunity as a member of Nicaragua’s congress. In 2001, Ortega renounced his immunity after calculating that Nicaragua’s five year statute of limitations for the sexual abuse and rape charges had finally passed. The case was dismissed by a judge widely known of being a loyalist of Ortega's party, the Sandanistas.
\textsuperscript{353} Interview B19.
\textsuperscript{354} Interviews B01, B10.
At this time (1996) women’s NGOs did not push for harsher sentences for abusive husbands, based on past experience with changes in Nicaragua's laws on sexual violence. (In 1992, when reforms to the sex crime legislation did introduce stiffer sentences for rapists, the result was, in fact, a drastic reduction in the already paltry conviction rate.) As Ellsberg and her colleagues explain, “[j]uries were unwilling to convict, even when they believed the defendant to be guilty, because nobody believed that rape was serious enough to warrant a 15-20 year prison term.”

In 2008, however, further changes to the Penal Code did raise the sentence for intimate partner violence (including psychological assault) to a maximum of 13 years - depending on the severity of the injuries. On the one hand, more severe punitive measures were intended to send a message of deterrence to (current or future) perpetrators of intimate partner violence. On the other hand, increasing the sentence for intimate partner violence was intended as more than a "top-down" perpetrator-focused measure to improve women's security. Harsher sentences for intimate partner violence have provided an ideational resource for women, as they emphasize the severity of intimate partner violence as a crime and as a basic rights violation.

Independent from whether or not a potential jail sentence of 13 years has encouraged women to use the available legal resources and report abuse, the mere existence of a stiffer punishment for intimate partner violence helps empower women by criminalizing - and thus denormalizing - violence against women in the private sphere. The ideational power of Law 230 may even be more salient than its legal effect on violence against women in Nicaragua, as mediation remains the most-often used route to settle cases of intimate partner violence. When cases do go to court, mediation is most frequently ordered by judges who do not find the evidence supports the gravity of injuries necessary for a full conviction. Also, female victims of intimate partner violence frequently opt for mediation after reporting an incident of private violence to the WPS, as many women are reluctant to take their partner to court (often because a woman determines it is not in her own best interest to prosecute her partner and/or because the police have advised that the case may not be strong enough to warrant a conviction).

355 Ellsberg et al., 1997, 86.
A major limitation inherent in Law 230, and the Women’s Police Stations charged with upholding this law, is that the security measures do not have a preventive character but are only punitive. As I discussed with "due diligence," a punitive response may be effective as a deterrent, but it does not fully address the root causes of intimate partner violence (which I have identified as gendered power imbalances and patriarchal roles/identities that normalize violence against women). Also, the means available to protect women who have reported their abuse do not necessarily result in making women more secure. For example, all the police commissioners told me that restraining orders often fail to work (as is also found to be true in developed states\(^\text{357}\)). In many cases, monetary fines and/or jail time can actually serve to punish the victims of intimate partner violence rather than the abuser. For instance, as related in the testimony above, money needed to pay fines often comes out of family income and thus detracts from badly needed financial resources for food and other necessities. In the few cases where jail time is ordered and served, it has not been shown to be a rehabilitative process, but can make men even more violent.\(^\text{358}\) Extensive jail time can even lead some men to seek revenge upon their release – often in the form of murder.\(^\text{359}\) Women who decided not to press charges against their abusive spouses explained their reasoning as follows:

When men get out of jail they are angry and they come back and kill the woman or threaten to, at least.\(^\text{360}\)

I don’t want my husband going to a jail with murderers and gang members. He gets drunk and hits me and the children, and I want that to stop. But I’m scared if he goes to jail he will be more angry. Then what? He won’t be in jail forever.\(^\text{361}\)

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\(^{358}\) As Babcock et al. summarize: “Despite declarations that arrest followed by court-ordered treatment offers ‘great hope and potential for breaking the destructive cycle of violence’ (U.S. Attorney General’s Task Force on Family Violence, 1984, p. 48), there is little empirical evidence that treatment is effective in reducing recidivism of family violence to any meaningful degree. In his review of the earlier studies on marital violence treatment programs, Rosenfeld (1992) concluded that men who are arrested and complete treatment have only slightly lower recidivism rates than men who are arrested but refuse treatment, dropout of treatment, or remain untreated. Some have even argued that treatment programs may put women at increased risk for intimate partner violence, by contributing to a false sense of security among battered women whose husbands have sought treatment (Holtzworth-Munroe, Beatty, & Anglin, 1995).” Julia C. Babcock, Charles E. Green, Chet Robie, “Does batterers’ treatment work? A meta-analytic review of intimate partner violence treatment,” in *Clinical Psychology Review*, 23 (2004) 1024.

\(^{359}\) Mary Ellsberg et al., 1997, 88.

\(^{360}\) Interview B21.
For 50 to 90% of the female population to press charges against their abusive partner, however implausible, is a virtual "dead end" for an already overburdened and under-resourced legal system. Sentencing more men to violent, overcrowded, and uncontrolled prisons is not a "solution" for improving human rights and non-violence within the region. According to the International Center for Prison Studies, in 2011, overcrowding in Central American prisons had reached unprecedented heights; with Nicaraguan prisons running at 133% over capacity, Guatemalan prisons at 160%, and Salvadoran prisons at 254%. Prisons also offer a fertile environment for gangs to recruit new members; in several cases, gangs have actually taken over prisons and are using the jail as their unofficial headquarters, running operations via cell phone. Taking these points into consideration, the "solution" for intimate partner violence is not for every abused woman to follow legal procedure and put her abusive partner behind bars.

That said, every year the number of women who do wish to press charges against their abusive partner at the WPS increases. Thus, another challenge to the operations of the WPS is the limited and sporadic material resources they receive. In my interviews at four women’s police stations, located in diverse areas of the country, every staff member claimed the lack of material resources as a major challenge. Stations in rural areas certainly face the most limited resources (relative to those stations in the nation’s capital city of Managua), but there is also a general deficiency of material and human resources plaguing all locations. While psychological violence is now included in the Penal Code as a punishable aspect of intimate partner violence, a lack of adequate forensic and medical psychologists is one cause of the low level of enforcement of the provisions on psychological injuries. As Luisa Pérez-Landa explains, “the available human and material resources are not sufficient to establish the presence of psychological

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361 Interview B14.
362 International Center for Prison Studies in association with the University of Essex. Central American statistics available online: http://www.prisonstudies.org/info/worldbrief/?search=centrlam&x=Central%20America. Between 2005 and 2007 only 2% of 2,000 cases involving the violent deaths of women were “resolved” (some without convictions). Anabell Noriega of the Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office also reported that in 2004 only one case out of 500 resulted in a conviction (a rate of .002%). See: http://www.ghrc-usa.org/Programs/ForWomensRightsToLive/2009VAWReport_execsum.htm
363 I conducted interviews with staff, including the Head Commissioner, of Women’s Police Stations in Granada, Masaya, Matagalpa, and Estelí.
injuries; the 10 day period given to determine the presence and extent of these injuries is largely insufficient.”\(^\text{364}\) Indeed, one woman seeking help from the WPS told me that she had been to the station the previous day, but was sent away because there had been no one present to conduct a proper examination.\(^\text{365}\)

Also problematic, is the fact that many WPS offices use typewriters to type up case complaints and compile rudimentary statistics on the prevalence of intimate partner violence in each district. The inability to gather primary data on intimate partner violence at the very location where women now report incidents (by the tens of thousands) creates difficulties in collecting and consolidating data at a national level. As I have mentioned throughout the dissertation, the lack of reliable, available statistics on violence against women in developing countries presents a key obstacle to activists and scholars interested in studying the widespread prevalence of this human rights violation. Should the WPS be provided the resources necessary to develop - and then manage - a coordinated computer-based system of data collection, it would greatly improve the WPS services. For instance, a centralized computer system would alert other stations about repeat offenders who might move from one town to another; as it stands, one can essentially disappear their "criminal record" by moving into the next police "zona." More accurate data on the number of women reporting incidents of intimate partner violence, and the choices they make in (not) pursuing institutionalized measures of criminal justice, would also be an asset to those working on the problem of intimate partner violence from angles other than judicial.

In line with a democratic approach to justice, all WPS services are offered to women free of charge. Yet, this complicates material resource provision, as the Nicaraguan government has failed to offer reliable funding to the WPS. Exemplifying the role of external actors in the peacebuilding process of post-conflict Central America, financing for the Nicaraguan WPS is a complicated web of international funding; major donors include government agencies in


\(^{365}\) Interview B13.
Holland, Germany, and Sweden, as well as the Inter-American Development Bank.\textsuperscript{366} This funding is precarious, however, due to President Daniel Ortega’s ban on therapeutic abortion. European states do not wish to fund the efforts of the WPS to address violence against women in a state that has a policy in direct violation of women's right to "life, liberty and security of person." In taking a stance against covert femicide, states such as Sweden find themselves in a complicated situation; sanctions may very well make a symbolic or even moral point, but at the same time, their cut in aid to the WPS only serves to decrease the (already limited) resources dedicated to improving women's security. Throughout the course of my research, WPS Commissioners and women working at the Network of Violence against Women, explained that such cuts would certainly affect their ability to operate.\textsuperscript{367} Because the Nicaraguan state dedicates less than 1% of its own budget to all women’s projects in the country, both the WPS and those grassroots women's organizations with which they work rely almost entirely on external donors.\textsuperscript{368}

Within Nicaragua, the plan to ensure the WPS’ sustainability is to gradually move away from the current "grassroots actors/international donors" alliance, and charge the National Police with the responsibility to fund the WPS from their budget. This is concerning because the National Police (NP) has little financial autonomy; their funds are controlled by the Public Treasury, whose support for programs addressing “women’s issues” is unreliable.\textsuperscript{369} With little

\textsuperscript{366} For example, through a funding cooperation agreement with a German agency, a new women’s police station was opened in Puerto Cabezas, in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region. Meanwhile, a program for improving services at 13 police stations in Nicaragua, involving Swedish and other European funding agencies, ran from 2001 through 2004. Stations receiving this support were widespread, including locations in Chinandega, Leon, Managua (District V), Ciudad Sandino, Tipitapa, Masaya, Estelí, Matagalpa, Jinotega, Ocotal, Boaco, Chontales and Bluefields. Specifically, this program included technology transfer to better equip the stations, and negotiations with the Nicaraguan government to ensure the stations' sustained funding with less reliance on external donor states. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Nicaragua: Number and location of women's police stations; their effectiveness in addressing violence against women (Update to NIC34186.E of 11 April 2000), 28 August 2003, NIC41906.E, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/485ba8712a.html [accessed 18 January 2011]


\textsuperscript{368} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{369} Almachiara D’Angelo y Yamileth Molina (PATH) and Nadine Jubb, (CEPLAES), Mapeo de las Comisarías de la Mujer y la Niñez en Nicaragua, 2008, Acceso a la justicia para mujeres en situación de violencia: Estudio comparativo de las Comisarías de la Mujer en América Latina, 2008, 24. Online: www.ceplaes.org.ec/AccesoJusticia/
choice in the matter, WPS operations have been increasingly placed under the direct management of the National Police. According to government officials, this transition may improve the lack of coordination between stations, offer more consistent training among officers, equalize resource distribution between urban and rural stations, and facilitate comprehensive data collection.\textsuperscript{370} After 17 years in operation, women working at the WPS welcome this association with the National Police force - provided that it results in a more consistent provision of resources. As one long-time officer summarizes:

\begin{quote}
We have helped pass some important legal reforms for women, and more and more women come to use the stations every year. So many that we don’t have the resources to help them all. But, we haven’t seen advances in changing the consciousness of the people or the state. Or, at least, not like we hoped when we started. In reality, the government takes no ownership for us. We are considered a project that depends on the support of external money.\textsuperscript{371}
\end{quote}

b) Agency

Recall that, for Kabeer, agency refers to people’s ability to make choices in the face of opposition from others. Arguably, the annual rise in the number of women choosing to file formal reports of intimate partner violence reflects success in the WPS’ two national campaigns \textit{Break the Silence} in 2006 and \textit{A home is not built with violence; give your family love} in 2007 (see Appendix 4). Both campaigns encouraged women to seek the increasingly comprehensive services offered by the special stations and were developed and executed with the help of grassroots women's organizations.\textsuperscript{372} I asked various commissioners about the purpose and execution of these campaigns; they offered similar responses, explaining how posters were placed around town in high-traffic locations (including telephone posts in the central market and inside churches). The purpose of these campaigns, I was told by Rebeca, an officer at the Granada WPS location, is to “send a message of sensitivity about family violence….\textbf{[Other women's organizations]} make more people aware that \textbf{[intimate partner violence]} is a social

\begin{footnotes}
\item[370] D’Angelo, 2008, 15-16.
\item[371] Interview B27.
\item[372] I have translated the campaign titles from Spanish. “Rompe el Silencio” and “Un hogar no se construye con violencia; dale amor a tu familia.” See Appendix 4 for photos of the posters taken at one of my visits to the Comisaria in Granada, Nicaragua.
\end{footnotes}
problem. But it’s also a legal problem. And that is the job of our stations – to help women recognize Law 230 and their rights.\textsuperscript{373}

In some respects, fostering women’s agency has been a definite highlight of the WPS’ activities. For example, in the first year of WPS (1993), less than 3000 cases were reported, but by 1996, there were about 8000 reported cases.\textsuperscript{374} In the years the WPS ran its two major campaigns on violence against women (2006/07), there was a notable increase in the number of women seeking help from the WPS (64,798 in 2006 and 91,536 in 2007) as well as in the number of formal complaints filed (21,604 in 2006; 27,393 in 2007). Yet, this represents only a fraction of women suffering the life-threatening violence of intimate partner violence, as the vast majority of women do not report their experience with intimate partner violence through official means, nor do they seek institutional help. In fact, estimates claim that nearly 80\% of intimate partner violence cases remain unreported.\textsuperscript{375} While the number of women reporting intimate partner violence to the WPS increases annually, these figures represent only a small number of Nicaraguan women experiencing life-threatening violence.

In rural areas where privacy is limited, many survivors seek help through women's non-governmental organizations or local cooperatives, such as the Women’s Collective in Matagalpa. In cases where the injuries are severe, women typically go to the nearest hospital or clinic. In my interviews with staff from the Japan Hospital (Granada's main public hospital), nearly all of these women leave without formally reporting the incident. I spent one week at this bustling hospital, interviewing nurses, doctors and patients as well as being granted access to the hospital's collection of statistics. In these records, I found no patient’s injuries linked to intimate partner violence; yet, in interviewing three nurses and one doctor, all claimed that women "frequently" came in for treatment from injuries related to intimate partner violence. One nurse reported that several women have returned on multiple occasions with “suspicious injuries” that are, in her opinion, "very consistent with being hit in the head or cut with a machete.”\textsuperscript{376} For a variety of

\textsuperscript{373} Interview B11
\textsuperscript{374} Ellsberg et al, 1997, 85.
\textsuperscript{376} Interviews H5, H6, H7 and H10. January 2009, Granada, Nicaragua.

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reasons, women with injuries so severe as to require medical attention, often return to the situation that just landed them in the hospital:

These are women with kids to look after. The older girls look after the younger ones, or an aunt or grandmother comes over, but kids need their mother back home. Quickly. Going to the police takes a lot of time. And for what?  

Abused women come in here all the time. Broken bones, mostly. Their husbands come with them. It’s typical. How do you press charges with the man beside you? You can’t. Men know that so they come. Other times it’s a mother or a sister who comes with them.  

It’s not the job of doctors and nurses [to be police officers]. We treat injuries. That’s all.  

Upon further investigation, one reason that hospital records do not contain references to intimate partner violence is because injured women are often accompanied by their husbands/partners when visiting the hospital. To protect their partner, women lie about how the cause of their injuries. When I spent a day in the hospital’s wing for “Labour and Delivery”, one woman in labour had two black eyes from being beaten by her intimate partner. Clara, a nurse who has worked at the Japan Hospital for 5 years, explained how the beating had sent this patient into early labour (as she was only in the seventh month of her pregnancy). Because this hospital wing is only open to female patients, it is possible that women feel less pressure to lie about their experiences of intimate partner violence when asked (men are not allowed to accompany their partners during labour and delivery, and are only allowed to enter the wing to visit – after the baby is born – for one hour of “public visitation” per day). Clara told this patient that her boyfriend's abuse will likely kill the baby; still, the patient will not report the crime, as she does not want to put her boyfriend in jail. “I see this all the time,” said Clara, explaining that the patient’s aunt is her co-worker in the Japan Hospital. “I asked [the aunt], ‘Why not call the police?’ But she just looked at me.” Clara hoped that, once discharged, the patient would go and live with this aunt. “Thanks to God, I hope so,” she said.
Agency is further limited for abused women living in rural areas. Even where a rural police station exists, if the case does proceed to court, women often have a difficult time travelling into the nearest city to be present at the hearing. In trying to close the rural/urban agency gap, some WPS departments are now using “mobile police stations” to visit rural communities where a permanent station does not exist. Mercedes Ampie, general commissioner of the National Police in charge of the Special Police Stations, explains this creative solution: “A complete team, including a police investigator, a prosecutor, a forensic psychologist, and a social worker, joins volunteers and student interns in making the visits to the neighbourhoods where women can receive information and assistance.”

In both rural and urban settings, one reason that women are reluctant to report intimate partner violence is because of entrenched gendered stereotypes of "family values." This "family values" discourse, and women's role as "good" wives and mothers, is evident in private homes and within the public offices of the WPS. Faced with intense social pressure from other family members, their religious community, and other neighbors (particularly in smaller towns and villages) to “realize their mistake” and put their family back together, women are encouraged to "think of their family" and withdraw (or not press) charges against an abusive intimate partner. This pressure results in many wives demanding the release of their jailed husbands, which weakens any future complaints they may want (or need) to file. Out of eleven women who had sought help from the WPS for intimate partner violence, only two were pressing charges against their spouse. One of these two women was pressing charges because her husband had badly beaten her daughter, not due to the long history of abuse inflicted upon herself. The difficulties inherent in pressing charges against one’s intimate partner are represented in the following statements from women seeking help at various WPS:

No, no. I won’t press charges [against her husband]. I just want the violence to end. If every woman in Nicaragua pressed charges [for intimate partner violence], there would be no men left in the streets! What would women do then?

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382 Throughout my fieldwork, this social pressure was repetitively described in interviews by women working in the WPS and women who were victims of intimate partner violence who had faced the choice of prosecuting their husband.
383 Interview B13.
I came today with my sister. She is looking for help because her husband hits her. She’s been here before, but me, no. [Why did you come with her? For support?] Yes. Also because my boyfriend pulls my hair and hits me when he’s drunk. So, I told him I was going to the police with [her sister]. I’m just going to sit here [in the waiting room], but I want to scare him.  

I came for help. My mother-in-law is very upset with me. She told me not to go to the police. I’m destroying the family, she said. I don’t want to put my husband in jail. I love him. I am a good wife. I just need him to stop hitting me and our children.

Various Nicaraguan human rights activists critiqued these campaigns in their testimony at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2011. One expert claimed these programs "superimpose family togetherness over human rights" and "emphasize family unity and reconciliation at the cost of justice for gender-based violence." In my own field research, I found some evidence that officers have definitely encouraged women living in life-threatening situations to stay with their abuser and keep the family together. Consider the story of one participant:

In the beginning [two months ago] I came to get a restraining order. The police interviewed me, I filed a complaint, and the doctor looked at my face [where she had been hit]. I told the police I have four children and I was pregnant. They [the police] told me to come back with my husband and we would have counselling sessions. Like a therapy for the family. My husband won’t come here! Ha! To the police station? [Laughs] Now I am back to ask for a restraining order again. [She shows me the bruising on her neck and forearms]

This story raises concerns for the ability of the police to effectively enhance women’s rights and basic security. As Sally Engle Merry argues:

> When police act as if women do not have the right to complain about the violence of their husbands, battered women are discouraged from seeing themselves that way […] Thus, an individual’s willingness to take on rights depends on her experience in trying to assert them. The more state institutions reflect back serious attention to her as a person with rights not to be battered, the more willing she will be to take on this identity. On the other hand, if these rights are treated as insignificant, she may give up and no longer think about her grievances in terms of rights.

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384 Interview B16.
385 Interview B15.
386 Abbot, 2011.
387 Interview B19.
In speaking with police commissioners and survivors of intimate partner violence, the abusive male partner's exercise of life-threatening violence is not automatically viewed as the cause of family destruction; rather, women are charged with "rupturing" the family unit by asserting their right to security. As revealed in one interview with a commissioner of nine years:

Most women come to us for help. They are upset and confused. They have a lot of emotions. They love their husband or boyfriend; they do not want him to go to jail. They want to change him. They see moments when he is a good husband, a good father. They want him to be like this all the time. It’s hard for them [women suffering intimate partner violence]. [...] We know almost all women continue to live with their [abusive] husband, and we don’t have much success with court cases. So, we suggest other methods [of dealing with intimate partner violence]. Counselling for women is the most popular. But also mediation with the husband and the wife.  

I asked about the effectiveness of mediation - often accompanied by a temporary restraining order - as a useful “middle ground” strategy for limiting intimate partner violence (without sending men to prison). The respondent from the WPS replied:

Yes, sometimes. But it’s really only a piece of paper. It doesn’t protect women very well. If someone wants to beat you, they will do it. You understand? [...] We have to be practical. We use the law – it is important! I also tell women about the classes [points to a schedule on the wall reading: Karate 4:00]. They [the self-defense classes] are free and getting popular.

In my findings, both the police commissioners and the women seeking help from the WPS agree the stations are important but they are disillusioned with formal legal proceedings in Nicaragua, particularly considering the frequency with which charges are eventually dismissed. When the state encourages women to report violence – and to see themselves as rights-bearers – only to then dismiss the charges, it creates yet another form of a neglectful/abusive relationship in women’s lives. This challenge is not particular to Nicaragua, however. In the United States, Mills’ research on state interventions into cases of intimate partner violence demonstrates that “ironically, the very state interventions designed to eradicate the intimate abuse in battered women’s lives all too often reproduce the emotional abuse of the battering relationship.”

389 Interview B24.
390 Ibid.
391 Mills, 554-555.
As Amaris, a woman seeking help from the WPS explained, she checks the progress of her case on a weekly basis, yet is frustrated by the slow processing of evidence. Amaris filed a complaint more than four weeks before our interview, but the forensic evidence for her case remains unprocessed. The medical examiner has told her they needed to send the evidence to Managua (the capital city) to have it processed in a laboratory. On this (fourth) visit to the WPS, the officer with whom Amaris speaks advises her to keep waiting. Amaris is frustrated because the process of filing a complaint has largely ostracized her from her family and friends. Her in-laws do not speak to her, and her husband barely comes home (he was not arrested, but, depending on the strength of the evidence, will have charges pressed against him and will need to attend a court hearing). In one way, her husband’s absence is a blessing because the violence has stopped. However, she struggles to raise their children without any regular income (Amaris knows her husband to be spending any money he makes on "rum and gambling"). Without the help of her mother-in-law, Amaris now has to bring her young children to the market where she attempts to sell pre-cut mangoes on a stick.

