

MAYAN YOUNG WOMEN AND PHOTOVOICE: EXPOSING STATE VIOLENCE(S) AND GENDERED MIGRATION IN RURAL GUATEMALA

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This research reports on a collaborative photovoice project developed to document and respond to some of the effects of the complex interface of state violence and gendered migration in the Southern Quiché region of Guatemala. The participating women were students in a local high school who had at least one parent living in the United States, and had themselves expressed some interest in migrating North at some point in their lives. Findings from the photovoice process revealed how these young women's transnational understandings of family and home shaped their hopes, resistance, and complex views of migration. The youth's visual representations facilitated community dialogues regarding the urgency to challenge gendered forms of discrimination at the intersection of state violence and migration. The article also discusses ethical implications for co-researchers and Mayan communities seeking to engage feminist-infused photovoice processes that best support Mayan young women's resistance to some of the structural violence(s) that push them North.

Keywords: *Mayan young women, Guatemala, state violence, gendered and racialized migration, photovoice*

1. Introduction

Guatemalan Mayan women living in