Others in the waiting area had overheard our conversation. One listener commented that pressing charges was a “waste of time” because “no one ends up in jail.” I asked this second woman why she bothered coming to a police station if this is the case, to which she responded in a matter-of-fact tone: “Hitting women, violence against women, is illegal and you need to go to the police to report it.” This statement truly characterizes the difficult paradox of the WPS in helping women suffering intimate partner violence to exercise agency. On the one hand, the WPS has created a space where special attention is given to women’s experiences with violence. For women to have their human rights violations heard by a police officer, and documented on the public record, is significant in the building of post-conflict liberal democracies. On the other hand, recall that agency (in the context of my dissertation) refers to people’s ability to make choices in the face of opposition from others. Unfortunately,

392 Interview B20.
393 Although I would ask women waiting at the WPS to participate in my research, I would then suggest that we conduct our interview in a private location. Surprisingly to me (at the time) most women preferred to conduct the interview on the spot, in the open waiting area, amid other women and children. After spending many months in Central America, I learned that privacy and anonymity are not considered exceptionally valued in societies (particularly smaller towns and villages) where everyone knows everyone else and secrets are not well guarded.
394 Interview B22.
395 Ibid.
internalized norms about the acceptability of violence against women affect every stage of the WPS efforts – from the court system, to the attitudes of some WPS officers, to the women seeking help for intimate partner violence. In many cases, women are seeking immediate assistance from the WPS to halt the violence in their daily lives. These women are using the services of the WPS to turn their promised human rights into lived practice. The public awareness campaigns led by the WPS have encouraged thousands more women to report intimate partner violence, which is certainly an example of fostering women’s agency. However, as several WPS locations move away from the goal of acquiring justice (i.e. convictions) for perpetrators of intimate partner violence, and towards the promotion of women’s security as a human right to be obtained through individual counseling, couples mediation, and self-defense classes for women surviving violence in their intimate relations, it seems the WPS are adapting to (rather than challenging) the realities of a weak and corrupt legal system embedded in a strongly patriarchal state.

c) Achievements

In terms of empowering Nicaraguan women, the achievements of the WPS are mixed. As a 2008 overview of the Women's Police Stations' activities asks:

Why, after 15-23 years of experience with the WPS, do we know so little about their impact? The WPS statistics do not capture their impact because they are based on WPS records, which select priorities based on an institutional perspective. In this sense, the statistics reflect the existing models, which do not have a holistic approach, nor do they place women in situations of violence in the centre […] That is to say, the indicators must go beyond measuring the number of complaints received and the clearance rate.396

Working at the grassroots level, the WPS have created an avenue for every Nicaraguan woman to access an all-female team of legal support. In spite of their challenges, the WPS are well known in their communities and their targeted campaigns have improved women's awareness of their right to a life free from violence. Not only are thousands more women now reporting abuse, but these cases are documented in a systematic - albeit outdated - fashion. Should the WPS receive more (and more consistent) funding, their operations will increase the

396 Jubb et al., 2008, 39.
availability of more reliable statistics on intimate partner violence in post-conflict contexts. As I experienced my own struggles to obtain reliable, up-to-date data for this project, such a benefit cannot be understated.

In terms of reducing the obstacles women face in confronting the criminal justice system, however, the success of WPS is more ambiguous. Speaking for the Nicaraguan Network of Violence Against Women, Program Manager Budel explained that, although the process is slow going, Women’s Police Stations have played a definite role in changing attitudes about the normalcy of intimate partner violence. Men exercising violence against their female partners was long viewed by many women as yet another “cross to bear” and as “natural as childbirth or menstruation,” yet this form of systematic violence is increasingly discussed as a crime.397 Significantly, the partnership between women’s NGOs and the WPS helps in “confronting the existing cultural norms which tolerate and even encourage male violence against women.”398 One example of this is an oft-heard saying in Nicaragua: “Man’s number one enemy is the Women’s Police Station.”399 This marks a change from the more traditional sayings that "He who loves you, beats you" or "Husbands hold their wives' reins," but does not demonstrate a shift in men's thinking that using violence in the context of an intimate partner relationship is wrong. Nonetheless, small shifts in gendered power relations and patriarchal roles are crucial for improving women's security, as traditional cultural norms “along with the feelings of shame and isolation which often accompany such abuse, prevent many women from telling anyone about their experience, much less report the abuse to the police.”400

Finally, the ideational resource of the Women's Police Stations itself is a major achievement for women’s empowerment. Before the widespread opening of WPS, “as far as available resources for women living with violence were concerned, most groups considered the police, health centres and judges to be the least accessible and helpful institutions. Family,
friends, church communities, and battered women’s houses were generally recognized as better allies.\textsuperscript{401} In 37 locations across Nicaragua, women suffering intimate partner violence now have an alternate, well publicized, and increasingly trusted location to seek help. Distinct from the support of family, friends and church communities, the WPS offers women the power of legal recourse for an issue that is a violation of law. The dramatic increase in the number of women seeking legal assistance shows victims taking the initiative to call or visit the police for help (whether that be in the form of immediate cessation of violence, mediation, or a restraining order). As Sally Merry reminds us, “Those who call on the legal system for help have taken a step toward seeing themselves as defined by the promises and protections of rights even in the domain of the family.”\textsuperscript{402}

These achievements are tempered by the fact that most perpetrators of intimate partner violence are never brought to justice. Women’s police stations are mainly “complaints departments” where women document their abuse and perhaps seek other resources, such as short-term psychological counseling, access to support groups run by local women’s NGOs, or free self-defense classes. This is due to a number of factors, including a lack of funding, poor training of experts necessary for a successful trial, and a mix of structural and interpersonal dynamics that get perpetrators “off the hook.” Each WPS is supposed to be staffed by six police officers, two social workers, one psychologist, and one lawyer; due to a lack of funding, the staff size is often limited to a far smaller number.\textsuperscript{403}

Because women are often financially dependent on the offender, sanctions such as jail time or paying fines may discourage women from reporting violence. In the case of jail time, women would be left with less financial support for themselves and their children, or, in the case of fines, would have the money come out of their family budget.\textsuperscript{404} Due to the economic effects of gendered power relations, women also face problems attending hearings (particularly women

\textsuperscript{401} Ellsberg et al., 1997, 88.
\textsuperscript{402} Merry, 2006, 184.
living in remote rural areas) and have difficulty paying for evidentiary documents. Due to the fact that so few women actually see their cases reach court, my field data is limited to the following woman’s experience with the Nicaraguan judicial system:

The lawyer told me that only serious cases have a chance [at a guilty verdict]. Rape usually. It’s more likely [than other forms of intimate partner violence to result in a conviction]. Rape of children is the type of case that gets attention. I felt like my case is small. I don’t have confidence [in the judicial system].

Finally [after waiting over a year for a court date] I had to go to court in Managua. Traveling there was a waste of time and it costs money! Who is paying for this? Me. My family. I borrowed money from my sister. I went to Managua. I was scared going to court. I didn’t want to see my husband. [...] Then, [the trial] was only a few minutes. The evidence had not been collected well. So the judge stopped [the trial] and let my husband go free. When I came back to Masaya, I was on the same bus as my husband.

We have a saying in Nicaragua: anything planned always turns out badly. It’s true. I planned to put him [her husband] in jail. He still lives one block – one street – from my house. He walks in the park with his new girlfriend. [I ask: Do you think he hits her too?] Oh, of course…without a doubt.406

In the relatively few cases brought to trial, a number are later dismissed due to procedural errors in the collection of medical evidence.407 Not only are medical examiners often poorly trained, but those adjudicating intimate partner violence cases display a limited understanding of gendered violence; unfortunately, where sensitivity training has been offered, there has been low interest and participation rates in these courses (including among the highest-level justices).408 When the accused is in a position of social or political power, there is even less confidence in the judicial response.409 Even within the WPS, officers have been insensitive to survivors of gender-based violence. As Kavanagh writes, “WPS operators sometimes underestimate the danger women face. Some women reported that operators blamed or humiliated them. Others perceived

406 Interview F6.
407 Concerned with the number of cases falling apart due to mistakes in evidence collection, doctors from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health have tried to improve the collection of medical evidence, requesting more training on the legal aspects of forensic medicine. See: Nicaragua National Institute of Women (INIM). 30 November 2001. 
408 Ibid.
409 Ibid, 14.
a bias against psychological violence because operators don’t see physical evidence that a crime has been committed.” 410 This report helps underscore the crucial distinction between access to justice and a halt to life-threatening violence. Corroborating my own interviews with women seeking help at the WPS, the report explains that, “while WPS operators often see the services they provide as being an end in themselves, women typically go to these facilities for support to help stop the brutality without necessarily seeking to pursue a full range of legal options.” 411

As found throughout my research (and that of Kavanagh) women seeking justice will rarely follow the full judicial process, as many just want to scare their husbands or to seek immediate protection. 412 For example, in 2007, the WPS across Nicaragua served 91,536 women; yet, only 27,393 (or 29%) filed a formal complaint (see Figure 3.1). 413 The annual rise in the number of women seeking help - in the public sphere - for the "private" violence of intimate partner violence certainly marks a shift in normalizing violence against women. In a country of approximately five million people (thus, about 2.5 million females) over 90,000 women per year exercise this form of agency. These public reports of private violence are both a sign of shifting gendered power relations and of the patriarchal roles that have so long made women the "natural" bearers of violence. In short, this use of the WPS is evidence of women's empowerment.

411 Ibid.
412 Ibid.
413 Data is relegated to 2006-07 because these are the only years from which systematic data has been collected and published. I tried to collect similar data during my fieldwork but found this task requiring a much larger research team than I alone was capable. D’Angelo et al, 2008, p.25.
Again, Mills' research on intimate partner violence in the United States sheds light on the Nicaraguan context, as she discusses the tension in relying on the public (state) response for this type of private violence.\textsuperscript{414} Police reporting is important, explains Mills, because “we send a message to men who batter their partners that their battering has consequences. This message is intended to have a deterrent effect, and indeed, some of the arrest studies demonstrate that it probably does.”\textsuperscript{415} Yet, “when the battered woman has a negative interaction with the state, she is less likely to rely on governmental assistance in the future […] if a battered woman is given the choice between abuse by the batterer (which is familiar) and abuse by state actors (which is unfamiliar) she is likely to choose the abuse she knows best.”\textsuperscript{416}

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\textsuperscript{414} Although Mills is writing on the American context, and is addressing the politics of mandatory intervention (which is not Central American policy), several of her points speak to the limitations of the involving the state in cases of intimate partner violence as well as her “survivor-centered model” specifically addresses the importance of empowerment.


\textsuperscript{416} Mills, 1999, 595.
As critics of the Nicaraguan WPS project point out, “The commission, as a gateway to justice, does not have a high level of success when only 15.7% of women seeking help see their cases end up in the Justice department.”

The WPS fosters women's empowerment through its provision of a legal and ideational resource, and improves women's agency by creating a safe space where women are encouraged to denounce acts of private violence, press legal charges, and break the silence – and thus erode the perceived normalcy – of intimate partner violence. As Commissioner Mercedes Ampie explains, “Because of the power men have over women in relationships, it’s hard for women to leave their husbands, and for [men] to accept that their wives leave them.” Accordingly, the WPS have responded to these major challenges by adjusting their strategy. Consider the following excerpts from my own interviews with WPS staff:

Our job is directed at women to help them know their rights, the laws that defend them, the international treaties that exist, and the procedures to follow when these rights are violated.

The idea is to get them [women] to be convinced to make a complaint and this raises awareness in the larger society. When a woman comes to us, it’s not a secret. Her neighbors know, her sisters know, her mother knows. It is very important to get each woman to file a complaint because this is the only way they add up and we can convince the government that intimate partner violence is as serious as we know it is.

We are trying to adjust the focus, using a human rights model and using equality between men and women as our principal message. We are still a police station, and we of course promote women’s access to justice as a human right. But, I think we are transitioning the focus of our service from one of offense [directed at delivering consequences for perpetrators], to a focus on defending women’s right to a life without violence.

How the WPS will execute this shift in focus is hard to predict. From my findings, corroborated by the research of others, it seems that defending women’s rights and basic security requires a multi-pronged approach. The WPS have already contributed significantly to raising...
the public visibility of intimate partner violence, and the framing of intimate partner violence as a violation of both national law and internationally-recognized human rights. Rather than relying solely on women’s NGOs to address violence against women (which are sometimes disparaged as run by "Internationalistas" and propagating "foreign" feminist values), links with the national police help strengthen the message that Nicaragua considers intimate partner violence a crime with legal consequences. The very existence of the Women’s Police Stations attest to this message – resources have been dedicated to having special buildings with a special police force who have a special mission: to protect women and children from systematic human rights violations. Regardless of legal outcomes for perpetrators, the WPS must “defend women’s right to a life without violence” by continuing to spread the message that one ever-growing, internationally and state-sanctioned group in Nicaraguan society is taking violence against women seriously.

In so doing, the “WPS have brought about tremendous changes in the daily activities of the police. They used to ignore intimate partner violence against women in particular, or they would almost always blame or re-victimize the woman, thus maintaining the dichotomy between public and private.” This is significant, as Sally Merry explains, because a subjective shift often takes place in women who begin using the law as part of a strategy to counter the violence in their lives. Because she so nicely illuminates the contextual complexities of women seeking help from the law in places where, just a few years before, this was nearly inconceivable, I quote Merry at length:

In going to the law, a woman takes on a new subject position, defined in the discourses and social practices of the law. She tries it on, not abandoning her other subject positions as partner/wife, member of a kinship network that usually includes her partner’s family as well as her own, along with other subject positions such as ‘local,’ Christian, and poor. She is, in a sense, seeing how it goes […] Although there has clearly been a substantial increase in the number of women willing to turn to the courts, many try this position on and discard it, returning to a subjectivity less challenging to their partners and perhaps to their kin […] Indeed, women are choosing between two incompatible subject positions, one the rights-bearing subject, the other the good wife. Each represents a vision of the self that produces self-esteem, but the battered woman cannot

422 Jubb et al., 2008, 18.
simultaneously enact both. Choosing either one represents a failure of the other.\footnote{Merry, 185-86.}

Knowing that very few abused women press charges against their abusive partner, we must recognize the complexity for women in trying on this new identity of “rights bearer.” After years of research in various countries, Merry observes that localizing human rights and fostering rights consciousness among women “requires a social shift of some magnitude.”\footnote{Ibid, 191.} For many years, “women’s entrance into this subject position is ambivalent, hesitant, and intermittent.”\footnote{Ibid, 192.} Separate from the successes and obstacles of the WPS as an organization, Nicaraguan women will face continued personal challenges in assuming their right to a life without violence.

To emphasize these tensions, I conclude this section with the case of Luz Marina Lezama Suazo. Suazo's case poignantly highlights the fact that addressing the life-threatening violence experienced by women requires more than access to a police station and the knowledge of one’s legal rights. In this case, Suazo had served 15 years with the Nicaraguan Police; in 2004, she became the Chief of the Women’s Police Station in the small town of Diriomo. On April 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2009, after a loud argument with her intimate partner, including gunshots, Chief Suazo was found dead. After the homicide, Suazo’s intimate partner (Santiago Mora Mena) admitted that a gun was involved in their argument, but claimed the shooting was an “accident” resulting from a struggle as Suazo was wrestling the gun from her partner’s hand. Forensics experts, however, claimed this to be impossible as the gun was shot from approximately 50cm from Suazo’s body (which is far longer than any human arm). Furthermore, Suazo’s sister and several neighbours reported witnessing intimate partner violence in the victim's relationship.\footnote{Lucía C. Vargas, “Marido mata a jefa de Comisaría de la Mujer,” in \textit{La Prensa}, 2009. Online: http://archivo.laprensa.com.ni/archivo/2009/abril/23/noticias/regionales/323358.shtml}

This case prompted Nicaraguan officials to further investigate gendered motivations behind female murders, finding that at least 25 of the 45 women murdered in the first half of 2009 were victims of ongoing intimate partner violence.\footnote{United Nations Development Programme, "Opening Spaces for Citizen Security and Human Development", 2009.} Having spoken with Suazo during my research, I stress the importance of her story in exemplifying the difficulty women face in
achieving basic security – even those leading a major program to address violence against women. When I interviewed Suazo in July 2008, she spoke to me in her capacity as a police chief and identified women seeking the services of WPS as those “needing help, support, protection and information”

428 from herself and the police station. Meanwhile, in her own “private” life, she needed the very services she was providing to others. In a public statement on the Suazo case, Granada Chief of Police, Ramon Avellán, told the press: “Domestic violence is a very old social problem. But today we are breaking the silence and people do complain. Complaints have risen 35% yet the police do not escape this phenomenon. We are part of society.”

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Given the complexities of intimate partner violence, the existence of the WPS is not capable of altering entrenched behaviour or shifting the deep gendered power relations that lead to violence. Making the legal response to intimate partner violence accessible at the grassroots level is thus necessary, but insufficient, for achieving my feminist conception of positive peace. Peacebuilding can be improved, I argue, by including (and perhaps emphasizing) relational approaches to empowerment that address the issue of intimate partner violence. For instance, opposed to the perpetrator-centered approach offered by the police and judicial system, a different – “survivor-centered” – approach to intimate partner violence is put forth by Mills. As she argues, “[b]y adopting the survivor's perspective, which is fundamentally an emotional one, we should be charged with hearing her story on her terms and in ways that take into account her particular circumstances […] Engaging survivors in the political struggle against intimate partner violence must begin with facilitating their personal empowerment in the intimate sphere.”

430 Keeping in mind Merry’s discussion of competing subjectivies, the case of Chief Suazo’s homicide, and Mills’ focus on survivors of intimate partner violence, I now analyze a different "bottom-up" approach to addressing violence against women in post-conflict Central America – the shelter and self-esteem workshops run by Nuevos Horizontes.

428 Interview B23.
429 Vargas, 2009.
430 Mills, 554-555.
3.2 Nuevos Horizontes

Nuevos Horizontes (New Horizons) is located in Quetzaltenango (commonly referred to as Xela; pronounced Shay-la). Xela is the second largest city in Guatemala, with a population of approximately 160,000 of which approximately 65% is indigenous. Located in the western highlands, the area surrounding Xela was a major site of violence during the country’s 36-year long civil war. In response to the long-term violence, a refugee shelter operated in the city of Xela during the war, and was largely populated with indigenous families escaping conflict in surrounding rural areas. In 1989, this refugee shelter fell under the ownership of three American women and three Guatemalan women who acquired the space as a temporary shelter for women and children fleeing situations of intimate partner violence. This was the beginning of Asociación Hogar Nuevos Horizontes. To this day, this building continues to be a “refugee” shelter for women escaping life-threatening intimate partner violence and, through their headquarters (located in another part of the city) Nuevos Horizontes now offers a comprehensive program for women including shelter, vocational training, psychological counseling, and bi-weekly workshops on legal rights and self-esteem.

Similar to the WPS, Nuevos Horizontes operates in a resource-poor, heavily patriarchal, context. With nearly one hundred thousand complaints of intimate partner violence filed a year in Nicaragua (with a population of only 5 million), and campaigns dedicated to promoting women's right to a life free from violence, Women's Police Stations are important actors for peacebuilding. Yet, reporting intimate partner violence is only part of the security equation; having a safe place to flee from life-threatening violence, which Nuevos Horizontes provides, is of paramount importance for women's security. In cases where the woman ends an abusive relationship, studies show that partners sometimes become more violent towards their (now ex) partner, as their position of power and control is challenged. As Johnson and Hotton warn:

very often the violence and threats do not end with marital separation. Women are often assaulted, threatened, hunted down, and killed by extremely jealous and possessive partners who are desperate to maintain control over women who are equally desperate to escape them. In fact, homicide rates are higher for women who
have separated than they are for women in intact relationships, and these tend to occur in the immediate aftermath of separation.\textsuperscript{431}

Addressing this immediate security need, Nuevos Horizontes provides a shelter for women leaving the life-threatening violence in their private home. Similar to the case of Women's Police Stations, laws against intimate partner violence are used as both legal and ideational resources to empower women. In the case of Nuevos Horizontes, however, the ideational component is more pronounced; through its various programs, the grassroots organization uses laws less as a legal instrument (for punitive and/or deterrent effects) and more as a way to enhance women’s subjective sense of themselves as rights-bearers. This approach is fundamental for women's empowerment (and thus women's security) in resource-poor and institutionally-weak post-conflict contexts. As my findings from women's workshops demonstrate, the collective effect of this cost-effective peacebuilding practice is to challenge patriarchy by fostering a culture based on rights and basic security for all.

To explore the convergence of social services (shelter, counseling, vocational training) and a human rights approach to intimate partner violence, I interviewed 37 women involved with Nuevos Horizontes. These interviews include 22 women using the services provided by the organization, and 16 women responsible for administration and service provision. The workshops offered by Nuevos Horizontes are open to all women in Xela and surrounding rural areas; therefore, while all of the 22 women using the services had experiences with intimate partner violence, only 10 of them were living (or had previously lived) in the shelter. Of the 16 women working for Nuevos Horizontes, 4 worked at the head office in various capacities (legal advisor, program coordinators, psychologist) and the other 12 worked in the shelter as paid employees or volunteers. Interview data are supplemented by many hours of observation of (and participation in) discussions held in women’s support groups (at the organization's head office.

\textsuperscript{431} Holly Johnson and Tina Hotton, “Losing Control :Homicide Risk in Estranged and Intact Intimate Relationships” in \textit{Homicide Studies}, Vol. 7 No. 1, February 2003, 59. As support for this claim, they cite: Block, 2000; Campbell, 2001; McFarlane et al., 1999.
and in surrounding rural villages). For two months (March-April 2009) I also participated regularly in the daily activities of the shelter as a volunteer.\footnote{1}

a) Resources

Through their comprehensive program, Nuevos Horizontes gives women two major types of resources that form a crucial basis for empowerment: material and ideational. I categorize “ideational” as the human rights framework, while “material” includes the shelter, food and clothing provided to women and their children. I frame laws and rights as an “ideational” resource because, as my research demonstrates, at this time – and in this context – it is the idea of human rights that can affect women’s security as much, or even more than, actual implementation of the laws themselves. In this context of widespread impunity (recall that Guatemala’s conviction rate for femicide sits at less than 2\%\footnote{2} and overcrowded prisons, I argue that women’s right to basic security holds more traction as an ideational resource for women’s empowerment than in its legal/institutional capacity.

To make this argument, I will first highlight the significance of the material resources provided by the organization as food, clothing and shelter are basic needs for all women leaving situations of intimate partner violence. To fully realize the difficulty women have in finding an alternative safe shelter we can look at women's experience in a country as resource-rich as the United States. Many U.S.-based studies show the leading cause of women’s homelessness is intimate partner violence.\footnote{3} If intimate partner violence is the leading cause of women's

\footnote{1} During March and April 2009, I recorded my daily interactions with women in the shelter, and (with the consent of all women present at the organization’s workshops) I was also given permission to record the meetings in which I was in attendance. The material cited in this section derives from these notes and recordings.

\footnote{2} Between 2005 and 2007 only 2\% of 2,000 cases involving the violent deaths of women were “resolved” (some without convictions). Anabella Noriega of the Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office also reported that in 2004 only one case out of 500 resulted in a conviction (a rate of .002\%). See: http://www.ghrc-usa.org/Programs/ForWomensRightstoLive/2009VAWReport_execsum.htm

\footnote{3} As the National Coalition for the Homeless found: “Many studies demonstrate the contribution of domestic violence to homelessness, particularly among families with children. A 1990 Ford Foundation study found that 50\% of homeless women and children were fleeing abuse (Zorza, 1991). In 1998, a study of 777 homeless parents (the majority of whom were mothers) in ten U.S. cities, 22\% said they had left their last place of residence because of domestic violence (Homes for the Homeless, 1998). A 2003 survey of 100 homeless mothers in 10 locations around the country found that 25\% of the women had been physically abused in the last year (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004). In addition, 50\% of the 24 cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified "domestic violence" as a primary cause of homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005).” See: NCH Fact Sheet #7, August 2007. Available online: http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/domestic.pdf
homelessness in a highly developed state, then we can assume that the need for safe shelter in less-developed, post-conflict, contexts is acute. Across post-conflict Central America, there are very few shelters for women and children wishing to leave situations of life-threatening violence. In Nicaragua, there are no state-operated shelters dedicated to female victims of violence and other forms of abuse. However, a collective of women’s organizations (called the Network of Women against Violence) operates three shelters in the country. In El Salvador, the number of people in shelters is a small fraction of the number of reported cases and calls to the country’s hotline for intimate partner violence. Of course, not every person suffering intimate partner violence wants, or needs, to make use of a shelter; however, the vast difference between victims reporting violence and the availability of an important transition resource is stark (see Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2: Resources for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in El Salvador:**

*A Snapshot*

![Graph showing calls to family hotline, domestic adult abuse cases, and people in shelter from 2002 to 2008.](image)

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435 United States State Department, 2007.
In Guatemala, as of March 2009, only six shelters operated nation-wide. Three are located in Guatemala City and, with the exception of Nuevos Horizontes, not one provides long-term assistance. Nuevos Horizontes is the only shelter in post conflict Central America offering women and their children access to physical security and the provision of basic needs (food and clothing) for 6 to 12 months, in addition to comprehensive psychological rehabilitation and work reintegration programs.

Like most developing regions, post-conflict Central America has not experienced a “shelter movement” which played a large part in feminist politics of the 1970s and led to the creation of women's shelters across Europe and North America. Also, in resource-poor, heavily patriarchal, states "women's issues" are a low (to non-existent) priority on the national budget. At first glance, Nuevos Horizontes appears to be a state-supported program that is funded - in part - by the National Coordination Unit for the Prevention of Family Violence and Violence against Women (CONAPREVI). Yet, a closer look reveals that the Guatemalan state directs no public resources towards the organization's efforts to limit violence against women as "the Executive does not include in its budget funds for the functioning of CONAPREVI." Rather, this "national" women's office is the product of external donors, including the Canadian-sponsored Fund for the Empowerment of Guatemalan Women, the Canadian International Development Agency and the development agencies of Switzerland and the Netherlands, the United Nations Development Program, the United Nations Children's Fund, and a six million dollar loan from the Inter-American Development Bank. Thanks to these international donations, CONAPREVI's budget increased 700% between 2004-2010. Although some of this money has been channeled through the national office to support Nuevos Horizontes, the organization relies heavily on private donations from individuals who have previously volunteered at the shelter or who have found their programs online. The organization’s use of

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437 Such movements have been documented in the United States, Canada, the UK and Australia.
440 Interviews with staff at the CONAPREVI office in Quetzaltenango, March-April 2009.
social media and their website (although unfinished for the past five years) helps Nuevos Horizontes stay connected with these private donors, whose contributions have supplied the shelter with clothing, food, toys, school supplies and scholarship money for both the children and the younger mothers to attend school.\(^{441}\)

The shelter provides a significant resource for women’s empowerment, as it allows women to spend time in a safe space in which they can reflect on their past, present and future. As Julia, one woman living at the shelter in March 2009 explained, “I’m doing a therapy. It’s a time to reflect on my life.”\(^{442}\) In a particularly poignant set of conversations, Julia repeatedly mentioned how she felt “so thankful” for the resources provided to her at Nuevos Horizontes. “Not being safe” and “needing to buy food” were the two most stressful issues in Julia’s home life; here at the shelter, these two major issues were no longer concerns.\(^{443}\)

When I asked about the specific screening process for women applying to live in the shelter (as there are space limitations) I was told that a risk assessment is done first at head office. This assessment involves discussing the type and level of violence experienced in the home, if the woman has no other options for a place to live, if her children are at risk, the level of risk she faces from the aggressor if she goes back to her community. In more vague terms, I was also informed that women are accepted largely based on the following factors: 1) if the woman demonstrates a serious commitment to leaving her abusive partner; 2) if the woman displays characteristics that make for a good fit with other women and children already housed in the shelter; 3) if there is space for the number of children the woman must bring along with her.\(^{444}\) This final point is important, because most women who come to the shelter are mothers of multiple children. As one long-time volunteer told me, one woman once brought her seven children to the shelter.\(^{445}\) During my time researching and volunteering at the shelter, it was most common for each resident to have two or three children.

\(^{441}\) For example, after two years of my volunteer work and research in the organization I continue to receive the Nuevos Horizontes quarterly newsletter informing me of new developments and asking for donations.

\(^{442}\) Interview C23.

\(^{443}\) Ibid.

\(^{444}\) Interview C12.

\(^{445}\) Interview C01.
One of the main screening elements for admission to the shelter is a clear commitment to leave one’s abusive partner. This is important because the shelter typically runs at maximum capacity (sometimes having to turn women away), staff thus want to ensure that those who gain access to their resources are serious about improving their security. At the same time, however, as they are cognizant of the difficulties women face in breaking the cycle of abuse-reconciliation, Nuevos Horizontes makes admission decisions on a case-by-case basis. For example, take the case of Sofia (22 years old). Sofia had brought her three-year old daughter with her, and was visibly pregnant with a second child. When we spoke, she explained that this is her second time staying at the Nuevos Horizontes shelter. The first time, about two years ago, Sophia left because she was “bored” and “missed her boyfriend” (the abuser, and father of her daughter). She recalled wanting to “have her family together” and felt a lot of doubt about “being independent” and did not want to be stigmatized as a single mother. Like many women who suffer intimate partner violence, Sofia also hoped her boyfriend would change. Unfortunately, however, Sofia’s boyfriend continued to physically and verbally assault her. She was hesitant to return to Nuevos Horizontes because she knew the organization might have refused to take her back. When her boyfriend hit her 3 year old daughter, Sofia said that she “screamed and cried more than ever in my life.” At seven months pregnant, she asked Nuevos Horizontes if she could return. They agreed, deciding that Sofia was now seriously committed to leaving her boyfriend and starting a life without violence. “Thanks to God,” said Sofia, “I am here another time and my daughter is safe. And the baby is safe. I will find work after the baby is born…maybe doing laundry? I think that would be a good life.”

Once accepted, each woman is assisted in developing a “Life Plan” that combines psychological help with vocational training. As Esperanza, an employee at Nuevos Horizontes headquarters explains, counseling and vocational training are crucial aspects of the shelter, in that it “forms a transition space where women are not set up for failure.”

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446 Interview C17.  
447 Ibid.  
448 Interview C22.
actively participate in the organization’s training programs are set up with a paying job, which is essential for long-term financial independence once they move out of the shelter.\textsuperscript{449}

However, life inside the shelter is hardly idyllic. The internal dynamics between women and children living in the shelter are often difficult; strained relations are mostly due to space limitations and a number of women simultaneously enduring a highly emotional transitional period in their lives. According to the employees and volunteers with whom I spoke, maintaining the best possible dynamics within the shelter was paramount.\textsuperscript{450} Time spent in a confined space, away from friends and family, is difficult for many women and children. Although women can stay in the shelter for six to twelve months (depending on the case) most leave about four months into their stay. As the shelter’s psychologist, Rebeca, explained of women’s time here, “It is not a fun vacation. It is a space to get their life together, to think, and to believe in a different picture of their future. It is our job to help them make a life plan so this picture becomes a reality.”\textsuperscript{451}

During the months that I spent at Nuevos Horizontes, two women who had been accepted into the shelter left without any notice or explanation.\textsuperscript{452} When I enquired from shelter workers about where they had suddenly gone, my questions seemed unwelcome; I received extremely vague responses, such as: “She had to leave”\textsuperscript{453} and “Sometimes women just leave.”\textsuperscript{454} Speaking to other volunteers (who have worked in the shelter for at least nine months) revealed more contextual detail. Take the opinion of Monique, a European volunteer who had been working with Nuevos Horizontes for about fifteen months:

Monique: She left because the other women were complaining about her. They think she’s a lesbian because she has no kids and she touches some of the women. She was making people feel uncomfortable – even a few of the volunteers complained about her rubbing their hands and

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\textsuperscript{449} The organization’s “labour training” includes workshops in making shoes, sewing dresses, machine embroidery, painting, handicrafts, baking and flower arranging (all of which are skills that these women would use to make items to sell in the market and/or in the street to tourists).

\textsuperscript{450} Interviews C13 and C14.

\textsuperscript{451} Interview C02.

\textsuperscript{452} One woman had three children, one of whom had become quite close with me, so their sudden departure concerned me greatly. The other woman stood out for several reasons – she was both single and much older than other women in the shelter.

\textsuperscript{453} Interview C10.

\textsuperscript{454} Interview C11.
getting a strange vibe from her. I think she just wanted someone to help her learn some letters. I had been teaching her \( a, b, \) and \( c. \) She liked me to trace the letters on her hand with my finger. I didn’t think it was a ‘sexual’ thing at all.

Author: Does this happen often? Women suddenly leaving the shelter?

Monique: Yeah. There are some women who have been here for months and seem to be making a lot of progress. Their children are not difficult. They [program workers] want to keep these women comfortable. These are going to be their ‘success stories’ so if they complain about someone, or someone’s kids are hitting the other kids too much – I’ve seen that too – then, it’s usually not long before that newer person is gone.

Author: Where do these women go?

Monique: Back home, I guess. No one really talks about it. I guess it makes the shelter look bad.\(^{455}\)

The shelter is a confined space – the door is locked 24 hours a day, with a security guard often on watch – and women rarely leave. The children are taken outside on regular excursions by the volunteers and one or two shelter employees, but their mothers remain in the shelter cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and attending sessions with the on-site psychologist. Aside from these cases of “disappearing” women, most women living in the shelter described their experience to me in very positive terms; for example, a “safe place,” a “place to get help,” a “place to reflect,” and a “place to find support” were all used as descriptors.\(^{456}\) These women came to the shelter believing their life was at risk and all were scared for their children. One resident, Rosana, stressed that living with family was not an option, because her husband would know where to find her. In her words, “this shelter saved my life”.\(^{457}\) It is clear that for many women, escaping to the shelter was the only way to attain security for themselves and their children. The physical building, as well as the food and clothing provided to its residents, are crucial material resources in empowering women's transition to a more secure life.

In addition, \textit{Nuevos Horizontes}’ approach to intimate partner violence contains an important generational effect. Shelters provide women with the ability to respond to their partner’s

\(^{455}\) Interview C01.
\(^{456}\) Interviews C03, C04, C05, C07.
\(^{457}\) Interview C04.
violation of their family security and help women to engage their own responsibility to protect both themselves and their children. In my capacity as a volunteer, my main responsibilities at the shelter were to look after the children. The volunteer coordinators spent time explaining the shelter’s rules for the children, as well as their rules concerning how adults were to interact with the children. These “adults” included the volunteers, the employees of the shelter, but also the women living in the shelter with the children (including their own mothers). During our orientation tour, it was stressed that the rules of the shelter fostered a space of non-violence. There were no toy guns in the playroom and no hitting allowed between children. Also, the mothers living at the shelter were discouraged from hitting their children as a means of discipline (which is commonplace amongst Central American parents). As volunteers, part of our responsibilities included watching for such exercises of violent behaviour and then correcting such behaviour (with gentle reminders) and/or reporting the incident to the shelter’s senior staff. Women who extract themselves, and their children, from a home characterized by life-threatening violence not only break the cycle of violence between the adult partners but also disrupt the generational cycles of learned behaviors of violence passed down to their children.458

In choosing the security offered by the Nuevos Horizontes shelter, mothers can weave a counter-story of non-violence and healing into the lives of boys and girls throughout the Guatemalan highlands – children who would otherwise be left with only the example of violence within their homes. The story of Carmen and her 11 year old daughter, Angela, illustrate the importance of the shelter in helping to change the lives of children. When Angela showed up at the shelter - without her mother - a shelter worker explained that Angela's mother was in the hospital due to “problems with her stomach”459 so Angela would live at the shelter (alone) until her mother could join her. These "stomach problems," I later found out, were serious – Carmen was 6 months pregnant, and had been beaten so severely by her husband (including being punched repeatedly in the stomach) that a miscarriage was likely. A family member who knew

458 Intergenerational patterns of intimate partner violence have been cited as deeply problematic. In a hearing on "Women and Violence," before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, one expert testified that In homes where intimate partner violence is present, children are typically also victims of abuse - children of battered women are fifteen times more likely to be battered than children whose mothers are not abused. This expert also claimed that boys who have witnessed abuse of their mothers are 10 times more likely to batter their female partners as adults ("Women and Violence," Hearings before the United States Senate Judiciary Committee, August/December 1990).
459 Interview C02.
of Nuevos Horizontes had driven Carmen and her daughter to the organization’s headquarters, where the case worker had directed Carmen to the hospital and agreed to place Angela in the shelter. For three weeks, I spent a significant amount of time with Angela, and found out that she was receiving sessions with the shelter’s psychologist because she displayed signs of trauma (including nightmares and aggressive behavioural outbursts, mainly characterized by screaming). By the time I was due to leave my volunteer position, Angela’s mother had still made no appearance at the shelter. When I enquired as to her condition, the shelter workers were evasive and said they were unable to share any information because the case details were confidential. They assured me, however, that Angela would stay on in the shelter and continue her schooling (which Angela repeatedly told me that she “loved”).

In addition to these valuable material resources, Nuevos Horizontes also uses ideational resources to empower Guatemalan women and to challenge patriarchal gendered roles and identities. Across Central America, “[t]he autonomy and independence of women as subjects of law is not recognized; rather, they are still viewed in terms of their reproductive roles, and the concept of women is equated with the family.”460 It is therefore easy to see how women reporting violence by their intimate partner, or leaving him to live in a shelter, is more than a difficult personal choice - it is also a challenge to deeply entrenched gendered roles and identities. Similar to the ways in which the Nicaraguan Women’s Police Stations and Law 230 challenge the "normalization" of violence against women, Nuevos Horizontes uses Guatemala's 2008 Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women to change how women self-identify. Classifying intimate partner violence as a crime is an important development in Guatemala, as it begins to shift both public and individual perception of who women are and what their bodies are for. Seeing oneself as a “rights bearer” in addition to (not in place of, as Sally Merry’s work describes461) the more readily accepted identities of wife and

461 Sally Merry’s observations of women taking on the identity as “rights bearer” in the Hawaiian community of Hilo is, in many aspects, similar to my own findings. However, she describes victims of intimate partner violence as “tracking back and forth” between identities of battered woman and rights bearer. Her focus on the legal aspect of women charging their abusive partner forces these women to choose between two incompatible identities. Women living at the shelter are encouraged to end their relationship with their abusive partner, however, women seeking
mother, presents a fundamental shift in women’s sense of identity as it has long been socially constructed and reinforced. As Kabeer tells us, empowerment correlates to the amount of meaningful choices one has available to change and improve their quality of life. This new choice of identity, as presented in the Femicide Law and reinforced through programs like those offered by Nuevos Horizontes, is very important for women’s empowerment.

Throughout my field work, I found that reading and discussing both national and international laws on women’s right to a life without violence was commonplace at women’s workshops. The weekly, or sometimes bi-weekly, women’s workshops offered by Nuevos Horizontes were often referred to as talleres de autoayuda (self-help workshops) or grupos de apoyo (support groups). Women living in the shelter, and women from Xela and surrounding rural communities, were welcome to participate. In the meetings I attended, there were approximately 12 to 20 women participating at any given time (some of whom brought their children, who also sat through the meeting). At each meeting, about half of the women in attendance had travelled from smaller villages surrounding the city of Xela.

Nuevos Horizontes workshops began with a discussion leader going through key points in Guatemala’s 2008 Law against Femicide. First, the group was asked to identify types of violence against women. The leader would then ask which forms of violence were illegal in Guatemala and which were a violation of human rights (the answer to both questions was "all of them"). Women in attendance then engaged in an open discussion of their personal experiences with intimate partner violence. In an effort to make connections between personal experience and legal rights, the group leader emphasized how each story represents a violation of a certain section of the law. Because the majority of women at the meetings were illiterate, having

other services of Nuevos Horizontes often continue to live with their partner, continuing to “wear” the identities of “good wife and mother” while adding another layer of “rights bearer.” Thus, I would not characterize my observations in the same dichotomous, mutually exclusive way that Merry does. In this case, I see the identity of “rights bearer” as being a new, and welcome, addition to the multiple identities these Guatemalan women simultaneously hold. I discuss this further in the dissertation’s concluding chapter.

462 Locations in which I found women’s workshops on rights and/or self-esteem taking place include: Matagalpa and Estelí in Nicaragua; the national government’s Institute for Salvadoran Women’s Development and the non-governmental organization, Las Dignas, in El Salvador.
someone to read the rights as they appear in the law’s text was a crucial step in translating human rights into practice. During my time at the shelter, 6/7 women living there had very limited reading and writing abilities; at the workshops, on the two days I asked, 2/12 and 3/16 women (depending on who was in attendance) had rudimentary literacy skills. The importance of a conduit – the workshop leader – to make written laws both known and understood among the population who most need them was essential for women’s empowerment. As summarized by one participant, “We could never talk like this if we didn’t know the laws. And how would we know them?” And, in the words of another workshop participant, “I never knew anything about laws or rights until I came here [to New Horizon’s workshops]. Where else would I learn this? It’s very new to me.”

At one meeting the group leader, Manuela, wrote the following on a large piece of paper (despite the high rate of illiteracy in the room):

**Steps if you are suffering:**
- break the silence
- lose shame and fear
- come to Nuevos Horizontes for help and security
- understand your value/worth

Manuela opened the meeting with a general message to the women present: “We need to fix our hearts and our attitudes.” She continued to speak to the women about the *Femicide Law* and gave encouragement, such as, “We must unite in the attainment of rights or it will never happen. Women will never get out of the cycle of violence.” And later: “To prevent violence, we need more institutional coordination. But information is also fundamental. This is why we go through the law.” Yet, there was a tension in Manuela’s opening lesson. On the one hand, she stressed the law’s importance: “This (Femicide) law is so important for us [women]. It helps us look forward. We must use this law.” On the other hand, similar to the WPS, she made several comments about mediation and counseling as helpful strategies. For example, Manuela

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463 Interview C05.
464 Interview C08.
465 Meeting held March 26th, 2009 at the Nuevos Horizontes head office in Xela.
explained, “A couple is 50/50. You and your husband can come to Nuevos Horizontes for psychological help and for group support.”

Manuela also emphasized the importance of outreach, telling the women, “If you know a neighbor or a friend who is suffering violence then call Nuevos Horizontes. Bring them here to a meeting. We can help.” To close the meeting, Manuela told everyone present: “Remember, if God is king of kings, then we are princesses.” She then thanked all of the women for coming because "these workshops also help me remember that I am strong" and said that it motivates her to see more women attending every week. Manuela also took special care to congratulate those two women who brought their sons “because this will change the violence in our culture, little by little”. Finally, she had everyone give me a special round of applause “because Kimberly is an example of Canadians believing in the international obligation to stop violence against Guatemalan women.”

In the second half of the workshop, Nuevos Horizontes provided the women with materials for a craft of some kind (sewing napkins, embroidery) that women brought home to sell - either at the market or to tourists on the street. This material incentive for attendance recognized that many women gave up a day of working in the market to travel to the head office in Xela, and thus provided a form of compensation. Also, as two women explained to me, bringing the craft home made their husbands less “suspicious” of what they do at these meetings.

After the meeting, Manuela explained to me that women have a “very hard time leaving their husband” and the answer for everyone who comes to Nuevos Horizontes is not “abandon your family or break up the relationship with your husband.” The organization works with women who live in violent situations to help them devise practical solutions to increase their security. “We tell the women: make your own money, increase your self-esteem, know your rights, and improve your parenting.” On this last point, I ask for more detail; Manuela

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466 Meeting notes, March 26th, 2009; recording of meeting C40.
467 Interviews C05 and C08.
468 Interview C41.
469 Ibid.

explains that women very often hit their children in Guatemalan society, so Nuevos Horizontes encourages mothers to “take all violence out of the home” and to model non-violence in those private relationships in which women already have power (over their kids). Counselors in the organization are trained to stress education for both girls and boys, and they help women keep their children in school for as long as possible. In fact, the organization started a scholarship program (funded mostly through private donations from previous shelter volunteers) that covers the cost of registration, uniforms and school supplies.

In making the point about rights as an ideational resource, Lucia’s experience is particularly salient. Every second week, Lucia travels almost an hour by bus in order to attend the group meetings offered by Nuevos Horizontes. She often brings her young son – about seven years old – with her; during one occasion, I observed him sit quietly through the entire meeting. At one meeting, Lucia (with her son listening) described how her husband used to hit her in the middle of the street, giving “not a thought” about neighbours watching. One day, Nuevos Horizontes held an outreach meeting in her town, and Lucia went with her sister because they are always curious “when anything out of the ordinary happens in our village.” Lucia told me that, initially, she was “suspicious” of the women from Nuevos Horizontes, but as she listened to an explanation of Guatemala’s new law against femicide and intra-familial violence, she felt “a little fire inside.” Now, Lucia travels to the meetings held in Xela, at the Nuevos Horizontes headquarters, because she wanted to continue discussing her rights, and learning how “the government was standing up for women.” In the group discussion, Lucia had mentioned that she was not planning to leave her husband, so I asked whether or not she felt the law on femicide and other forms of violence against women would change her life. She said:

My husband pulled my hair in the market the other day and I yelled at him. In public! I told him he was breaking the law. I never was able to tell him that before. It gave me power in that situation. He is wrong and I am right. I feel good knowing that.

Ana, the legal advisor at Nuevos Horizontes, explained the role of various women’s groups in lobbying for the 2008 law to explicitly state that neither culture nor religion were grounds for justifying violence against women. This inclusion was “so, so important,” she said, because the

470 Interview, C09.
471 Ibid.
government is taking a position of “zero tolerance for violence against women.” When I asked her to elaborate on this comment, she explained that “because this is my job, I counsel women about their legal options in their circumstances and I encourage them to press charges, to file a legal report.” However, she had “only a little confidence” in the court system which she called "corrupt" and "very sexist." She expanded on this point:

It is hard for a whole population to change their thinking just because we passed a new law […] Police need to collect evidence, judges need to take the crime seriously – I don’t think Guatemala is ready yet. So, it’s a tension for me. I want these women to use the law, otherwise why did we [women’s NGOs] push so hard for it? But, I want to protect these women from wasting their time or from being treated badly. They come here for a new life and I want them to spend this time training for a job and planning for the future. I don’t know…it’s a hard position to counsel women in this situation.

With impunity rates, prison over-crowding, and the experiences of my informants in mind, my view is that laws and rights act as a crucial ideational resource for: a) de-normalizing violence against women in contexts that are highly patriarchal and have long histories of violence due to war; b) encouraging discussions among victims of intimate partner violence that are both therapeutic and politically salient; and, c) changing how women see themselves as agents, which then leads to achievements in increasing their security.

Only a few of the women I interviewed in the shelter or in the workshops claimed that knowing their rights and understanding the Femicide Law prompted them to take any sort of legal action. Yet, all of the women expressed that this law was important. In my analysis, it seems that after being raised in a culture where violence against women is normalized, to have the state and the international community “see” women as deserving protection from violence, and claiming that basic security is their right, places Guatemalan women in a position of strength previously unknown.

Women such as Carla helped reinforce the point that while many women may not use the law for any legal purpose, knowing about the law’s existence - and its content - has changed how women think about violence. Carla explained that, “like all women in Guatemala,” she used to

472 Interview C22.
473 Ibid.
feel that violence was “normal.” This law is “like a revolution” she claimed. Throughout our interview, Carla pointed to the country’s 36-year long civil war and the “machismo culture” as forces that make women believe violence is just “another normal part of life.” Women faced threats of violence from male soldiers (particularly in this part of the country) and from the men in their homes (many of whom were involved with war efforts). Additionally, “the priest tells you to obey your father, then your husband. So where does a woman go? Her house, the street, the market, the church […] it is all these messages of being a good wife means staying with your spouse. And then we find out there is a law saying the opposite. One by the “internationalistas” [United Nations Declaration of Human Rights] and also our own government. It helps my self-esteem.”

For women to be informed of their rights, and of exactly which national laws are being violated in circumstances of intimate partner violence, is a form of empowerment. For women to know that they have a legal right to charge their abusive partner affects women's sense of agency. However, this legal knowledge is only one component of effective agency. In addition, the knowledge that women's rights and basic security are codified in national and international law has helped some Guatemalan women envisage a life free from violence. The idea of security - reinforced by the material resources and programs offered by Nuevos Horizontes - has helped empower many Guatemalan women to make their right to "life, liberty and security of person" a lived reality. Ideational and material resources are complementary, as both are necessary for women’s empowerment.

b) Agency

Agency – as supported by the ideational resources of laws and rights and the necessary material resources of food, clothing, and safe shelter – is transformative, meaning that it leads to specific achievements. Agency suggests a greater ability on the part of women to question,
analyze, and act on the structures of patriarchal constraint in their lives. Transformative agency does more than address immediate security needs; it is used to initiate longer-term processes of change in the structures of patriarchy. As Kabeer explains, “while changes in the consciousness and agency of individual women are an important starting point for such processes, it will do little on its own to undermine the systemic reproduction of inequality.”

One significant effect of Nuevos Horizontes’ programs is an increased sense of agency, which manifests as self-esteem among individual women. A second effect is a broader, socio-political effect, which I will discuss in the section on achievements.

First off, grassroots efforts can increase women's self-esteem and elaborate on why this is crucial for the larger project of increasing women's security in post-conflict contexts. Research on intimate partner violence describes “the early stages of abuse as a gradual process of ‘losing the self,’ whereas the process of disengagement may be viewed as a process of personal empowerment, or ‘regaining the self’.” In response, Nuevos Horizontes' workshops help women "regain" the self by using a counseling approach that is both victim-centred and relational. By “victim-centred,” I mean that survivors of intimate partner violence engage in programs that encourage them to recount their experiences with violence in their own time and on their own terms. The workshops also offer a "relational" approach to healing, as the group dynamics foster new relationships of trust and support between survivors of intimate partner violence. As Herman explains, intimate partner violence is not only marked by physical injury, but is also a form of psychological trauma. Abusers thrive on their partner's disempowerment and disconnection from others. Healing from intimate partner violence is, therefore, "based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation."

478 Kabeer, 2005, 15.
479 Ibid, 16.
Although interpersonal relationships were strained inside the shelter, there was a notable change in the women's attitudes whenever they left the shelter. During one trip to Nuevos Horizontes headquarters for an afternoon workshop, I asked the women in our van about the change in mood. As Lydia explained, "We all need a break from the shelter. I am grateful for it but I miss the sun and the breeze." Another woman, Beatrice, looked forward to these workshops for another reason: "My aunt tries to attend the group [...] I always love to see her and gossip about our village. No one in the shelter knows the same people that I know." The organization's workshops thus provide a safe space for women to (re)unite with their friends and/or family members, as well as a valuable opportunity for those living in the shelter to get a break from the enclosed environment and to spend time in with a different group of people.

My interviews with female workshop participants revealed a common theme of increased self-esteem. I therefore used "self-esteem" as my indicator of agency, evidenced when women reported changes in how they see themselves, feel about themselves, and feel about the choices they are making in creating more secure lives for themselves and their children. Consider the following excerpts from female participants in the Nuevos Horizontes workshops, and note the explicit references to "self-esteem" throughout.

In the words of Tatiana, a young mother of three children:

Self-esteem is necessary to continue with new projects in life. I can dream of myself doing different things now that I'm feeling differently about myself [...] I would not return to my husband. Not now. It was difficult to leave him but now it would be worse to go back. I have reflected a lot. I have changed. One hundred per cent.

Felicita, a woman in her mid-twenties, is a wife and a mother of two sons. She described how the workshops had provoked a change in her behaviour with her husband:

482 When traveling to the Nuevos Horizontes head office for the workshops, the mood in our mini-bus was rather jovial. This was also the case when we held the quarterly "birthday party" (a celebration of all the women's and children's birthdays over the past three months, including employees and volunteers at Nuevos Horizontes) in a nearby park.
483 Interview C30
484 Interview C31
485 All interviews cited in this particular section took place between March 1st-April 28th, 2009 in either the Nuevos Horizontes shelter or the organization’s head office. Both places are located in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.
486 Group Interview C21.
When I first came here [to the workshops] I felt guilty for leaving my husband for the day. He was suspicious about what I was doing here with other women. He made me feel very guilty. He called this a group of lesbians. Now I just laugh. What a stupid thing to say! [...] He doesn't like the changes he sees.

Author: What has changed?

Felicita: The last time he hit me, I yelled at him. I threatened to go to the police. 487

Damita, one of the older women in the group (forty-five years of age), has been married to her abusive husband since she was nineteen years old. They have five children together. Damita stressed that her husband is not “dangerous” because he does not “hit her every day” but only “sometimes”. In her words:

I know many women in my village are hit by men. Maybe all women. I’m not sure how many, but it’s many, many. When I hear her [points at Felicita, cited above] say she yelled at her husband and threatened to call the police, I am proud of her. Me too, I don’t want to leave my husband. I love him. But, I know he can’t treat me with violence and I have more self-esteem from coming to this group [...] Just talking and listening to other women who are the same as me. 488

When I asked participants to describe how the workshop makes them feel, and what they perceive as the value of attending, Lola (a frequent workshop participant) commented:

[Workshops] are spaces where women survivors of violence can be strengthened. It is a space where we are not treated like we are stupid or weak women. Here we are just women who are all going through the same experience. [...] Knowing about the law and about my rights makes me feel like I have power [...] I know the violence is wrong so I’m more confident. It’s on paper. It’s in the law. We talk about this together [...] I come back because I have friends here and we help each other feel stronger. 489

Various women recounted how participating in Nuevos Horizontes workshops had both affected their subjective self and led to actual changes in their lives. Of the 22 participants with whom I spoke about the impact of rights in their daily lives, 15 used the words making “new” or “different” decisions. 490 One woman, Elanora, even described a change in her husband’s

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487 Interview C34.
488 Group Interview C21.
489 Ibid.
490 Ibid.
behaviour, which she attributed to bringing her knowledge of the Femicide Law (and the actual printed booklet) into their home: "He [her husband] knows that I carry this [holds up the pocket-sized booklet of the Femicide Law] with me. Since I’ve had this around, he has not hit me. Not even one time."\textsuperscript{491}

From my own observation in such groups, corroborated by interviews at the shelter, all participants (22) told me they felt a higher sense of self-esteem as a result of attending \textit{Nuevos Horizontes}' women’s workshops. While laws and rights are significant markers of change in and of themselves, I found that, for these women, they largely translated into a language of "self-esteem". In the context of these workshops, laws and rights were used less for their legal, punitive, function and more to spark a shift in self-perception. In hindsight, I did not inquire enough about whether women themselves saw connections between self-esteem and empowerment, nor did I ask enough explicit questions about how women themselves define “empowerment” to gain a better sense of whether or not they find any meaning in the term. In future research, I would certainly make a concerted effort to ask these important questions.

The evidence I did collect suggests that these workshops offer a place to form new relationships. These relationships become important to participants, as this group becomes a source of support for Guatemalan women who are experiencing a shift in their conception of self. Schwalbe and Staples explore how identities change, explaining that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{commitment to an identity is seen as growing out of an individual’s experience of its value for generating positive self-evaluative information in a variety of contexts. People will be committed, in other words, to those identities which they have used successfully, and can continue to use, to generate positive self-evaluative information from the sources that are most important to them.}\textsuperscript{492}
\end{quote}

The workshop groups at \textit{Nuevos Horizontes} allow women to "grow" their commitment to an identity as "rights-bearer". The group of women becomes an "important source" from which each individual can "generate positive self-evaluative information" in developing new aspects of their identity. Knowing their rights, and the laws that support their equality and security, women

\textsuperscript{491} Ibid.

in these groups are encouraged to be strong, assertive, and rational. In so doing, traditional, patriarchal, gendered roles that associate femininity with weakness, submissiveness and emotion are challenged. I return to this point in my discussion of "communities of judgment."

Despite the security benefits of the Nuevos Horizontes approach to limiting intimate partner violence, an over-emphasis on self-esteem as a programmatic goal carries some danger. Critics of “self-esteem” as the proposed “solution” to intimate partner violence carry some legitimate warnings.\(^{493}\) Looking at how feminism has merged with the self-help “industry” in North America, critics are wary of a misplaced focus on the individual, self-reliance, and personal responsibility for change. These critics are particularly wary of the women’s self-help industry that includes books, magazines, and television shows which are aimed at “empowering” girls and women to make the most of their lives.\(^{494}\) In this view, issues such as intimate partner violence can become distorted; if women gaining self-esteem becomes the “solution” to violence against women, then women’s lack of self-esteem might be identified as “causing” their insecurity. Thus, women would be blamed for the abuse they suffer, and their own personal failing to be “strong”. In cases of intimate partner violence, “[t]he problem which had no name in the 1950s, and which in the 1970s was clearly named as one of men’s power and men’s behaviour, has, by a complicated alchemy, been transformed into women’s unwillingness to use their own power, and their need to increase their self-esteem.”\(^{495}\) According to Goodkind, this message creates “a shift in the location of the problem [violence against women] to be addressed from outside of the self (e.g., patriarchal society) to within the self (e.g., low self-esteem).”\(^{496}\) The message for women is that their insecurity in the private sphere are problems of their own making, implying that if women had higher self-esteem, they would not be as insecure. This is an “empowering” message, however, because all they need to do is “fix” themselves by improving their self-esteem, and then they can – and will – make better choices.\(^{497}\)

\(^{494}\) Goodkind, 397.
\(^{495}\) Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1996, 80.
\(^{496}\) Goodkind, 401.
\(^{497}\) Ibid.
Keenly aware of this critique, I want to be careful in making the argument for women’s empowerment as linked to self-esteem and, consequently, to changes in women’s security. I am not arguing that violence against women is a problem for which women are to blame because they lack the confidence and independence to achieve greater security. In the case of this grassroots organization, the language of “self-esteem” is not being received in isolation (reading self-help books, for example). Rather, “self-esteem” is used as a language for how the newly “discovered” laws and rights make women feel about themselves and about how their bodies should be treated. Counter to an emphasis on the individual, this Guatemalan version of “self” esteem is discussed in a cost-free, highly accessible, workshop in which women discuss their “self” esteem in community. Interestingly, Swanger’s research on a women’s consciousness-raising program in Juarez, Mexico (where femicide first gained international prominence) supports my own findings on how “self-esteem” is used in Latin American contexts. In her view, the Mexican workshops were a way “to fill one of the broken promises of neoliberal globalization” and presented an indirect challenge to “the narrow rules underpinning capitalism that are much more supportive of individual rights than of the practices necessary for sustainable community.”

Supported by my field data, I argue that workshops emphasizing self-esteem (power within) have created a network of support (power with), combining material and ideational resources with a sense of increased agency (power to), producing concrete achievements in women's security. The effect of sharing experiences and discussing national and international laws on violence against women in groups differs from a private therapy, and is more culturally appropriate for the group-based (opposed to individualistic) Guatemalan context. Because one’s self-perception is inextricably linked to their social environment, group discussion occurs in a public space where feelings are reaffirmed and new norms around violence and human rights are created.

Moreover, this grassroots women's group creates role models that seemingly have a notable impact on women participants, while also fostering new, non-violent, relations that are

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essential for women’s long-term recovery. One of the biggest “success stories” to come out of
the shelter is a woman named Lupe and her two-year old daughter. I heard about Lupe from the
two Volunteer Coordinators and from others who work for the organization - everyone
referring to her as a “role model” and an “example of what Nuevos Horizontes is trying to do”. Lupe
arrived at the shelter, fleeing intimate partner violence, when her daughter was just a few
months old. Over the past two years, Lupe attended counseling, put together a “life plan,” and –
setting an example – executed that plan. Living with her daughter in their own apartment, Lupe
now works as a maid during the day and places her daughter in the childcare centre run by
Nuevos Horizontes. I met Lupe and her daughter at the quarterly “birthday party.” When
explained that she is highly regarded by her peers, and used as a “role model” for the women
living at the shelter, she smiled widely. Lupe said that she is thankful to Nuevos Horizontes
because they helped her to feel “strong” and “capable”. She specifically cited her attendance in
the organization’s self-help workshops as an exercise allowing her a “recuperative ability” or the
“power of recovery” (depending on the translation). When I asked how she built this self-
estee, she credited “knowing my value, and discussing with other women that no woman has to
live with violence. I see my daughter and I want her life to be different. But my life had to be
different before hers could be different. Daughters repeat what they see the mother do.”

In her U.S.-based research on intimate partner violence, Mills provides theoretical context
to the process of role-modeling, stressing the importance of support groups. In her words: “The
evidence strongly suggests that a battered woman is more likely to change her life if she is

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499 Corroborating my findings in this Guatemalan program, a separate study of 107 women in a Salvadoran therapy
group for dealing with intimate partner violence were interviewed about the impact of the sessions on their lives.
Interestingly, anguish, fear and sadness were the predominant emotions identified by the women at the beginning of
the sessions, yet, 95% of the participants stated that at the end of the sessions they felt better physically and
emotionally. Furthermore, 94% responded that their home environment had improved, to which they credit
continuous participation in group counseling. In conclusion, the impact survey explains: “The women
interviewed manifested these stories of development of group therapy because these groups have helped them
overcome the traumatic experience of intimate partner violence, primarily by strengthening their sense of self-
estee, which improves family relations. See: ISDEMU, Boletin No. 29, 2008. My translation.
500 These coordinators, who I will refer to as Victoria and Laura, were invaluable to making my research at Nuevos
Horizontes possible.
501 This is an event where everyone connected with Nuevos Horizontes (workers, volunteers, and those living in the
shelter) meet in a park, play games, and share food, including a giant cake for all the women and children who have
had birthdays during the past three months (the cake on my visit is decorated with Spiderman). It is a festive
occasion, and the women living in the shelter are visibly happy to be outside.
502 This depends on the translation of “capacidad de recuperación,” which can mean both ideas.
503 Interview C32.
involved in a non-judgmental peer support group that recognizes connection, not isolation; these groups can help the battered woman make the transition away from the abuse.” In frank, group-based, discussion the difficulties in transitioning out of abusive situations are rarely suppressed. - a truth that crosses contexts, applying to both the American and Central American contexts. Knowing what other women have endured, and overcome, experiences with life-threatening violence allows women to use one another as role models.

In the Guatemalan case, long after women have left the shelter (and in “successful” cases, such as Lupe’s, have moved on to a safer chapter in their lives) the women and children are invited to the organization’s quarterly events. On one hand, these events are important for the women who have “graduated” from the program, such as Lupe, because it maintains the social network that helped them to improve their security. Being around women of the same mindset continues to be important for reinforcing one’s decision to leave an abusive partner. On the other hand, the presence of these women at such events is significant for other, newer, women in the program. Women such as Lupe provide “real life” role models; their success in changing their level of security and ensuring their human rights are no longer violated in their home both inspire and support newcomers to Nuevos Horizontes.

As Mills explains:

state actors need to honor the long-term healing connection over a short-term solution of arresting and prosecuting the batterer. Given the scant evidence that mandatory interventions reduce violence, and the obvious fact that a battered woman's resolution to terminate the abusive relationship is the most enduring hope for her long-term safety, state actors should turn their attention toward the healing strategies that are most likely to alter permanently patterns of violence.  

Nuevos Horizontes fosters exactly these types of “healing strategies,” both within the shelter and in the workshops. In addition to a justice-focused grassroots response to violence against women (offered by the Women’s Police Stations), women’s workshops are a cost-effective grassroots strategy for “making meaning” of human rights in the lives of women. As part of their due diligence in preventing the violation of women’s rights, the state - backed by

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504 Mills, 1999, 602.
505 Ibid, 610. My emphasis.
international donors - must support such peacebuilding projects working to empower women and thus shift traditional gendered power relations.

My research in both the Women’s Police Stations and *Nuevos Horizontes* demonstrates that programs are increasingly (but perhaps unknowingly) taking an empowerment approach to link human rights to greater security for women in their daily lives. As Kabeer emphasizes, and as the case of Nuevos Horizontes shows, an important element of empowerment is self-esteem in that it fosters agency; yet, encouraging women to take responsibility for their security is distinct from shifting the responsibility for violence onto women. In short, workshops such as those in Nuevos Horizontes do not blame women for being victims of violence, but instead help women realize their capacity as agents of security. Let us now turn to the broader, socio-cultural, achievements possible with this combination of resources and agency.

c) Achievements

*Nuevos Horizontes* has two notable achievements in their efforts to empower women. The combination of material and ideational resources creates a secure space where women’s agency is fostered (indicated by increased self-esteem). Two key components of agency are evident: knowledge of the laws themselves and a transformation in one’s subjective "sense of self". To know one has such rights (and what these rights are, exactly) is part of the picture, but to shift one’s self-perception to realize one has the capacity to exercise this right – to self-identify as a “rights bearer” – is also crucial to women’s security. As Sally Merry reminds us, “[t]aking on this new identity requires a social shift of some magnitude. For many abused women, their most important relationship is with their partner […] Her ability to make this change depends on the social support she receives from others.”506 The success of *Nuevos Horizontes* is distinct from the legal approach of the Women's Police Stations because women make this identity shift in relationship with other women who are simultaneously “trying on” a different subjectivity. Even in the "best case" scenarios, whereby women pursue legal action with the support of friends and family and encounter legal professionals who are supportive of women’s rights, many struggle - in isolation - with the meaning of exercising such agency. In *Nuevos Horizontes*, women are

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506 Merry, 2006, 191.
surrounded by a community of real people with whom they can struggle with questions of shifting identity – or adding an additional identity – together.

Legal knowledge and enhanced self-esteem among survivors of intimate partner violence are major components of women’s empowerment in the context of post-conflict Central America. Lupe’s story (the shelter’s key “role model”) supports the argument for rights as an ideational resource that help foster self-esteem. Lupe continued to attend the workshops whenever possible; thus I asked her opinion on how the law may affect women trying to leave relationships characterized by life-threatening violence. “I think it [the law] helps women to believe they are right. For example, I felt confused and sad to leave my husband. My mother-in-law says things like, [the abuse] is not that serious, or that suffering is a cross women bear. These things were in my head. I didn’t feel strong. Having a law is like a voice against those other voices, a powerful voice.”

Keeping in mind the relational method of fostering self-esteem, and its ability to influence women’s security, Nuevos Horizontes programs are very similar to North American feminist “consciousness-raising” groups. Although Nuevos Horizontes’ methods of operation are somewhat context-specific, my research in the women’s support groups reveal patterns of consciousness-raising similar to those present in North America forty years ago. Describing American consciousness-raising (C-R) groups in 1973, Brodsky wrote the following:

The technique of heightening self-awareness by comparing personal experiences was as basic to the continuance and solidarity of the movement as any other tactic. Women found themselves eliciting and freely giving support to other group members who often were asserting themselves as individuals for the first time in their lives. They gained strength from members who confronted others, and they learned to ask for their own individual rights to adopt new roles and express new behaviors.

As in women’s consciousness-raising groups throughout North America, the workshops at Nuevos Horizontes allow women to discuss their feelings about experiencing violence that – in other contexts – is difficult, if not impossible. In line with Brodsky’s writing on the dynamics of C-R groups in the 1970s, “[f]inding that not only are these feelings not abnormal, but common

507 Interview C32.
experiences among other women, can have an almost religious conversion reaction in some women.\textsuperscript{509} This is comparable to \textit{Nuevos Horizontes}, wherein women at all stages of their experience with intimate partner violence participate in one common workshop. Like other popular and effective healing groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, people with similar experiences are brought together to share their stories and feelings in a supportive environment. Women who have been out of violent situations for years with those who have just left violent partners weeks – or even days – before their first meeting. Women who have not left their violent intimate partner are also most welcome at the workshops.

Although a therapeutic process occurs within these groups, in contrast to therapy, consciousness-raising groups are political. This is because “the C-R group starts with the assumption that the environment, rather than intrapsychic dynamics, plays a major role in the difficulties of the individuals.”\textsuperscript{510} Yet, a major difficulty with the groups, writes Brodsky, “comes at a stage when the women try to transfer their new found behaviors outside the group […] C-R group members often find that the group understands, but the outside world does not change to correspond with the groups’ level of awareness.”\textsuperscript{511} The “most crucial, and often the most effective, stage of the group” occurs once these frustrations with the external world have been experienced; in other words, when the newly formed "common sense" located inside the group needs to expand into the “outside” world.

To help define the socio-political aspect of this process, Jennifer Nedelsky's work on communities of judgment is helpful. Nedelsky explains the transformative role of North American consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s:

they transformed the "common sense" of the women who participated. Having a new community in which to base their judgment transformed how each one saw her life and judged its justice, fairness, and satisfaction. In the course of recounting their experiences to other women whose own stories became points of reference, the women’s sense of those experiences changed. And as it did, their individual, and emerging, collective judgments shifted as well. The consciousness-raising groups

\textsuperscript{509} Ibid, 26.  
\textsuperscript{510} Brodsky, 1973, 25.  
\textsuperscript{511} Ibid, 26.
created alternative communities of judgment, whose common sense about women’s roles was no longer that of the mainstream community.512

The alternate community of judgment created in Nuevos Horizontes workshops offers an empirical illustration of Nedelsky’s theoretical work. The material and ideational components of security merge, as “women plan to actively alter the environment in a realistic manner to make it more compatible with the developing growth needs of the members. The direction of the group turns from personal, individual solutions … to some sort of group action.”513 Encouraging a heightened sense of self-esteem links to improved levels of women’s basic security in that women who feel supported in their choice to leave a violent partner are more confident in their choice to create a life free from life-threatening violence.514 In cases where women choose not to leave their partner, some have started satellite discussion groups of women's rights and the Femicide Law amongst their friends and neighbors in their home village. So, even in cases where women’s individual security remains compromised in the private sphere, their participation in Nuevos Horizontes workshops has a public effect on women’s rights and basic security by expanding the new community of judgment and further de-normalizing violence against women.

As Goodkind reminds us: “Feminism, in its myriad forms, has always promoted both individual and societal change, often struggling to resolve tension between the two and make them complementary rather than conflicting.”515 In line with this point, self-esteem levels can rise in relation to one’s participation in an important (new) group in which there is an interpersonal role-model effect, but as women’s agency is fostered, there is also a broader socio-political impact on gendered power relations and patriarchal gender roles. Over the course of two months, I observed Guatemalan women experiencing changes in their self-esteem - changes that had an immediate impact on their individual security, and that gave evidence to a burgeoning community of judgment.

513 Ibid, 27.
514 At least to the extent this is under one’s control, leaving the larger socio-political climate of violence aside.
515 Sarah Goodkind, “You can be anything you want, but you have to believe It: Commercialized Feminism in Gender-Specific Programs for Girls” in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2009, 397-398.
Just as consciousness-raising groups were so essential to enhancing women’s rights and equality in the North American context, the Nuevo Horizontes workshops could have a similarly broad social effect on gendered power relations and roles in the Central American region. The exclusivity Nuevo Horizontes workshops provide to a group of like-minded women with similar experiences is important. With regards to women’s C-R groups in the United States, Nedelsky explains how “the exclusion did serve to expand rather than contract the enlarged mentality available for judging. The exclusion allowed for the recognition of perspectives that had previously been effectively blotted out by the dominant views on women’s roles.”\textsuperscript{516} In Nuevo Horizontes, it is the bounded inclusion of women who have themselves experienced intimate partner violence firsthand, and women working in the name of women’s right to life free from such life-threatening violence, that fosters open discussion and trust within the group. Enhanced by the country’s 2008 Femicide Law, women gain confidence in this “safe space” to raise objections to violence exercised against them and – as did the American women forty years previous – to recognize “perspectives that had previously been effectively blotted out by the dominant views on women’s roles.”\textsuperscript{517}

Women shared evidence of the links between their newly heightened self-esteem and the formation of an alternate community of judgment. Carla, for example, told me this story:

I thought if this [intimate partner violence] is criminal, then I don’t want to live with a criminal. I don’t want to tell my children their father is a criminal. My sister came to live with me and we cleaned up all the bottles [her husband was a heavy drinker] and told him [my husband] to stay with his brother for some time. He’s still there [at his brother’s house]. […]

Sometimes, he calls me a bitch in the street and says I’m having sex with another man. It hurts me. I know this is psychological violence, so he hasn’t stopped breaking the law. I don’t want him in jail, but I don’t want him back in the house either. I like these meetings because the women agree that I’m taking the right decision.\textsuperscript{518}

Carla’s story supports the argument for seeing – empirically – an example of a new community of judgment at work within Nuevo Horizontes. This community of judgment is necessary for women’s security, and is largely grounded in the law’s ability to change the ways in which

\textsuperscript{516} Nedelsky, 2000, 9.
\textsuperscript{517} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{518} Interview C20.
women make decisions in their own lives. In my analysis, the law is less effective as a “legal tool” but acts as an important ideational resource that enables women to think differently about their personal experiences with violence and to, in some cases, empower women to confront these situations differently than before having known and discussed these laws in detail.

The expansion of this alternate community of judgment begins in the program’s workshops, as more women participate, but gradually extends - geographically - to surrounding villages. Volunteer “group leaders” exist in several communities surrounding Xela who run village-level group discussions about femicide and intimate partner violence. They also keep tabs on violence against women in their small communities, as well as other types of inter-family violence (namely, child abuse). Village leaders act as liaisons between Nuevos Horizontes headquarters and women in their home community, communicating with Nuevos Horizontes staff about severe cases of intimate partner violence (that may end in femicide) and by flagging cases of women and children who may be good candidates for the shelter.

Frida, a woman who attended the Nuevos Horizontes workshops at head office and then continues these discussions back in her village with family and neighbors, recounted a comment her niece once made. “[My niece] said that we have signs in our town saying we’ll lynch robbers, but we don’t have any signs that say we’ll lynch men who are abusive.” Frida thought the idea to put up these signs would be “crazy” because “men are never going to lynch their friends, or their brothers!”

As Frida’s niece observed, there are basic widely upheld understandings of justice in terms of property-related crimes but not in terms of violence against women. This recognition demonstrates a distinct shift in thinking by Frida’s niece - that both stealing and intimate partner violence are crimes worth deterring through severe punishment. It also points to challenges for changing the larger social context, in terms of raising awareness about which new laws exist,

519 Interview, C22.
520 Ibid. In several small towns surrounding Xela (and throughout Guatemala) some male shop owners have taken justice into their own hands, posting simple signs outside their doors that read: We lynch anyone who steals. This is largely qualified as ‘vigilante justice’ and formally disparaged by the national police; yet, it is a clear sign of popular frustrations with Guatemala’s widespread impunity and a general example of the challenges in instituting law and order in post-conflict contexts.
which crimes are “worth” public threat of punishment, and the fact that men are the sex largely responsible for implementing justice in several of these small highland villages.

Consistent communication between workshop participants and their local community can, over time, build a broader base of shared common sense in favor of women’s rights and basic security. Another example of a woman networking in her home community is Dolores. In my view, the efforts of Dolores speak to this burgeoning community of judgment in and around Quetzaltenango:

I came to Nuevos Horizontes many months before I started to be a group leader in my own village. Not many women wanted to come all the way to Xela for this meeting. It’s a long trip and they have to sell things in the market […] I feel better after coming to these meetings. I wanted to share that feeling with my friends and neighbours. […] We now have little meetings sometimes and talk about the Femicide law. If one person is having a hard time she talks about it. […] We all understand. When we see her husband in the street we stare at him. […] These discussions help our self-esteem. We help each other.\(^{521}\)

Communication is of utmost importance in helping to shift the dominant "common sense" about norms around violence and human rights in post-conflict Central America. As Nedelsky explains, "success in communication builds a broader base of community, of shared common sense, which, in turn, enhances one’s ability to put oneself in the place of others — with all due attention to their particularity. This then expands one’s capacity to communicate."\(^{522}\) In my analysis, the Nuevos Horizontes workshops were an exercise in creating an alternative community of judgment - an enlargement of the newly shared "common sense" that violence against women was neither "normal" nor acceptable in Guatemalan society. Workshops provide a "safe space" where women can take a perspective different from that of their spouse, family members, and even society at large. In their interviews, workshop participants spoke more of the personal impact of being part of this alternative community of judgment - an increased sense of self-respect, in particular - than of effecting social or political change. Yet, it is my argument that as more and more women participate in such programs, and then communicate their new perspective on women's rights and the use of violence, a broader socio-political project of shifting norms around violence and human rights is at play.

\(^{521}\) Interview C16.
\(^{522}\) Nedelsky, 2000, 22.
For example, each time women like Frida and Dolores leave a workshop at Nuevos Horizontes headquarters and then discuss new perspectives on women’s rights and security with family and friends in their home village, the community of judgment finds potential expansion. Each time a new participant joins the workshop, or a long-time participant brings a curious friend or family member to a meeting, this alternate common sense begins to grow. Each time the employees or volunteers travel to rural areas outside Xela to distribute hard copies of the Femicide Law and conduct ad hoc workshops on women’s rights, the community of judgment further expands. Finally, each year, dozens more women (and men) join the annual demonstrations throughout downtown Xela on International Women’s Day. As I witnessed on March 8th, 2009, the parade walking behind the Nuevos Horizontes banner consisted of approximately forty people, including women, men and children. During the march, I was told this number had increased by about 15 people from the previous year. In a once isolated, war-torn, highly patriarchal mountain region of Guatemala, this annual public demonstration in support of women’s rights provides evidence of an alternate “common sense” about violence against women. Admittedly, this community is small; but, its continued and consistent growth gives reason to claim the Nuevos Horizontes workshops do, in fact, bring resources and agency together to create broader socio-political achievements. Nuevos Horizontes is thus challenging and changing traditional gendered power relations by empowering women on both a personal level (increased self-esteem) and on a public level (many of these women then aspire to shift the dominant common sense about violence and human rights within their families and communities).

Additionally, as more Guatemalan women broaden their perspective on, or commitment to, the role of "woman," "wife," and/or "mother," Nuevos Horizontes workshops also challenge patriarchal gendered roles. I found the women of Nuevos Horizontes to be judging against their community; or, put another way, to be living in overlapping – and often contradictory – communities of judgment. This is a defining feature of communities of judgment, for, as Nedelsky explains, “[i]f we start with the idea that judgment begins as grounded in a local community, we will quickly come to the recognition that most communities are not homogenous. Many contain sub-communities. […] most people in the modern world will be exposed to
multiple and overlapping communities, communities that differ in their ‘common senses’ in at least some respects.”

In this regard, the women’s workshops of Nuevos Horizontes could be thought of as a local or sub-community of judgment. The community of judgment in Nuevos Horizontes overlaps with the “common sense” of Guatemala’s current political and legal community. Recalling that “the very essence of judgment is a claim of agreement, of validity, despite the subjectivity of the judgment” we see how the new Femicide Law provides further validity to the common sense put forth by the women of Nuevos Horizontes. In practice, however, we have seen that continually rising rates of femicide and consistently high levels of intimate partner violence prove the existence of another (patriarchal) “common sense” deeply embedded in the Guatemalan public. Challenged by funding issues, which is a consistent problem throughout the developing world (and particularly notable for projects focused on women), the achievements of Nuevos Horizontes are significant. In this organization, women are working from the grassroots to close the gap between the promise and practice of human rights in a post-conflict context. Cultivating this alternate community of judgment, I argue, is an empirically verifiable and normatively “good” approach to increasing women’s security throughout post-conflict Central America.

In sum, Nuevos Horizontes presents a model of a valuable, and cost-effective, peacebuilding practice that contributes to my feminist conception of positive peace. The grassroots organization uses human rights as “ideational” resources to empower women by fostering self-esteem (agency) in order to produce more secure relations throughout their lives (achievements). In this context, rights act as “hooks” between the international, state, and interpersonal levels of analysis, as rights give women a public claim to their personal sense of self-worth. Nuevos Horizontes’ workshops impart significant legal knowledge and provide women a safe space in which to share their experiences with intimate partner violence with a sympathetic audience. Because these workshops are held in community, feelings of self-respect and autonomy are fostered in a group setting. This group approval from a new community of

523 Nedelsky, 2000, 12.
524 Ibid, 22.
judgment helps close the gap between the “private” and “public” divide to a point where clear demarcation is rendered imperceptible.

3.3 Conclusion

Empowerment – as defined by agency, resources (both material and ideational) and achievements – offers a conceptualization of power that fits with a feminist theoretical approach to peacebuilding. Using Kabeer’s empowerment framework to analyze both the Women’s Police Stations and Nuevos Horizontes, these examples provide a disciplinary “value-add”: conceptualizing power as empowerment is important for the study of peacebuilding and gendered security. Empowerment offers theoretical traction to those studying positive peace and relations of non-violence, as it provides an alternative to traditional IR definitions of power as “power-over” – conceptions that lend themselves to analyses of warfare but are less useful for a comprehensive study of peace. Recall that “the dominant understanding within social sciences has been of power as ‘power over’, whereas the feminist understanding of empowerment should be a dynamic one, which conceptualizes power as a process rather than a particular set of results.”

Empowerment, as a process, thus offers a good fit to reconfiguring dynamic gender relations throughout the parallel process of post-conflict reconstruction.

The physical buildings (police stations and the shelter) and monetary budgets (which pay the salaries of several small staffs, produce posters/fliers/ad campaigns, buy food, clothing and school supplies) are crucial resources for both Women’s Police Stations and Nuevos Horizontes in increasing women’s empowerment. Dependent on these material resources, both projects contribute to enhancing women’s rights and security throughout the region by helping a large number of women who “may be aware of the circumscribed nature of their lives without necessarily knowing what to do about it.” In these two projects, material resources combine with the ideational resource of human rights to foster women’s agency – both for individual women who declare an enhanced feeling of self-esteem, and for women as a community of like-minded “rights-bearers.” In so doing, more individual women attain the tangible achievement of

526 Kabeer, 1994, 228.
living in secure, non-violent private relations. Because women's empowerment changes both the
gendered power relations and gendered roles that disadvantage women and perpetuate their
insecurity, the WPS and Nuevos Horizontes also improve the equality and security enjoyed by
women - as a social group - in the public sphere.
Changing Gendered Roles and Identities: Masculinities, Machismo and Violence against Women

As much as 90% of the post-conflict Central American female population will suffer intimate partner violence in their lifetime. In some cases, improving women's security requires the physical separation of women from their abusive male partners. As a peacebuilding strategy or "best practice," however, the separation of women and men is neither practical nor desirable. Thus, projects addressing the structural violence of patriarchy - namely, the gendered roles and identities that normalize violence against women - are a necessary compliment to those focused on the more immediate security needs of women living in situations of life-threatening violence. One such grassroots effort is Puntos de Encuentro ("Meeting Places" or "Common Ground"), a social media project that self-identifies as a “feminist” organization, with the goal of promoting human rights in post-conflict Central America. Through its programs, Puntos works to challenge the pervasive gendered identity of machismo, and to address the ways in which this definition of masculinity influences patterns of violence against women. Although difficult to quantitatively measure how effective Puntos’ work has been in instigating social change, I present qualitative evidence in support of Puntos as an important peacebuilding project. Using interviews and survey data, this chapter examines the role of men and masculinity in affecting women’s rights and basic security in post-conflict Central America. Using the power of social media to reach a large Central American audience, Puntos is effectively challenging - and changing - the individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviours associated with machismo.

This shift in patriarchal gendered identities and roles is crucial for limiting violence against women. Incorporating storylines about femicide and intimate partner violence into their popular telenovela, Sexto de Sentido (Sixth Sense), Puntos has been effective in communicating, to both men and women, that violence against women is illegal and a violation of human rights. At a more concrete level, these storylines also show individual women and girls the steps to take if they find themselves in situations where their security is compromised in similar ways to those of the telenovela’s characters. In sum, this telenovela is a tool for improving women’s rights and basic security in post-conflict Central America in the following three ways. First, the show
increases public awareness of violence against women as both a crime and a human rights issue. In so doing, *Puntos* aims to effect broader cultural change in challenging the traditional normalization of violence against women. Second, through various storylines about intimate partner violence and homosexuality, the telenovela questions *machismo* as the prevailing conception of “manliness” and, in particular, *machismo*’s links to control over, and violence against, women. Third, one storyline driven by the character, Elena, highlights the resources available to help women and girls in situations of life-threatening violence and provides practical advice for those seeking to increase their security.

To be sure, other peacebuilding scholars have considered the role of men and masculinity in post-war societies. As Pankhurst points out, “[t]he term masculinity is used with increasing frequency in the conflict/post-conflict literature and generally refers to prevailing cultural and social norms about men's behaviour.” So far, however, “‘Masculinity' has a simple explanatory appeal as being something to do with men, as distinct from women. In this context it tends to be talked of in the abstract, in a functionalist way, as if men have no agency; as inevitable; and with little possibility for positive change.” To counter this trend, I present *Puntos* as a baseline example of a peacebuilding project treating young men as agents of positive change. The work of *Puntos* is premised on the fact that men – and particularly young males – are necessary allies of women in building more equitable and secure post-conflict societies. When encouraged to analyze their behaviours and choices, young men and women become important agents for instigating positive socio-cultural changes in post-conflict Central America.

### 4.1 Men, Masculinity and Machismo

In studying gender and security, it is important to study the characteristics of masculinity that affect men’s – often violent – relations with women. In the context of post-conflict Central America, this discussion first requires a definition of some key terms; namely: patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and *machismo*. In a conversation with Carol Cohn (later published in

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528 Ibid.
Signs) Cynthia Enloe made the following remarks on the relationship between patriarchy and masculinity. These remarks set the tone for this section:

Patriarchy is not a sledgehammer being swung around a raving feminist head. It is a tool; it sheds light at the same time as it reveals patterns of causality [...] it means you have to ask about the daily operations of both masculinity and femininity in relationship to each other. It is not men-on top that makes something patriarchal. It’s men who are recognized and claim a certain form of masculinity, for the sake of being more valued, more “serious,” and “the protectors of/and controllers of those people who are less masculine” that makes any organization, any community, any society patriarchal. It’s never automatic; it’s rarely self-perpetuating. It takes daily tending. It takes decisions - even if those are masked as ‘tradition.”

Neither femininity nor masculinity contain any inherent characteristics; rather, as socially constructed identities, both are malleable and multiple. Under the power of patriarchy, however, a certain type of masculinity is fostered as “hegemonic.” To use Enloe’s words, the characteristics associated with this certain form of masculinity require “daily tending” and are highly resistant to challenge. Across the masculinity literature, the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” is a socially constructed cultural ideal of a dominant masculinity operating to subjugate femininity and other devalued masculinities, such as homosexuality. Hegemonic masculinity acts as “a standard against which others are judged – not a set of values of behaviour norms that all men have to comply with or even agree to.” Thus, while “hegemonic” in its reach, this “standard” does not represent all Central American men, nor is it immune to change. As argued by R. W. Connell, “hegemonic masculinity embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy, and that at different times particular groups of men can be challenged and the basis for hegemony changed.”

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532 Pankhurst, 2007, 301.
533 Connell, 2005, 39.
In post-conflict Central America, *machismo* is considered the hegemonic masculinity.\(^{534}\) *Machismo* is a reference used widely on both the streets of Latin America and in scholarship, yet its ability to capture the complexities of masculinity is highly contested.\(^{535}\) Perhaps the most-cited definition of *machismo* comes from Stevens, who labeled it “the cult of virility.”\(^{536}\) Stevens associated this type of masculinity with “the desire to prove sexual potency and male strength through the boastful enforcement of power, aggressiveness toward other men and women, expectation of female submissiveness, and the belief of the superiority of men over women.”\(^{537}\) *Machismo* is thus largely associated with characteristics of “manliness” popular worldwide: power and control.\(^{538}\) Men often assert power as “control over” those less powerful in their lives, such as women and children, but also “effeminate” men, such as homosexuals. This exertion of power and control often manifests as violence that is physical, emotional, and psychological. Socially patterned and/or intentionally organized violence against women in post-conflict Central America is, in part, due to the structural violence of a *machismo* identity that has institutionalized gender inequality within the family, the community, and society at large.\(^{539}\)

\(^{534}\) “Machismo” is certainly not particular to Latin America, since men in other cultures display the same characteristics of masculinity. Furthermore, scholars such as Rafael Ramírez, argue that Latin American ideals of masculinity should not be stereotyped as *machista*, with only negative connotations of male chauvinism, because they also include positive values of responsibility.\(^{535}\) Several Latino scholars writing on masculinity have critiqued the simplicity of the term. For example, Vigoya recognizes that even under the widespread idea of *machismo*, “masculinity is not an essential or static quality but a historical manifestation, a social construction and cultural creation […] It is important to recognize multiple masculinities, but one must also understand the relationship that exists between them and note that gender identities and class or ethnic-racial identities are acquired simultaneously and generate social practices marked by these multiple identities.” See: Mara Viveros Vigoya, “Contemporary Latin American Perspectives on Masculinity” in *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 3, No. 3, January 2001, 245. And, the scholarship of Santiago Bastos examines gender relations in Guatemalan households to find that a “double-system” of masculinity is largely operative. Male behaviour is ambiguous, he argues, because: “On the one hand, the image of manhood is constructed with reference to men's capacity to fulfill their roles as economic providers, thereby obtaining social recognition and the possibility of imposing their authority on women and children in the home. On the other hand, men must present an image of themselves free from social ties, in particular from those with women.” See: Santiago Bastos, “Desborando patrones: El comportamento domestico de los hombres,” in *La Ventana*, Vo. 7, 166-224.


\(^{538}\) The content of *machismo* produces and reinforces a conception of power as "control-over" another. As argued in earlier chapters, this conception of power is antithetical to cultivating a society that protects women's rights, equality and security.

\(^{539}\) Work on masculinities and peacebuilding is relatively new. Based on research in Colombia, Theidon echoes my argument for post-conflict Central America. In her research with former Colombian combatants, Theidon argues...
Yet, the creation and maintenance of patriarchy may have more to do with relations among men, than with inter-sex relations. In *The Gender Knot*, Johnson explains this dynamic as follows:

Perhaps more than anything else, what drives patriarchy as a system – what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression – is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control, to fear other men’s ability to control and harm them, and to identify being in control as both their best defense against loss and humiliation and the surest route to what they need and desire. In this sense, although we usually think of patriarchy in terms of women and men, it is more about what goes on among men. The oppression of women is certainly an important part of patriarchy, but, paradoxically, it may not be the *point* of patriarchy.⁵⁴⁰

If definitions of masculinity are largely performed for, and upheld through, groups of men, then any broad socio-cultural change in masculinity will require men to change their individual attitudes and behaviours (irrespective of what women are doing for, and with, other women). *Puntos*’ focus on young male audiences is a cornerstone of the organization’s effectiveness in improving women's basic security, but also in trying to reduce the widespread "culture of violence" in post-conflict Central America. As demographics show, 35-40% of the Central American population is under the age of 15 years old, combined with over half of the region living below the poverty line; thus, we find a hearty supply of marginalized youth to be (potentially) motivated as recruits for gangs.⁵⁴¹ Male youth are particularly vulnerable to this life of violence: in Guatemala, gang members range in age from 12 to 30⁵⁴², the Salvadoran National Public Security Council (2009) reports the average age for recruitment in MS-13 and M-18 dropping from 14 to 12 years of age, and the U.S. State Department places the recruitment age

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⁵⁴² Data from *Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica* cited in Rodgers and Muggah, 2009, 304.
for these gangs as young as nine.\textsuperscript{543} Efforts to challenge the patriarchal gendered roles that associate males with violence - and to target these gendered identity shifts among the (male) youth population - are particularly salient in cultivating, from the bottom-up, a widespread rights-based culture necessary for liberal peacebuilding. As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime summarizes: “The future of Central America depends on seeing youth as an asset rather than a liability.”\textsuperscript{544}

4.2 Men: Crucial for Women’s Security

“Men must teach each other that real men do not violate or oppress women...”\textsuperscript{545}

\begin{flushright}
~ United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, 2009
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To focus on changing women’s lives at the exclusion of men’s role in gender-based violence will preclude efforts for non-violent gendered relations. Since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the role of men and boys has been highlighted as crucial for gender equality. Seven sections of the declaration highlight the role of males as necessary partners with women in changing gendered power relations.\textsuperscript{546} In a strong statement from the international community, all governments were urged to “emphasize that men must involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality.”\textsuperscript{547} In 2003, the United Nations commissioned a report entitled, The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality; the authors of this report made the following claim: “Research has repeatedly shown that patterns of gender inequality are interwoven with social definitions of masculinity and men's gender identities. To move towards a gender-equal society often requires men and boys to think and act...”

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\textsuperscript{543} Cited in Eric Lemus, “El Salvador: Gangs Recruiting Younger and Younger Members,” in IPS El Salvador, March 28\textsuperscript{th}, 2009. This strategy of ever-younger recruitment is reported in Lemus’ article as integral to both rebuilding the strength of the gangs whose members are in prison after heavy-handed policies of Mano Dura and Mano Super Dura, but also to recruit members who are too young to face legal charges. This undermining of the liberal state, a state that conceptualizes crime-committing children as distinct from their adult counterparts, is yet another challenge posed to the building of justice systems in post-conflict and developing states.
\textsuperscript{545} http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/network.shtml
\textsuperscript{546} These sections addressed the following areas: education and the socialization of children, childcare and housework, sexual health, gender-based violence, and the balancing of work and family responsibilities. See: The Beijing Platform for Action, 1995, paras 40, 72, 83b, 107c, 108e, 120, 179.
\textsuperscript{547} Declaration from Beijing +5, Paragraph 6, 2000.
\end{flushright}
in new ways, to reconsider traditional images of manhood, and to reshape their relationships with women and girls."\footnote{548}

Gendered roles and identities are created and sustained by various inter and intra-sex dynamics. To improve women's rights and basic security in post-conflict contexts thus requires the involvement of men. Yet, “[m]en and boys are most likely to support change towards gender equality when they can see positive benefits for themselves and the people in their lives.”\footnote{549} It is therefore important to show how challenging machismo as the hegemonic masculinity of post-conflict Central America is in the best interest of men and boys. A good place to start is with Roger Lancaster's ethnographic account of Nicaraguan men found in his insightful book, \textit{Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua}. Lancaster persuasively explains how machismo is detrimental to the health of males:

Although a boy’s training is to some extent a training for privilege, it also actively solicits the hallmark traits of machismo. Thus, the taunting and provocation of young boys begins while they are still babies and continues in some form or other throughout childhood. [...] Any show of sensitivity, weakness, reticence – or whatever else is judged to be a feminine characteristic – is swiftly identified and ridiculed [...] Justifiably, the regimen of this socialization might be called “brutal”; its whole purpose is to induce a certain insensitivity – and irresponsibility – in men. \textit{That the fate of so many Nicaraguan men is alcoholism, broken health, loneliness, and early death is a direct consequence of this atomizing and isolating socialization.}\footnote{550}

This “paradox of male privilege”\footnote{551} creates a situation where an oppressive system like patriarchy can exist even though the dominant group is perhaps suffering more costs than enjoying benefits. The patriarchal dividend that favors males in certain terms simultaneously

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{549}{Connell, 2003, 4.}
\footnote{550}{Roger N. Lancaster, \textit{Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua}, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992, 42-43. My emphasis. Furthermore, the work of other scholars and activists echo these comments. For example, Michael Kaufman, (who started the Canadian White Ribbon Campaign for men to show their support for stopping violence against women after the horrific Montreal massacre at Ecole Polytechnique) has written that “men’s violence is not simply a result of men’s individual and social power and …the sense of entitlement to that power. My work has also analysed what I call ‘men’s contradictory experiences of power’. The very way that men have constructed social and individual power is the source of enormous fear, isolation, and pain for men themselves.” See: Michael Kaufman, “Working with men and boys to challenge sexism and end men’s violence” in \textit{Changing Violent Men}, 2000, 214.}
\footnote{551}{Johnson, 171-172.}
\end{footnotesize}
leaves many males disempowered on other fronts, particularly those related to emotional
development, self-esteem and self-control.

Further exploring the personal factors that encourage men to engage in violent behaviors is
a fundamental aspect of a gendered peace; yet these “personal” factors are interconnected with
structural conditions that are socio-cultural, political and economic. During a United Nations
conference on gender and peacebuilding, Lumsden reminded participants of the positive roles
men can – and do – play in peace processes. “While it is true that men are responsible for most
family violence, as well as for most of the destruction of war, they are also builders of homes and
cities, political systems and cultures.” It is therefore essential, Lumsden continued, that a
“discussion of ‘masculinities’ in the context of a culture of peace needs to pay attention to both
the personal and the situational factors that prevent men ‘building,’ so that their energies become
destructive.”

In terms of specific situational factors that prevent men from “building” in post-conflict
Central America, most obvious are the political and economic disenfranchisement of the (very
poor) majority. I use the following interview excerpts with Nicaraguan men as a representative
sample of these “situational” factors. In speaking with various Nicaraguan men about the
challenges in their daily lives, many confirm Lancaster’s finding that “life is hard,” and attribute
this general disaffection to few job opportunities, entrenched cycles of poverty, and a common
view of the Revolution as a failure (best symbolized by President Daniel Ortega’s conservatism
and corruption). For example, Carlos – a Sandinista Revolutionary or “guerrero” – explained
that his generation also had few economic opportunities, but men had a “purpose” in fighting.
Although Carlos is disappointed with the Revolution’s outcome (citing a dismal economy and
President Ortega’s hypocritical and corrupt politics) he notices that today’s young Nicaraguan

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552 Malvern Lumsden, “Engendering peace: creative arts approaches to transforming domestic and communal
553 Ibid, 257.
554 Interviews E22, E27; E30. Also, this was a point of view generally expressed throughout conversations with
many males (ages 18 to 57) during my six months of living in Nicaragua (July, 2008; January, 2009; October 2009-
February 2010).
males have felt “no purpose, nothing to fight for,” and seem to demonstrate “little energy, very little hope…it’s very sad.”

An example of this disillusionment is Alvaro, an industrious twenty-eight year old who has taught himself English as well as the basics of computer programming. Despite his skills, and the effort he has put into searching for full-time employment, he cannot secure a job. “I want to work in tourism,” he tells me, because “I can give tours in English, I can answer the phone, I also know computers for reservations [sic].” However, as a teenager, Alvaro drank heavily, sniffed glue (a typical form of drug use among poor Nicaraguan youth) and spent time in jail for theft; this reputation has proved difficult to shake – particularly in a small Nicaraguan town. The few jobs, he explains, “go to people who know people…it’s between families.” Plus, he says, “I was a bad boy – very crazy.” So, despite making positive changes in his life, such as regularly attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and educating himself, “no one here trusts me.” Alvaro has decided that if he cannot find a job in the next month, he will leave the country and search for work in Costa Rica.

Luis, another young man from the same Alcoholics Anonymous meeting as Alvaro, approaches his life from a different perspective. “Alvaro has a bad attitude,” Luis declares, “He’s depressed and has problems with anger. Sometimes he still drinks.” Luis, on the other hand, claims that he has been sober for nearly three years and is currently enrolled in business courses at a University in Managua. He, too, wants to work in the tourism industry because, “[Nicaragua] will be so popular after Survivor is on television in the United States.” When I comment that he seems optimistic about his future prospects, Luis tells me that he knows a secret: “If things don’t get better,” he says, “we’re going to have another Revolution. We want to overthrow the Ortegistas!”

555 Interview E28.
556 Interview E32.
557 Interview E33.
558 A season of the popular American reality television show, Survivor, was shooting on a Nicaraguan island during my field work in 2009.
559 Interview E33. “Ortegistas” is a common term used for those who support and/or work for the Ortega government. Despite strong opposition to his rule, charges of corruption, and a general disillusionment with his Presidency, Daniel Ortega easily won re-election in November 2011.
A return to war as the “solution” to men’s lack of political and economic agency, is obviously not good for peace. Men’s complaints about these structural limitations, however, are understandable. Nicaragua remains the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere (second to post-earthquake Haiti) and job opportunities remain elusive. In a country of about 5 million people, about half a million Nicaraguans have moved to Costa Rica in search of work.\footnote{Since 1990, an additional 230,000 Nicaraguans have emigrated to the United States.} In these circumstances, even the “positive” characteristics of machismo - such as the strong sense of responsibility to provide for one’s family - can undermine the ability of many men to consider themselves as “manly.”\footnote{“Novela, Novela,” A documentary created and distributed by Puntos de Encuentro, 2007.} Thus, it is easy to see how the structural conditions connect to the personal feelings of frustration, low self-esteem, and anger felt by many Central American males.

Widespread male disempowerment causes real potential for violent relationships, because, “[a]ccording to disempowerment theory, those who feel inadequate or lacking self-efficiency are at risk of using unconventional means of power assertion, including violence […] These individuals overcompensate by controlling persons they perceive threatening or who expose their insecurities.”\footnote{United States Census Bureau Report. June 2004.} Moreover, because machismo discourages men from expressing emotion or vulnerability in public (particularly in front of other males) this can result in an explosion of violent behavior in the place where they do feel powerful – their private home. Describing the “petty tyranny” of male domination in the household, Meg Luxton explains how the “family provides an arena for the expression of needs and emotions not considered legitimate elsewhere. It is one of the only places where men feel safe enough to express emotions. As the

dams break, the flood pours out on women and children.” Although difficult to know the exact motives behind violence against women, the high rates of intimate partner violence - and the many cases in which a history of intimate partner violence precedes a murder by an intimate partner - are perhaps part of this phenomenon, as Central American males take out their lack of “public” agency in the “private” places their power position is clear.

While structural constraints on men’s lives are important contextually, they are, at once, “easy to blame” and “hard to change”. However, one thing that males can take responsibility for, and change rather immediately, is their behavior. And, although changing one’s attitudes and beliefs can take more time, in comparison with changing the structural economic conditions of one’s country or challenging the political elite, these are avenues of change that are far more accessible to the average Central American citizen. Therefore, I dedicate this chapter to studying a grassroots organization that presents a construction of manliness distinct from that encouraged by patriarchal gender roles and identities. I argue that this organization's programs and activities offer males an increased sense of agency, as individuals reflect upon, re-create, and perform their masculine identity in ways that defy a connection between power and violence. Importantly, these changes are in the individual interest of males and females as well as in the communal interest of fostering a robust culture of human rights.

4.3 Effectiveness of Media

Buvinic and his colleagues identify a relationship between media and the exercise of violence in society. In their view, media “influences the level of violence by providing often prized models of violent behavior that viewers learn and emulate; these, in turn, tend to stimulate and fuel aggressive behavior. Repeated exposure to rewarded violence in the media is consistently associated with increased incidence of aggression, especially in children. The violent media is a situational trigger for aggressive behavior.” Yet, the media can also be a situational trigger for non-violent behaviour. As Patricia Poppe, Chief of the Latin American Division at The Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs, summarizes,

565 To “perform” one’s gendered identity is an idea famously coined by Judith Butler.
566 Buvinic et. al., 1999, 12.
“the media can be an effective way to inform society about progress in changing the relationships between couples and society at large. In the area of domestic violence, communication programs can help build new social norms, to reverse the attitude that such violence is somehow normal and to be tolerated by family members and society as a whole.”

While difficult to establish exactly how much social change can be attributed to media, its use has been endorsed by international institutions, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, as an effective tool for raising awareness about intimate partner violence. For example, the 2009 Report of the Secretary General, “Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women,” states:

The prevention and eventual elimination of violence against women requires changing attitudes and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality between men and women, as well as those that condone violence […] A significant array of communications tools and media are now available from United Nations entities, including the Department of Public Information, for use in awareness-raising efforts around the globe. United Nations Television produced short films on the subjects of domestic violence legislation in Austria, so-called 'honour' crimes in Turkey, domestic violence in Nepal, the prevalence of rape in Burundi, and female infanticide in India.

Instead of short films, a more widely accessible type of media in Latin America is the ever-popular telenovela (soap opera). Telenovelas mostly depict characters in romantic relationships and focus on melodrama. Telenovelas have a long history of incorporating intimate partner violence in their storylines; for example, when a man slaps his wife for infidelity, it is part of the script as a legitimate reaction to such an indiscretion. In fact, a study of Colombian television programs found that telenovelas had the greatest number of violent scenes (averaging 315 scenes of violence per day) compared to all other television shows, including cartoons and news broadcasts. As this study reminds us: “Soap operas (telenovelas) have an especially powerful

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568 United Nations General Assembly, “Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women,” Report of the Secretary-General, 17 July 2009, A/64/151, 15. This report was submitted pursuant to the UN General Assembly’s resolution 63/155 on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. The information provided in this report is mainly derived from the United Nations bodies, funds and programmes and the specialized agencies.
impact. Not only are they the most violent form of programming, but no programs are more widely watched in Latin America.”

The recent introduction of the “social soap” has made headway in some Latin American countries and some have taken on storylines of intimate partner violence. Distinct from traditional telenovelas, a “social soap” incorporates intimate partner violence as a social problem – making it central to the storyline – rather than a reasonable behavior acted out when one's “manhood” has been insulted. Of course, a “social soap” cannot change male behavior and/or improve women’s security on its own. Yet, as Poppe argues, the effective elimination of a problem such as intimate partner violence requires the actions of lawmakers, police officers, and shelter workers, in collaboration with broader-reach social media. In her words: “Collaborative work with the media, particularly through drama such as television serials, is indispensable. The media has the potential to ‘model’ norms and specific behavior among members of a target group, such as women living with violence, or aggressors who require negotiating skills to solve conflicts with their partners.”

4.4 Puntos de Encuentro

“In Central America, traditional gender norms, scarce economic and educational opportunities, diminishing social services, restrictive laws and norms on sex education and contraceptive methods, and overwhelming sexual and family violence mean that women and young people often lack the information, support, and decision-making power that would enable them to navigate their lives with equal rights and opportunities.”

~ Puntos de Encuentro Website

Keeping in mind the security problems associated with machismo, as well as arguments for the effectiveness of media in changing social attitudes, I now describe the work of Puntos de Encuentro (“Meeting Places” or “Common Ground”) and argue for its value in improving women’s security in post-conflict Central America. Puntos de Encuentro (Puntos hereafter) is a Nicaraguan-based, non-profit organization started by a group of self-identified “feminist” women at the end of the Sandinista Revolution. Antonia, a long-time employee of the

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570 Ibid, 194.
572 The organization’s website can be found at: http://www.puntos.org.ni/English/about.php
organization, explained how the Revolution was a politically-charged time for Nicaraguan women, whereby they “had space to talk and question many things…particularly power and authoritarian relationships in society.” The brutal Somoza regime, followed by an American sponsored civil war – all within a deeply Catholic country – meant that “all Nicaraguan women had some experience with feeling subservient.” The founders of Puntos believed women and youth were the most in need of change and also the most likely to make changes in their lives. As Antonia pointed out, “for social changes to last for generations, we need young people to change their attitudes and then to teach this new belief of respect for differences to their children.”

Thus, in 1991, Puntos officially began its work as an organization founded to “analyze and change unequal relations” and to “promote women’s and young people’s human rights.” According to Andrea Lynch, the organization’s long-term institutional goal is “building a culture of human rights and gender and generational equity that values diversity, rejects discrimination and violence, and enables people to build and maintain healthy, mutually respectful relationships.” Employing a strategy of combining education and entertainment (sometimes referred to as “edutainment”), Puntos employs a multi-faceted approach that uses television, radio, billboards, and public speaking engagements to “encourage a reframing of social issues in both public and private discourse.” The point of using various media outlets to communicate social messages is to reinforce alternative viewpoint as legitimate, and to repeat messages of equality and non-violence so often, and in so many public places, that these ideas become part of the mainstream. All of the organization’s programs are dedicated to “inspiring young people and women to make and carry out decisions about the things that affect them and to create new avenues for personal and collective action against discrimination and violence.” As Amy Bank, co-creator of the organization's television show, explained:

573 Interview, F20.
574 Ibid.
578 http://www.puntos.org.ni/English/about.php
Essentially, what we’re trying to do as an organization is take radical ideas about human rights, about democracy, about respect for differences, about the right to live without violence…quite radical ideas, and put them out into the mainstream. I mean, totally fly in the face of traditional, conservative values and what most media continues to promote and reinforce, and say: You may think these are alternative ideas but they’re not marginal. We’re going to have them all over the place so that it becomes a mainstream idea. 579

While conducting on-site interviews at Puntos, I was given several impressive documents from the organization to inform my research. One of the documents contained the results from a three-year study conducted by a partnership between the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, several independent consultants, and Puntos. 580 The study includes a survey from 2005, wherein 3,366 Nicaraguan youth (ages 14-25) were asked about “the constraining and enabling forces in their lives, in terms of family, relationships and community,” as well as “to what degree were they able to put their knowledge and beliefs into practice in their intimate relationships”. 581 The respondents were 45% male and 55% female, and from diverse parts of the country. I will briefly highlight some of these findings, as they capture Nicaraguan youth’s current beliefs and practices in terms of violence against women. In so doing, these survey results provide a sense of the audience to which Puntos is speaking.

First, throughout the report, violence against women is repeatedly described as “an expression of machismo.” Generally, respondents were highly critical of intimate partner violence, with 99% of females and 97% of males declaring it “unacceptable” for a man to use violence against his wife if she “disobeyed him” or “refused to have sex with him.” 582 However, 9% of young men and 6% of young women said it was “acceptable” for a man to hit his wife if he suspected she was unfaithful; if the woman’s infidelity was confirmed, the numbers jumped to 17% of young men (versus 7% of young women) declaring violence acceptable. 583

Second, while 72% of respondents correctly identified a service provider for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, only 61% could identify a service provider for intimate

580 The consultants were from the Horizons Project/Population Council, PATH, and the Center for Demographic and Health Research in Leon, Nicaragua.
581 Approximately 35% of the Nicaraguan population is between the ages of 10 and 24.
583 Ibid.
partner violence. When disaggregated by sex, females were 44% more likely than males to know a centre with services related to violence; most mentioned the Women’s Police Stations or a women’s non-governmental organization, such as IXCHEN or AMNALE.\textsuperscript{584} Notably, almost no one mentioned a hospital or health center. Also, despite knowing these service centres exist, young people are more likely to address intimate partner violence privately; nearly 70% of young males and females answered that, if they knew of a friend experiencing violence at home, they would “give her advice” rather than “go to a Women’s Police Station.”

Third, survey results for questions related to condom use and sexual behavior among Nicaraguan youth, reflected that “cultural and social norms based around ‘machismo’ and constructions of gender and sexuality have historically promoted unsafe sexual practices, such as multiple sexual partners among men and a lack of negotiating capacity among women.”\textsuperscript{585} These findings are important for my research on intimate partner violence because machismo’s “culture of virility” combined with unsafe sex practices, presents a “double threat” to women’s security. Perhaps most obviously, it makes women vulnerable to life-threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

In addition, low condom use increases the chances of pregnancy. Adolescent pregnancy rates are particularly noteworthy, as babies born to young women ages 13-19 represent approximately one-fourth of all births in Nicaragua. Gender norms related to sexuality and intimate relationships make it difficult for women to negotiate safe-sex practices with their partner, but younger girls have an even harder time doing so. Young women surveyed report low rates of condom use in both casual sexual encounters and in stable unions. Moreover, female respondents largely feel “uncomfortable or ashamed” when buying condoms, and thus are reluctant to do so.\textsuperscript{586} Finally, in a society that offers moralistic, rather than medically accurate, sexual education, it is particularly hard for sexually active unmarried women to seek information

\textsuperscript{584} Some of the most popular women’s NGOs in Nicaragua are IXCHEN, AMNALAE, the Collectivo Mujeres in Matagalpa, and RED de Mujeres Contra la Violencia.


\textsuperscript{586} Lynch, 2008, 28. Specifically, 77% of young women in Esteli and 78% of women in Leon reported feeling this way. Only 40% of females in the small town of Juigalpa claimed to feel uncomfortable and ashamed; these same respondents were most likely to answer that they didn’t buy condoms because “I don’t need them.”
about how to prevent pregnancy, obtain contraceptives from their doctor, or seek any kind of sexual or reproductive health care.\footnote{Ibid, 17.} In the context of Nicaraguan and El Salvador, where there is a total ban on abortion, the ability of women to negotiate “safe" sex is of utmost importance.

\textit{Puntos} was founded by a group of women “with a vision of feminism and human rights being much more integrated into daily life.”\footnote{Interview F20.} After the organization had been running for five years, it was evident that “conservative forces were taking hold in the country and were pushing very traditional and fundamentalist values for women and for young people.”\footnote{Ibid.} Mass media was determined to be the best way to “counteract the Conservative wave”\footnote{Ibid.} by communicating the organization’s vision to Nicaraguans, targeting youth in particular. In general, \textit{Puntos} aims to catalyze greater interpersonal communication on a number of sensitive issues, including gender equity, intimate partner violence, HIV prevention and discrimination. In evaluating the impact of \textit{Puntos}, Lynch concludes that “any intervention that leads to greater equity in gender norms and/or to interpersonal and intimate partner communication also contributes to creating better conditions to prevent violence”\footnote{Lynch, 2008, 40.}  Elisa, a member of the organization, nicely echoed this view, so I use her words to conclude this section:

\begin{quote}
We [at \textit{Puntos}] can’t say: ‘Think this!’ or ‘Believe this!’ or ‘Talk about this with your friends!’ But we can create new opportunities for dialogue and debate about topics declared taboo. We can start the discussion on our radio show or the television program. Or we put the message in a poster. All sorts of things to help open people’s minds. Then, Nicaraguans can talk about these issues in their relationships, in their families, or with friends at school. Talking in the open, and analysing issues like violence against women or abortion or homosexuals [sic], is really the first step to creating bigger social changes. We can’t just stop violence or discrimination…it’s a process. It’s about communication.\footnote{Interview Z06.}
\end{quote}
4.5 The Telenovela as an Effective Peacebuilding Tool

“Men cannot change if there are no blueprints for change.”

~ bell hooks

In 2000, Puntos de Encuentro launched a campaign, Somos Differentes, Somos Iguales (We are Different, We are Equal). The heart of this campaign became the “social soap” Sexto Sentido (Spanish for Sixth Sense). Unlike any telenovela on Central American television, this series engaged topics that are widely considered taboo, such as intimate partner violence, sexual and reproductive health, and homosexuality. In 2001, Sexto Sentido first aired in Nicaragua and quickly rose to the most watched show in its timeslot; by 2005, out of the 26 telenovelas aired in the country, Sexto Sentido was the 6th most watched and the only one produced in Nicaragua with an all-Nicarguan cast. None of this is surprising considering the widespread popularity of television in Nicaragua. As the show's co-creator, Amy Banks, put it: "Nicaragua is television country [...] people have televisions before they have running water or a floor."

Official statistics published by the Horizons Program on the telenovela’s “impact” demonstrate that, among a 3099 person sample, Nicaraguans’ familiarity with Sexto Sentido increased from 41% in 2003 to 91% in 2005. Out of the 91% of Nicaraguans familiar with the show, 59% had watched at least two of the three previous seasons of Sexto Sentido “almost always” or “occasionally,” and were thus categorized as having “greater exposure” to the social issues put forth on the show. In addition, “half of those who watched Sexto Sentido TV said they did so with other people, with a large proportion saying they did so with ‘the whole

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594 The relationship between machismo and unsafe sexual activity is summarized in one of the organization’s publications. In their words: “cultural and social norms based around ‘machismo’ and constructions of gender and sexuality have historically promoted unsafe sexual practices, such as multiple sexual partners among men and a lack of negotiating capacity among women.” See: Puntos de Encuentro, CIDS/UNAN Leon, PATH, Horizons Program, “Catalyzing Personal and Social Change Around Gender, Sexuality, and HIV: Impact Evaluation of Puntos de Encuentro’s Communication Strategy in Nicaragua,” 2008, 3.
596 Amy Bank, Sexto Sentido co-creator. Interview recorded and copied to DVD by Puntos de Encuentro in 2007.
597 Solorzano et al., 2008, 23.
Due to its popularity, the show is now broadcast across Central America, various parts of Mexico and has been picked up by Centroamérica TV in the United States.

The show itself revolves around six main characters, three young men and three young women, who are from different parts of Nicaragua (thus representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds) but find themselves living in the same neighbourhood of the country’s capital, Managua. Interviews with the telenovela’s creators, Virginia Lacayo and Amy Bank, shed light on both the reasons why, and the context in which, the show was developed. In Lacayo’s words:

> With the show, we’re trying to model certain kinds of ways of being to show young people different ways of analyzing their own lives and of making decisions in their own lives. And, of assuming responsibility for the decisions they make. And that’s what it means to take control of their own lives. \(^{(600)}\)

In my research, I found that Sexto Sentido’s popularity is mainly due to the fact that it deals with issues of violence and masculinity in contexts that are relational, and that mirror the real lives of Central American youth. Various storylines show characters who are involved in relationships with intimate partners, friends and family members; these relations are often characterized by conflict and, most importantly, conflict resolution. According to Solorzano and his colleagues, the telenovela is an effective means of communication for these messages because it allows “intimate topics” such as sexuality and violence “to be introduced into the home efficiently and in a culturally sensitive way.”\(^{(601)}\) Furthermore, this format “promotes identification with characters and storylines, which can impress upon viewers the consequences of different attitudes and actions. These ‘parasocial’ relationships between viewers and characters promote self-efficacy, and can instil viewers with confidence in their ability to enact behaviors they have seen modelled by fictional characters.”\(^{(602)}\)

As Sexto Sentido co-creator Lacayo reasons, because Nicaraguans love telenovelas from abroad (most telenovelas are produced in South America or Mexico) they would, ostensibly, identify even more so with a show created by, and for, Nicaraguans:

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599 Ibid, 25.
600 I quote Lacayo from an interview recorded in 2007. Although I did not conduct this interview, or others on the recording, the organization provided me with this DVD compilation to use in my thesis as many of the interviews with the producers and cast of Sexto Sentido are highly relevant. Cited hereafter as: Puntos, DVD, 2007.
601 Solorzano et al., 2008, 8.
602 Ibid.
They [Nicaraguan viewers] talk to the characters, they love them, they hate them….They believe the characters and they often try to imitate them. So we [the creators of Sexto Sentido] thought if this is the reaction from imported telenovelas, imagine what would happen with one from right here!\textsuperscript{603}

A breakdown of the first season’s “social content” is as follows: \textit{Puntos} produced a total of 35 episodes of \textit{Sexto Sentido}, 34 of which dealt with gender roles, and 5 of these specifically addressed \textit{machismo}. 18 episodes addressed violence; in 8 of these 18 shows, intimate partner violence was highlighted through the storyline of Elena and her mother (which I discuss in detail below). Interestingly, connected to the last chapter’s emphasis on self-esteem in \textit{Nuevos Horizontes}, half of the \textit{Sexto Sentido} episodes (17) emphasized self-esteem. When I asked Isla, a writer for the show, why the language of “self-esteem” (\textit{autoestima}) was specifically incorporated in so many scripts, she answered that writers wanted to show how this is the foundation for Central American youth “to make good decisions and manage risks” in their lives.\textsuperscript{604} She was explicit that self-esteem will play a key role in changing the powerlessness and general disaffection that youth feel in present-day Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{605}

In their efforts to address the issue of intimate partner violence and violence against children, the telenovela used the storyline of “Elena”. As Lacoyo explained:

What we wanted to do was to deal with the family violence story over the course of a number of episodes. To show the real process. The process of first denying the problem of violence…the conflict of how you can love someone who hurts you. And, that despite this love, we needed to show that it’s vital for the two people who are victims [Elena and her mother] to form an alliance. To be strong together, to be able to confront such a difficult and painful situation.\textsuperscript{606}

In an eight-episode arc, the storyline for Elena and her parents unfolds as follows. First, we see Elena showing signs of abuse by her father and confessing to her friend, Gabriel, that her father is violent towards herself and her mother. Over the next two episodes, whenever Gabriel tries to talk with Elena about the violence in her home, Elena defends her father and blames herself for not being more obedient. In figuring out how to deal with the father/husband’s

\textsuperscript{603} Puntos, 2007.
\textsuperscript{604} Interview Z03.
\textsuperscript{605} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{606} Puntos, 2007.
violence, Elena and her mother are conflicted between love for the father/husband and a need for protection from his continued abuse. After a particularly intense episode of abuse, where the father is physically violent toward both his daughter and his wife, Elena displays a new resolve to take action. In this fictional scene, Elena approaches her mother, saying, "It [intimate partner violence] is not your fault. Not yours, not the kids, not mine. It’s his [her father’s] responsibility." The actress playing Elena’s mother then says a line that, as my research in the Women’s Police Stations demonstrated, addresses the concerns of many real Central American women facing a similar situation: "If we throw him in jail, it will just be worse. Who’s going to give you money for school? For our food? For everything? And when he gets out? He could come back and kill us, Elena!"

Elena then receives counseling – a serious conversation in which she is informed of Nicaragua’s new Law against Intra-Familial Violence, or “Law 230”. Addressing the main concern of Elena’s mother (not wanting to put her husband in jail) this law allows judges to order the abuser to stay away from the family; essentially, the law has a component to allow the imposition of “restraining orders” on abusive partners. As demonstrated throughout Chapter Three, women have many fears about charging their intimate partner with abuse, and – in spite of its drawbacks – this “middle course” for limiting violence (but avoiding the potential wrath of putting their partner in jail) does appeal to many Central American women.

* Sexto Sentido* used Elena’s story to let Nicaraguans know that the state had passed a new law identifying intimate partner violence as illegal and offering various forms of legal protection (such as harsh sentences for offenders, and the aforementioned restraining orders). At the end of the eighth, and final, episode in this storyline, a woman from the *Women’s Network Against Violence* (the leading Nicaraguan NGO on the issue) comes on the television, explaining to viewers that if they are in a situation similar to Elena’s, then look for “this pamphlet” - at which point, she holds up an information booklet on Law 230 and the locations of Women’s Police Stations. Notably, the booklet has a large photo of Ana Sofia [Elena] on the cover, which further

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607 Of course, in countries where restraining orders have long been possible, there is much literature criticizing their effectiveness at limiting intimate partner violence. Nonetheless, I argue that it is better to have this option “on the books” in Nicaraguan law, than not.
cements the association Nicaraguans are believed to make between the telenovela and their own realities. To coincide with the story-arc of Elena, *Puntos* then worked with local women’s organizations to distribute 50,000 copies of the “Elena” pamphlet to women and girls across the country.

On the show, Elena and her mother do press charges against the father/husband under Law 230, and he receives a court-order to stay away from them. Under Nicaraguan law, in spite of the restraining order, he is supposed to continue to help financially support his daughter. In later episodes, however, it is made clear that he does not send any money; consequently, Elena’s mother leaves Elena to live alone in Managua, while she jumps into a pick-up truck filled with Nicaraguan men planning to cross the border and search for work in Costa Rica. In my view, the story of Elena and her mother is truly demonstrative of Nicaraguan reality – there is no “sugar coating” of their experience, nor is there a “happy ending” that would send a moralistic message (confronting violence is the “right” choice, and your life will improve upon doing so). What happens in the script stays in line with the reality of most single mothers in post-conflict states; in spite of making the choice to increase their physical security, Elena and her mother remain economically insecure.

One of the main reasons the *Sexto Sentido* plotlines remain grounded in the realities of post-conflict Central America, and avoid slipping into the romantic fantasies characteristic of other Latino telenovelas, is that it is guided by the socio-political mission of Puntos, and that the show is truly a Nicaraguan creation. Everyone who works on the show – as actors, writers, and crew members – are Nicaraguan. In an effort to keep the show realistic for young people and to closely mirror the realities of viewer’s lives, the actors often advise the scriptwriters, or, in some cases, the actors write their own scripts. This is particularly the case when an actor has endured a situation in their own life that is similar to what their character is going through on the show. Elena’s story is an example of this; Ana Sofia, the actress who plays the character “Elena,” recounted her personal experience with violence in her family. As she described:

I like my character and I like that *Puntos* is dealing with this issue [intra-family violence] because there are lots of girls who are living with violence like I did. We’ve been working on it…my mom, my brothers and sisters, and I. We’ve been working to deal with violence.
My mom was the one who got me involved with this stuff in the first place. So that’s a big step, no? In many ways I’ve gotten over some of this stuff...the problem of violence. But, in other ways, sometimes it’s hard when it [her character’s storyline] reminds you of things. The memories. It’s not so much the exact situation, sometimes it’s just a tiny word.

I think it's going to be really important to a lot of girls to see Elena on TV and realize what they're going through is not normal...it’s called violence and you have to get out of that situation.608

When asked for an example of the show overlapping with her own memories of violence, Ana Sofia referred to a particular scene:

When [my character] Elena is going up the steps and there’s her dad and he says, ‘If you don’t like my rules, get out of here.’ I said to [co-creator] Virginia [Lacayo], ‘Ouch! That hurt!’ because I’ve been told the same thing. And it hurts a lot.609

Ana Sofia’s real-life mother, Juanita, recounted her own experience with intimate partner violence, and the ways in which she has tried to help her daughter “break the cycle” of abuse:

Yeah, I went through my own experience with violence and getting involved in the movement and getting my daughter involved was so that she’d learn other things, other choices. So she’d know how to defend herself, stand up for herself. So, in the future, she wouldn’t have to live through the same experience that I lived.610

Keeping the “Elena” story as close to women’s real lives as possible, one of the scriptwriters, Erika, has been a member of the Women’s Network Against Violence since she was 15 years old. Erika describes being part of the Network as beneficial, because it “has let me see with my own eyes all kinds of cases of violence, and get to know what goes on inside these women – why they sometimes stay in violent situations.”611 Erika sees the importance of using her experience working in the Network’s office and writing for Sexto Sentido as closely intertwined. In her words:

In a medium as important as television, I’m able to join together who I am as a young woman and who I am as a member of the Network. And we’re fighting, in

609 Ibid.
611 Interview, Z03.
both places [the NGO and the telenovela] so that each day, more and more women know about the Law 230.\textsuperscript{612}

In addition to presenting images of “strong” women who use the law to confront violence, the telenovela may be particularly effective at challenging *machismo* because it presents images of thoughtful, emotional men who grapple with questions of identity and who deal with conflict through dialogue opposed to violence. The most significant intra-male relationship on the telenovela is the friendship between Angel and Eddy. Angel is a homosexual male, but his best friend Eddy is unaware of Angel's sexual orientation until the sixth season of the show. In season six, Angel reveals his homosexuality to his friends and family, bringing masculinity, sexuality and patriarchal gendered identities into the spotlight. The way in which the storyline unfolds, over the course of numerous episodes, is rather formulaic. Eddy is first surprised to learn his best friend is gay, then he is in denial (telling Angel that he's probably just "confused"). When Angel introduces Eddy to his new boyfriend, Eddy is rude and makes several homophobic comments. Eventually, however, Eddy learns the error of his ways - Angel is his best friend and a good person, regardless of his sexual orientation. The discriminatory nature of Eddy's homophobia is also made clear, and - in line with the show's values of tolerance, equality and human rights - Eddy has a change of heart and the friendship survives.

While this storyline is important in and of itself, also interesting is the way in which the actor who plays Eddy, Rene Javier Blanco Ruiz, wrote large parts of his own script, based on his own struggle to accept homosexuality. Ruiz describes himself as a "perfectionist" and loves writing ideas for the show; when a camera crew followed him for a day, they filmed boxes full of script ideas and dialogue that he had written and stored in his bedroom at home. Speaking on "Eddy's" struggle with homophobia, Ruiz said that among his friends and family there was intense discrimination against homosexuals. Ruiz's older brothers (both of whom fought in the 1979-80 war) were described by the actor as "very macho guys" that he "idolized."\textsuperscript{613} Being cast in the telenovela was a "life-changing experience" for Ruiz, as questions of masculinity - as an identity widely linked to sexuality and violent behaviour - were continuously part of his character's storylines. In his own words:

\textsuperscript{612} Interview Z03.  
\textsuperscript{613} Interview K17.
I was a bit of a hypocrite for a while. I was playing this character who accepted his best friend was gay, but in my life I wasn't convinced that I would do the same thing...react the same way. I wrote out so many of my feelings about this. The contradictions and the struggle to accept gay people. If I'm being honest, I am still not one-hundred percent sure that I would have a best friend that was gay but I realize that is not because I don't like gay people but because I would be worried that people would think that I am gay. Why does that matter to me? I still don't have the answer. But, I do know that my prejudices towards gay people have disappeared.

When we tour at the schools, a lot of boys tell me that watching Eddy struggle to accept his friend's homosexuality is very sincere. I like to hear that because I wrote most of Eddy's lines based on my personal feelings about homosexuality and how my opinions changed over time.614

Ivo Rosales, who plays Angel, is proud of his role as the first main character on Nicaraguan television who is gay and who is "not there to be ridiculed."615 In various sub-plots on the telenovela, Angel is discriminated against based on his sexual orientation. These stories provide examples of the ways in which patriarchal gender roles lead to the infringement of male's rights within the public sphere. In the private sphere of Angel and Eddy's friendship, however, it is important that Angel gains the respect, and keeps the friendship, of the "cool guy" Eddy. This emphasis on intra-male private relations, and shifts in private attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour, model a sincere friendship between males. Through dialogue and sharing of their emotions, two young males discuss the common fears behind homophobia - particularly the disruption of the traditional conception of "masculine" identity within Central American society. Again, I emphasize that much of this dialogue between the characters was written by the young male actors, in an effort to make the show believable to its audience; yet, also noteworthy, is how this public expression of their own fears and frustrations with strict roles and "codes" of masculine identity has served as an important self-reflective exercise in the lives of these two Nicaraguan males.

Through the show's platform, these male role models (as fictional characters on the telenovela, but also as real men who tour schools in campaigns associated with the show's effort to promote the organization's message of tolerance and human rights among youth) may affect thousands of young Central American boys who may be hyper-sensitive to cultural messaging.

614 Ibid.
about manliness because they lack male role models in their real lives. This argument is best put forth in Nancy Chodorow’s influential *The Reproduction of Mothering*, in which she argues that father-absent families often cause young boys to suffer conflicts about their masculinity. In Chodorow’s words, “Sociologically, boys in father-absent and normally father-remote families develop a sense of what it is to be masculine through identification with cultural images of masculinity and men chosen as masculine models.”616 The relevance of popular media and cultural input is, therefore, highly charged in father-absent families. Unfortunately, father-absent families are pervasive (and ever-increasing) throughout Central America, as thousands of fathers continually migrate to either Costa Rica or North America in search of better economic opportunities than those offered by their post-conflict home countries.617

In order to get a sense of the show’s qualitative impact on Nicaraguan youth, I conducted interviews with students on the University campus in Managua, as well as in the small town of Esteli. In total, I spoke with 17 young adults, and my findings confirm the popularity of *Sexto Sentido* TV as well as the corresponding call-in radio show (*Sexto Sentido Radio*) where young people call in to discuss issues raised on the show. All but one of the students with whom I spoke had watched the telenovela “a bunch of times.” Furthermore, all 16 students identified the importance of the show’s themes and thought the show was “good for Nicaraguans” and promoted “positive social changes.” Already having a sense of the show’s popularity, I was more interested in what young adults would say about the show’s impact over time. When I asked if watching the show had, in any way, affected their own beliefs or behaviours, 13 (spontaneously) mentioned the show changing their attitude about, and acceptance of, homosexual men. When I asked if they recalled the story of Elena and family violence, most (11) said “yes.” As I probed for further details about how this storyline, in particular, affected them, I received the following responses.

616 Chodorow, 1999 (2nd ed.), 176.
617 At least 11% of Nicaraguan households have at least one family member living abroad. Most typically, this person is a young male (20-40 years old), with children, who resides in either Costa Rica or the United States full-time, or for seasonal work opportunities. An estimated 10% (400,000 - 600,000) of the Costa Rican population is made up of Nicaraguan migrants. See: Vargas, Juan Carlos. "Nicaraguans in Costa Rica and the United States: Data from Ethnic Surveys". *California Center for Population Research*; "Background Note: Costa Rica; People". *U.S. State Department*. 200
Gabriela, a twenty year-old student, explains that, “the violence that Elena and her mother suffered, yeah, I think it’s the kind of thing that is so common.” I ask if she knows anyone in her own life that has experienced similar situation of violence. Gabriela responds, “I know friends and neighbours who have these problems with their father, their boyfriend. It’s a very intense thing to live with.” When I ask if she thinks that a television show can make a difference in people’s real lives, she equivocates. At one point, she says, “Yes, for sure. A lot of women and girls didn’t know about that law and it’s a law that protects us!” Yet, a bit later in our conversation, Gabriela points out that “it’s hard to change the machista culture…I don’t think a television program is going to make a lot of men stop being violent. I think they do it in the moment and then they regret it and apologize.”

Angela, a nineteen year-old woman, brought up Sexto Sentido Radio, the radio show that accompanies the telenovela. She remembers how “a lot of people were calling into the show to talk about the topic [violence against women]”. Angela also enjoys reading La Boletina, the magazine created by Puntos and distributed with the help of women’s groups. Like the radio program, this magazine addresses social issues using articles and poetry, and acts as the print-media compliment to the television and radio components of the organization. Notably, La Boletina is the most widely distributed magazine in the country. From her own experience and from listening to people call into the radio show, Angela thinks that “a lot of violence happens because guys are always suspicious of women.” And because “when boys get hit by their father, they go and hit their girlfriend to make themselves feel better, feel stronger.” The work of Puntos “is very important,” Angela says, “because so many women see that and don’t know what to do.”

One young man of twenty-two years of age, Juan, felt that the telenovela effectively communicated the idea to viewers that violence against women is illegal. He described how many men in Nicaragua keep their wives and daughters “on a short leash” and he thought this was similar to how Elena’s father treated his wife and daughter on the show. When I asked Juan

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618 Interview Z25.
619 Interview Z20.
if he thought there was a change in these attitudes and behaviours amongst his generation, he used a very common Spanish saying: “Poco a poco” (which translates to “little by little”).

Miguel, a twenty-one year old male, asked me “why so many people are curious about men right now.” I told him that I’m researching violence against women, so I wanted to ask viewers of Sexto Sentido their opinion on how the show dealt with that issue. Miguel thinks “violence against women is a very serious problem in Nicaragua,” but he also wishes that more people talked about violence against boys. His own father was violent towards “everyone in our house – not just my mother and my sisters.” He describes his father as “drinking a lot – especially on days he got paid” and then, when his mother would ask for the money, they would “get in a fight that would turn my father crazy.” Miguel says he would “never hit a woman, never.” But, for him, this attitude is “not thanks to a television program” but due to his own experience with the trauma of violence. “[Sexto Sentido] is doing a good thing by getting the issue of family violence in the open,” Miguel says, “but each family is going to have to go through their own process…and it’s a trauma to the body and the mind. It’s important to have people who can help kids in this situation. The problem is that, like, half the country’s kids are probably suffering beatings.”

As we talk more, he tells me that a different organization (from Puntos) was on campus a while ago encouraging males to complete a survey to win a chance to meet Dayana Mendoza, Miss Universe 2008. He explained that the survey was asking men to identify which characteristics they associate with “being a man”. In my research, I later discover the organization administering this campaign is PASMO (an organization focused on the prevention of HIV/AIDS and gay rights) and, upon visiting their headquarters in Managua, I obtained a copy of the survey, “Not All Men are the Same,” as well as promotional material with a picture of Miss Universe 2008 and the caption “Miss Universe is looking for real men” (see Appendix 4).

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620 Interview Z12.  
621 Interview Z13.  
622 Ibid.
*Puntos* also granted me access to videos of their school tour called “We Need to Be Able to Talk,” run by the cast of *Sexto Sentido*. The purpose of these speaking engagements is to bring the actors off the television sets and into a face-to-face dialogue with Nicaraguan youth. These speaking engagements are important to create an interactive dynamic between the actors and the audience, opposed to the one-way communication permitted by television. These speaking tours are recorded by *Puntos* so the organization can both spread awareness of its key issues (violence, abortion, HIV/AIDS, and homosexuality), and keep abreast of current attitudes and beliefs held by their target audience. The meetings begin in a large room full of Nicaraguan girls and boys ranging in age from 9 to 16. The cast of the show first explains a bit about *Puntos*, asking how many people are already familiar with the show *Sexto Sentido* (many hands go up), and then they all watch a few special episodes together. Afterwards, a discussion of the themes takes place, with the telenovela’s actors helping to facilitate by sharing their experiences on the show and their real life encounters with these same issues.

The tour I saw on video was targeted, thematically, at gendered power relations and how these affect sexual violence and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). During a scene where a young girl is sexually abused by her grandfather, the camera pans several girls in the school audience who were crying. When the show is over and discussion begins, one of the girls in the audience (about 13 years old) says that, “We must remember that boys are a lot hornier than girls.” A young man, of about the same age, responds: “I don’t agree. In both cases (pregnancy or the contraction of STIs), it’s both their fault.” Another young man has a different view: “When a guy’s going to get laid, nothing can stop him, he wants it.” A girl, about 14 years old, quickly responds, denouncing men’s sexual forcefulness: “They do it because of machismo, not because they want it, but to prove they’re men.” When discussing the grandfather’s sexual abuse and the decision of the victimized girl to tell her mother about the incident, a girl of about 14 or 15 years old says the message of the show is that, “We shouldn’t keep our mouth shut, even if they are family.” Then, a teacher at the school adds a point from her own experience: “Violence starts from a very young age you see, maybe in school, they look at a girl, and I know a lot of
boys who are studying here, sometimes they grab a girl and force her to kiss them. I think that’s where it all starts – the violence against women.”

Although a relatively small, random, sample of Nicaraguan youth, this set of responses support claims of the telenovela’s effectiveness. My baseline findings on violence against women corroborate those of Weinberg, who analysed Sexto Sentido in terms of its ability to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS in Nicaragua. In his 2006 publication, he argues that “Sexto Sentido appears to have been widely recognized as a useful and relevant tool for reflection and debates around issues of power, domination and control in social relations.” As Weinberg rightly summarizes of the program, “The messages aim to create alternatives to mainstream social norms, attitudes to power and control, and models of behaviour.”

To sum-up, there is no direct cause-and-effect relationship between the storylines on the telenovela Sexto Sentido and immediate, widespread social changes in machismo attitudes, beliefs in gender equality, and/or non-violent behaviors. Nonetheless, in my analysis, Sexto Sentido does present a good example of how a “social soap” can raise awareness about violence against women as both a crime and a human rights issue in a post-conflict society. In Nicaragua, the show used the “Elena” storyline to highlight the resources available to help women and girls in situations of life-threatening violence and provided practical advice on their accompanying radio show, for those seeking to increase their security.

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623 All of these quotes are taken from the recording called, “On Tour in Nicaragua,” Puntos de Encuentro, DVD, 2007.
625 Ibid, 44.
4.6 Conclusion

Although males constitute about 50% of post-conflict populations, masculinity affects 100% of gendered power relations. As argued in this chapter, the hegemonic masculinity of machismo, and its particular propensity to violent behavior in the family, is being challenged through the multifaceted social media organization Puntos de Encuentro. Using a feminist approach to its messages of non-discrimination, respect for differences, and non-violence, the organization’s popular telenovela, Sexto Sentido, is encouraging young males to (re)define masculinity as men who protect women not by controlling them (keeping them “on a short leash” as one interviewee described) but by supporting women’s equality and by exercising self-control and non-violence in their own relationships.

Throughout mainstream peacebuilding literature, the need for an open media and – in particular – the ability for public dissent is cited as integral to building the liberal democratic societies to which post-conflict states aspire. An analysis of Puntos as a peacebuilding project is important in its effect on women’s security and human rights, and also points to the successes and challenges faced by a self-identified “feminist” media outlet in a highly patriarchal post-conflict context.

To conclude this chapter, I cite these pointed remarks by “masculinity” expert, R.W. Connell:

It is not practical to ask all men to engage in revolutionary personal change. Nor is it necessary, before a dynamic of social change can begin. The core of gender reform is setting up processes of change that will transform unequal gender relations [...] 'Step by step’...can achieve major change, provided the change process keeps going. Given the diversity of masculinities, and the diversity of social situations, change will happen at different paces in different men's lives.

In my assessment, grassroots feminist initiatives such as Puntos de Encuentro and its popular telenovela, Sexto Sentido, are important ‘step by step’ measures working to achieve major changes in gendered roles - and thus relations - throughout post-conflict Central America. Without attention to the male experience of gendered roles and identities - and the consequent behaviors - the process of women’s securitization will remain incomplete. Moreover, considering the “paradox” of patriarchy, the destabilization of machismo as post-conflict Central America’s “hegemonic masculinity” is in

626 Interview Z13.
men’s best interest. Although the structural conditions affecting men’s lives in post-conflict Central America are difficult to change, and often leave people feeling disaffected and without agency, men do have total control over their own attitudes and behaviors. Thus, socio-cultural influences, such as popular television programs, can act as a catalyst for changing the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of *machismo* - as associated with control over, and violence against, women - and can also play an important role in lessening the widespread, "epidemic," levels of male-on-male violence throughout the region. As Pankhurst writes, “certain types of masculinities (in the sense of preferred and celebrated identities, behaviours, and characteristics) do emerge in different societies at key moments,” citing “the fast and dramatic change that can occur in war and post-war contexts.” If media can effectively seize this post-war opportunity for “fast and dramatic change” by encouraging a post-conflict society to engage with different ways of being a “man” (ones that do not condone violence against women), and different ways of being a “woman” (ones that encourage confronting - and thus de-normalizing - violence), then there is reason to be optimistic about the possibility of such programs exercising a positive influence on women’s rights and basic security.

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Concluding Remarks

War's end presents a unique opportunity for a state to reconstruct its social, cultural, economic and political landscape to promote long-term peace. Yet, in this fragile time of transition, there is also danger that a state might regress into widespread internal conflict. To avoid – or to at least mitigate – this threat, peacebuilding processes are often geared towards fostering public order. Mediating violence between the individuals and groups that are most threatening to state stability is of utmost importance in achieving a negative peace. Under the rubric of "liberal peacebuilding," conflicts related to power-sharing are to be resolved through democratic political processes and judicial institutions, competition over capital and resources is to be resolved through an open, free-market, economy, and the fresh ink of post-war Constitutions promises justice and equality by institutionalizing national respect for international human rights.

However, as demonstrated by the case of post-conflict Central America, even in the most "successful" cases of liberal peacebuilding, the promise to cultivate a strong human rights regime remains elusive. In the post-conflict peacebuilding phase, a “gap” between the promise and practice of human rights undermines the security of all citizens; this gap is particularly problematic for women, as they often face distinct and disturbing types of socially patterned violence. Women's vulnerability to violence in the aftermath of conflict has been increasingly recognized by a number of sources, from feminist scholars to the United Nations Security Council.\(^{630}\) Nonetheless, the extent to which women suffer life-threatening rights violations in the private sphere has yet to be adequately incorporated into theories and practices of peacebuilding.

Most significantly, my dissertation provides empirical evidence to help build upon the conceptions of positive peace set out by feminist scholars such as Brock-Utne, Pankhurst and

Tickner. From a feminist perspective, peace requires limiting gender-based violence; projects that help limit femicide and intimate partner violence are therefore necessary to post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Socially patterned and/or intentionally organized violence against women occurs in both the public and private sphere and results from gendered power relations and gendered roles that disadvantage women and perpetuates women's insecurity. In response, a feminist conception of positive peace encourages scholars to include private relations as an important site of security research and emphasizes the role of grassroots actors in being well-positioned to translate women's universal human rights in a way that is contextually-sensitive.

My empirical findings also help bolster the theoretical work of (the mostly feminist) scholars interested in empowerment. Focused on grassroots actors, my research reveals how these projects are well-positioned to address the "root" causes of gender-based violence, identified as patriarchal gendered power relations and gendered roles/identities that sustain violence against women. Working at the community-level, grassroots projects are able to identify women's immediate and long-term security needs, and to respond in creative, contextually-sensitive ways. As illustrated in Chapters Three and Four, projects that empower women through a combination of resources (material and ideational), agency, and achievements are slowly shifting gendered power relations at both the interpersonal and socio-cultural levels. Women's empowerment also helps to disturb the patriarchal "script" of traditional gendered identities/roles that associate femininity with weakness/subservience and that emphasize women's role as nurturing, loyal wives and mothers to the detriment of their personal, human security.

Grassroots projects are in direct contact with survivors of intimate partner violence, providing necessary material resources (shelter, food, clothing) as well as translating ideational resources (laws and rights) into on-the-ground changes in women's lives. In bringing together survivors of intimate partner violence, the WPS and Nuevos Horizontes challenge the isolation often experienced by women in abusive relationships. Empowering women, the programs and resources offered by grassroots projects help raise women's consciousness about their rights (power within) in order to help women make real changes in their level of security (power to leave an abusive partner, for example). In workshops, survivors of intimate partner violence discuss human rights, and over time, these discussions create an ever-larger group of like-minded women (power with) who judge practices of violence differently (i.e. as unacceptable) than
traditional socio-cultural norms dictate. In this process of empowerment, individual women become agents of change, increasing their security within the private sphere. As the community of citizens denouncing violence against women and calling for gender equality expands, women (as a social group) increase their security within the public sphere. In tandem with empowering women, projects such as Puntos, are challenging prevalent patriarchal gendered roles/identities that identify males as "heads" of their household (i.e. private sphere relational dynamics) and that associate masculinity with aggressive and controlling behaviour. By challenging patriarchal power distributions and gendered identities/roles from the "bottom-up", my findings offer some baseline examples of how grassroots initiatives can improve women's security and, consequently, strengthen the rights-based culture necessary for positive peace.

In addition to supporting a rights-based culture in post-conflict states, I argue that grassroots initiatives are also well-positioned to foster the values and practices of care among post-conflict populations. A care-based society is integral for human security, argues Robinson, because it is through caring for one another that human life is sustained; thus, "responsibilities of care are the most basic substance of morality, as well as the most basic activity of citizenship." Looking at peacebuilding through the lens of feminist care ethics, relations within a post-conflict context must be non-violent, but also care-full. Grassroots projects that challenge patriarchal power distributions and gendered roles are - in my view - the key players in feminists' efforts to make peacebuilding "about building and rebuilding relationships to ensure that adequate care is given and received." At the grassroots level, people are giving and receiving care in face-to-face relationships with other people; the relational nature of human existence is, therefore, obvious.

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631 I qualify this process of changing gendered power relations as non-linear and very challenging. For example, "backlash" against women's gains in the public sphere has been noted as a major challenge facing women's equality and basic security. Backlash can occur in both over, violent, forms but also in more subtly oppressive ways; it is thus a process that occurs in a variety of contexts where women are trying to change gendered power imbalances (and not something particular to post-war societies). On the phenomenon of "backlash" see: Donna Pankhurst, "Post-War Backlash Violence against Women: What Can "Masculinity" Explain?", Gendered Peace: Women's Struggles for Post-War Justice and Reconciliation, London: Routledge, 2007; Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991.


633 Ibid, 118.
While the articulation of women's right to basic security must be universal, the ways in which women are able to enhance their security will depend on the particular contexts of the households and communities in which they are situated. Entrenching women's rights and basic security from the "bottom-up" will be a slow-going, micro-level, process; its benefits, however, cannot be understated. At the international and state-level, human rights may provide us with a mere "shopping list" of necessary conditions of human flourishing; at the grassroots level, however, rights offer important ideational traction in the "hearts and minds" of women. From my baseline research, it seems that rights can have real impact on women's security by influencing women's self-esteem and presenting a focal point upon which alternate communities of judgment (that condemn violence against women) can form - and expand. In sum, rights are far more than a universally-available "shopping list" - when their diffusion is analyzed from the "bottom-up," women's rights have played a part in challenging dominant ideologies and norms, including hegemonic forms of masculinity. In sum, micro-level shifts in reconstructing more equal, secure, and caring relations between people in post-conflict societies is one way to reconcile the "universal blanket" of international human rights with the diverse and particular relational contexts in which women's security becomes a real, lived experience.

Building on these ideas, the findings of my dissertation also suggest important policy implications. Recognizing the empirical significance of grassroots activities in the effort to cultivate women’s rights and basic security leads to a prescriptive argument: International institutions such as the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, and other external actors involved in peacebuilding processes, should ensure such (feminist) grassroots projects are widely available and well-funded. Using the concept of "due diligence," the international community should also maintain strict oversight on progress made by post-conflict states in efforts to investigate, punish and - importantly - prevent human rights violations in the private sphere. My field research supports the (widely accepted) point that a legal, "top-down," response to violence against women is necessary for assuring women's rights and basic security. In trying to build order and justice into a post-conflict society, laws serve the important functions of deterring

634 Robinson, 2008,
635 Robinson contends that "when dominant approaches to human rights are played out in the political arena - as they always are - they rarely provide an alternative discourse or normative orientation through which to challenge dominant ideologies and norms, including neoliberalism and hegemonic forms of masculinity" (2008, 176).
individuals from committing violence and punishing those who do. Ideally, criminal investigations should be executed without sexism (or other forms of discrimination) and by well-trained professionalism. However, due to resource limitations faced by police forces and prison systems, as well as the fact that women are largely reluctant to use the law against their abusive partners, preventative measures for gender-based violence are crucial.

As demonstrated in my empirical chapters, Women's Police Stations, *Nuevos Horizontes*, and the "social soap", *Sexto Sentido*, all have a preventative element to their work. In different ways, each project uses international human rights and national-level (post-war) laws to prevent future acts of gender-based violence, and to promote new relations of non-violence between men and women in both the public and private spheres. The growing presence of Women's Police Stations throughout Nicaragua gives physical, institutional, form to women's rights and basic security. The dedication of material and human resources makes a clear statement in the public sphere that private violence against women is now considered a serious crime; the mere creation of the WPS has likely prevented some instances of intimate partner violence and femicide. At *Nuevos Horizontes*, a policy of non-violence in the shelter aims to teach children (and their mothers) to resolve conflict without resorting to violence; the larger effect, ideally, is to prevent inter-generational use of violence in the private sphere. The organization's workshops also serve a preventative function - by empowering women (as individuals and as a group), their program challenges the gendered power relations and gendered identities that have long-sustained violence against women. Reinforcing the ideational power of rights and laws, many women attending the workshops come to include "rights-bearer" as part of their identity. As this community of like-minded citizens grows, violence against women is de-normalized and denounced at a broader, socio-cultural, level, thus reinforcing women's rights and basic security. The telenovela, *Sexto Sentido*, helps to further enlarge this new community of judgment, encompassing viewers across the entire region (as well as Latino communities in parts of the United States). The work of this social soap is also largely "preventative," as the show's popularity among Central American youth inspires hope that, among this next generation, women's rights and basic security in both the public and private spheres will be better assured.
Yet, power relations and gendered identities play out differently depending on a state's historical, religious, and cultural context. Despite the universal problem of gender-based violence and the universal availability of human rights, the best ways to translate rights into a meaningful way for women will require context-sensitive strategies. If mainstream peacebuilding operations were to follow my prescriptive advice and include a feminist conception of positive peace as part of their "vision" for post-conflict reconstruction, then the UN Peacebuilding Commission and other external donors would need to make a concerted effort to support grassroots projects trying to challenge and change patriarchal power relations and gendered roles/identities. However, this policy prescription raises a number of follow-up questions, such as: How should donors choose which grassroots efforts to support in any given post-conflict context? On what criteria should donors evaluate, and then compare, the success of the projects they do support? How do we "measure" levels of equality or care within a given society?

While recognizing that a "discourse of paternalistic caring is particularly dangerous in the context of peacebuilding, where societies and their members are usually dislocated, hurt and vulnerable," these same vulnerable groups need (and welcome) resources. When resources are channeled directly to grassroots initiatives working to empower women, then external actors' behaviour can also be understood as "caring" for abused women in post-conflict settings. International aid will always be a relationship fraught with inequalities, but it need not be one laden with paternalism. By channeling resources to those institutions and organizations that empower women within highly patriarchal, post-conflict states, external donors can help disturb (rather than reinforce) the strength of the socio-cultural context in which women find their human security continually compromised.

Moreover, external donors should channel resources based on the institution's (or organization's) commitment to recognizing and fostering caring practices among the post-conflict population. Peacebuilding projects that "teach men to care" - and thereby challenge the link between masculinity and violence that is so prevalent in societies where males are fresh off the "killing field" - should, perhaps, be a top priority. As Robinson explains: "If men, by and large, don't care, the explanation for this resides not only in the 'invisibility' of reproductive labor, and certainly not with the characters of most individual men, but with 'cultures' in which

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636 Robinson, 2011, 120.
hegemonic masculinity is characterized by autonomy, rationality, discipline, physical strength and aggression."\textsuperscript{637}

Nowhere is this type of masculinity more prevalent than in societies that are both highly patriarchal and steeped in a culture of violence - in other words, most states currently trying to rebuild after protracted wars or civil conflict. Should donors therefore be primed to expect different results based on the context of each post-war society? Will the data be qualitative (based on the reasoning I put forth in Chapter One) or are there ways in which we can quantitatively "measure" changes in gendered power and identity? These are just some of the challenging questions that arise from trying to implement the feminist conception of positive peace that I have put forth. Clearly, the need for more empirical research is great.

Fortunately, constructivists are calling for more context-sensitive, empirical research. The recent "practice turn" in International Relations, as advocated by Adler and Pouliot, claims the frontier of IR research rests with scholarship that improves our understanding of how world politics operates, in practice. In their words, "practice forces us to engage with the relationship between agency and the social and natural environments, with both material and discursive factors, and with the simultaneous processes of stability and change. In fact, the concept of practice is valuable precisely because it also takes us ‘outside of the text’."\textsuperscript{638} Emphasis within practice-driven IR research "may be put on generative relationships, that is, instances or episodes of formative interactions, which, due to either material or ideational reasons, or both, facilitate the emergence of a new practice."\textsuperscript{639} Whereas the public institutionalization of women's rights and basic security is evident, its diffusion as a practice is limited. In part, this is because the "institution" within which women's rights and basic security is most often threatened is the "private" institution of the family. Within the “practice” frame, women's rights and security in the private sphere could assume a more prominent place on the IR research agenda.

IR's “practice turn” also plays nicely into concepts used in the foregoing chapters of this dissertation. Overlapping with Nedelsky's "communities of judgement," Adler and Pouliot discuss "communities of practice." In their words: “A community of practice is a configuration

\textsuperscript{637} Robinson, 2008, 178-79.
\textsuperscript{639} Ibid, 24-25.
of a domain of knowledge that constitutes like-mindedness, a community of people that creates the social fabric of learning, and a shared practice that embodies the knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains. "640 Grassroots organizations, such as those presented in the Central American case, could easily be viewed as “communities of practice” for they encompass "the conscious and discursive dimensions, the actual doing of social change, but also the social space where structure and agency overlap and where knowledge, power, and community intersect."641

As a contribution to constructivism, the foregoing chapters help move forward those analyses focused on the importance of ideas and identities in shaping relations of violence. Constructivists have thus far explored the role of ethnic identity as it relates to violence, but have thus far excluded gendered relations from their analyses. 642 My findings illustrate how grassroots actors are key players in (re)constructing gendered identities in ways that contribute to (or prevent) women's rights and basic security. Perhaps the greatest benefit from using this framing for my own future research is that it allows for scholars of feminism, security studies, peacebuilding, and constructivism to converge around the "fertile focal point" of practice. 643 In so doing, this may bring more attention to the gendered nature of security and to relations in the private sphere - both of which remain marginalized topics of study within the discipline.

Using "practices" as the theoretical research frame is only a part of how we can better understand the ways in which women's rights and basic security become entrenched in the social fabric of post-conflict contexts. Three areas of future research are, in my view, of particular importance. First, as the efforts of Puntos show, the targeting of youth is of great value in grassroots efforts to change power distributions and identities that are gendered. There is a burgeoning literature on the links between youth, identity politics and violence 644; yet, there is

640 Adler and Pouliot, 18.
641 Ibid.
643 Adler and Pouliot emphasize that practice-driven research is not "purely" of one theoretical school, but rather acts as a "fertile focal point" around which the various theoretical camps in IR could engage with one another. As the authors summarize: "All in all, taking international practices seriously not only suggests a myriad of new and important research questions, but in doing so it also fosters the much-needed interparadigmatic conversations that bridge entrenched dichotomies in social theory." 31.
Building on the findings in Chapter Four, much more could be learned by interviewing those young Central Americans who have watched Sexto Sentido over the past six years. Data on gendered identity - and its relation to violent or non-violent behavior - could be collected and then disaggregated based on sex, age, urban vs. rural, nationality, and the number of episodes watched (commitment to the show). To evaluate the "impact" of this social soap, data would need to be compared to a sample of non-viewers and intervening variables identified. More follow-up research should also be done on the ways in which school visits from the telenovela's cast reinforce the show's "pro" human rights message and/or further expand the show's audience.

A second area of research requiring more empirical study is the way in which grassroots efforts aimed at improving women's rights and security concurrently affect the broader "culture of violence". In the case of post-conflict Central America, homicide rates are the highest in the world and 9 out of 10 of these homicide victims are male. Violent relations among gangs, between gangs and civilians, and between state operatives and gang members, have all served to cultivate an intense climate of insecurity in the public sphere. The ways in which machismo identity plays into such violence - and the ways in which changes in masculinity may improve men's right to "life, liberty and security" - are very important questions. Moreover, we need to better understand the ways in which violence, but also rights and security, "flow" between the public and private spheres. More research on masculinity, and male's experiences with violence in the private sphere, would shed light on this. For example, take the case of a Central American boy who grows up in a house characterized by private violence. In his teen years, he becomes a gang member who enacts male-on-male violence in the public sphere, then, in his private adult relations, repeats patterns of private abuse toward his own wife and children. This flow of violence between the private and public spheres is a common problem. As Cruz’s explains: “To many gang members,
the violence they experience on the streets during urban gang wars differs little from the violence they lived with on a daily basis in their homes, at the hands of their own parents. The difference is that on the streets they can respond to aggression with violence, whereas at home they cannot." 646

In post-conflict contexts, where institutions are weak and a rights-based culture in its nascent stage, violence becomes a "competent performance" that is practiced in both private and in public. However, just as norms of violence "travel" between the public and private spheres, so do norms of non-violence (rights, security). In Eisler's view, people learn about human rights first and foremost in the private relations of their families; thus, "it is only when we begin to apply a single standard to human rights violations, whether they occur in our intimate or international relations, that we see how the distinction between the public and private spheres has prevented the application of human rights standards to the most formative and fundamental human relations." 647 Future research must include a deeper investigation of the ways in which changes in patriarchal gendered roles and identities may also have positive consequences for men's security.

In my dissertation, women's self-esteem featured prominently as a factor influencing security levels; my findings from Guatemala on the links between empowerment, self-esteem, and improvements in women's rights and security have recently been corroborated with a study of Nicaraguan women. 648 As an important compliment to these women's experiences, the low

648 Mariano Salazar, Ulf Högberg, Eliette Valladares, Ann Öhman, “The Supportive Process for Ending Intimate partner violence After Pregnancy: The Experience of Nicaraguan Women,” Violence Against Women, November 2012, 18:1257-1278. The authors use grounded theory to conclude that many Nicaraguan mothers exposed to intimate partner violence during pregnancy eventually acted to protect their children and themselves. These Nicaraguan women "experienced ending abuse as an empowerment process characterized by a cognitive change in women’s attitudes toward partner abuse and the emergence of help-seeking strategies that lead to ending violence with or without ending the relationship." Similar to my findings in Nuevos Horizontes, this process was facilitated by a supportive environment that challenged abusive behaviors. The authors conclude that "although environmental changes can facilitate ending abuse, Nicaragua’s public institutions must be strengthened to reach women in need."
self-esteem of males has been cited as an underlying cause of violent behavior. Although favoured in terms of patriarchal gendered power distributions, Central American males (as individuals and as a group) may not feel a sense of agency. Because male behavior has a fundamental effect on the robustness of human rights and security in post-conflict contexts, the paradoxes of male identity and men's experience of power(lessness) require further attention as related to theories of positive peace and practices of post-conflict reconstruction.

These two avenues of research build upon the findings of this dissertation, and are meant to be done by re-visiting the field of post-conflict Central America. The third research program necessary to develop, and improve upon, my feminist conception of positive peace, is to ask my research question in other post-war contexts. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights cites women's right to "life, liberty and security" as universal; yet, we know that violence against women is a global problem and that women are particularly vulnerable in post-conflict contexts. To date, feminists have expressed much concern about the entrenchment of women's rights and equality but have little baseline empirical data on the contextual subtleties about how - and why - women's rights are violated in different ways and for different reasons. In every context, grassroots actors are attuned to these variances; thus, by studying their approaches to improving women's rights and security we can learn a great deal. Conducting grassroots research in a variety of places where violence against women is understudied will increase the size of our empirical "data-bank" on the challenges and successes in translating women's universal right to "life, liberty and security of person" into the public and private sphere. In so doing, scholars and practitioners of peacebuilding will be in a better position to compare and contrast grassroots approaches to improving women's rights and basic security. Over time, we may be able to identify positive trends across cases and develop a list of potential "best practices" for future peacebuilding operations.

One case of particular interest is that of post-conflict Liberia. In this case, West African women were integral to stopping the protracted civil wars that devastated the region in the 1990s. Liberian women organized thousands of women from the Mano River region to protest outside the building in which the Arusha peace accords were being negotiated. When it appeared the rebels were purposefully stale-mating the peace process, a group of women violated the security perimeter, sat themselves outside the door of the negotiation hall, and effectively locked in the
This group of women refused to move until the men had reached an agreement to end the war.

In the wake of women's remarkable role in the peace process, Liberia elected one of the key organizers - Ellen Johnson Sirleaf - as the post-conflict President. As the first female leader of an African state, Sirleaf campaigned upon - and has remained committed to - the promise of women's rights and security. As a post-conflict state with a women (and self-declared feminist) in power, Liberia is a rarity. In this unprecedented political context, it would be interesting to study the ways in which patriarchy and gender relations may, or may not, be changing. With Sirleaf committed to making women's rights and basic security a reality in her "new Liberia," it would be most engaging to find out to what extent this public promise is translating into the daily, private, lives of Liberian women. Are grassroots actors better supported in this case, compared to President Daniel Ortega's Nicaragua, for example? In other words, to what extent does post-war state leadership influence women's security? Are gender relations in the private sphere affected by such a change in the public sphere? To put it another way, is Sirleaf's electoral success a public reflection of deeper cultural shifts towards gender equality? Or, is Liberia "more of the same" - public support for a female leader and her promises of women's equality and security, yet private gender relations remain unchanged (i.e. male's having control and power "over" women; masculine identities that continue to normalize violence in the private sphere)?

If so, this would support the idea of a boundary - or, at least an ability to hold competing views and display contrary behaviors - in the public versus the private sphere. So, then, what are grassroots actors doing to garner support for initiating change in the private sphere? To find some answers to these questions, scholars must further explore how grassroots

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650 Previous to her three consecutive terms as the Liberian President, Sirleaf was a United Nations where her feminist politics were made clear. For instance, see Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Elisabeth Rehn's 2001 independent experts' assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peacebuilding, *Women, War and Peace*.

actors - in a variety of post-conflict contexts - can help to bridge the gap between the promise and practice of women's rights and security.

Violence against women is a global security issue, rooted in patriarchal gendered power relations and gendered roles/identities that are common to all post-conflict contexts. Human rights provide a cost-free, universally available, ideational resource to all peacebuilding efforts. Yet, to effectively translate the ideational quality of laws and rights into meaningful improvements in women's security requires the help of well-organized and well-funded grassroots actors. The ways in which men and women treat one another, in their public and private relations, is of crucial importance to the successful cultivation of a robust human rights regime - and private attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are something that grassroots actors are well-positioned to address. My baseline research in post-conflict Central America puts forth the successes and challenges faced by three grassroots projects trying to foster universal human rights in ways that make a difference in women's everyday lives. My research provides a better understanding of the interplay between "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to cultivating a human rights regime, and thus marks a valuable contribution to the effort of "saving" liberal peacebuilding for all.
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Appendix 1: Discussion Guide

Informed Consent

My name is Kimberly Carter, and I am a student from the University of Toronto in Canada. I am talking with a number of Central Americans about violence against women within the region. I am investigating the impact of organizations on women's rights and basic security, both on the public streets and in their own homes. This can help us understand how small, local, organizations can help make laws effective for women. This research can also highlight the challenges faced by women's rights organizations.

It is important for you to know that I do not work for the government of [insert country]. Your answers to these questions are for a research project for my university degree.

I am trying to learn from Central Americans like yourself, and I really value your opinion and your experiences. I know that some of my questions might make you think of difficult memories. I would like to record your perspective, but please remember that you can choose to stop this interview at any time or choose not to answer some of my questions. I will not tell anyone that you have spoken to me, and no one other than you will know what you have told me. My questions will take between 60 to 90 minutes to answer but our conversation can last much longer, should you wish to keep talking with me. Do you agree to participate in my study?

I would like your permission to audio-tape our discussion. I will also take some notes while you are talking, but audio-taping will allow me the chance to review your comments in detail later on. I will label the tape with a code that only I will understand so your interview will be completely anonymous. Your real name will not, in any way, be associated with your answers. Do you agree to be audio-taped?

Should you wish to contact me, these are my coordinates both in [insert country] while I am here and in Canada. Should you wish to contact my university, I can provide you with my thesis supervisor's information and the contact information for the ethics review board.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Discussion Guide*

Introduction/Demographics

First, please tell me a little about yourself...

(Probes/follow-up questions: Do you have a boyfriend or a husband? At what age did you get married? Do you have children? If so, then how many?)
Personal Experience with Violence

Please tell me about your own experiences with violence, both as a child and as an adult.

(Probes/follow-up questions: Did you grow up in a home where your parents used violence against each other? What were your personal experiences/encounters with violence during wartime? Have you been in a romantic relationship where your partner used violence against you? Do you feel comfortable telling me what he did to you - did he hit you or strangle you, for example? Are you aware of other women in your family or neighbourhood who suffer intimate partner violence? Out of all the women you know, how many would you guess have experienced violence at the hands of their boyfriend or husband?)

General Perceptions of Violence

What are your thoughts on the level of violence in [insert country] since war's end?

(Probes/follow-up questions: Do you feel safe on the street? Do you go out in public alone? If not, who is most often accompanying you? If so, do people in your family - maybe your husband or father - worry about you walking alone? Of what types of violence are you most afraid? What are your thoughts on the "femicide epidemic" currently plaguing the region? Do you know anyone who has been directly affected by femicide?)

General Perceptions of Women's Rights

What are your thoughts on women's rights and women's equality?

(Probes/follow-up questions: Would you consider yourself a "feminist"? What does the word "feminist" mean to you? Do you think that men and women are equal? Why or why not? Tell me more about what kinds of rights you think women and men should have and if they should have the same rights or not...)

Government Employees/Police Officers

Please tell me about the work your office does to improve women's rights and security in [insert country].

Do you think women's security has improved since the end of the war? Could you give me some examples of why you think that women's security has or has not improved?

In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges facing women in [insert country]?

In your experience working in this office, what are your greatest challenges in achieving your goals?

Again, in your experience, what have been your office's greatest successes?
Non-governmental Organization Employees/Volunteers

Please tell me about the work your organization does to improve women's rights and security in [insert country].

Do you think women's security has improved since the end of the war? Could you give me some examples of why you think that women's security has (or has not) improved?

In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges facing women in [insert country]?

In your experience working/volunteering in this organization, what are the greatest challenges your organization faces in achieving its goals?

What would you consider to be this organization's greatest successes?

IPV Survivors

When did you decide to report and/or leave your boyfriend/husband? Why?

Please tell me about the challenges that you have faced in making this decision.

(Probes/follow-up questions: What has the experience of reporting and/or leaving your partner been like? Have you received support? If so, from whom - which people, which organizations? Have you considered retracting the report/returning to live with your partner? If so, why?)

How has this organization helped you in improving your security?

(Probes/follow-up questions: Do you feel the organization's staff is supportive and understanding of your situation? Have you noticed any changes in yourself since you have reported and/or left your abusive relationship? Please tell me about these changes…)

Closing Remarks

Is there anything that you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

* Please note that this is a comprehensive discussion guide, not a questionnaire. Consequently, some parts may be redundant, all questions may not have been asked, and topics were often broached in different orders. Also, in the case of some participants, our discussion was carried out though a number of separate conversations, on different days. By working with a guide rather than a strict questionnaire, participants guided the discussion and I followed up as appropriate.
## Appendix 2: Interview List

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LOCATION ABBREVIATIONS:
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GC - GUATEMALA CITY
GRN - GRANADA
ES - ESTELI
LN - LEON
MAG - MATAGALPA
MAN - MANAGUA
MAS - MASAYA
OM - OMETEPE
SAN - SAN SALVADOR
QZ - QUETZALCOSTAL

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Appendix 3

Campaign Posters from the Women's Police Station in Granada, Nicaragua
Appendix 4

Miss Universe is Looking for Real Men: Not all Men are the Same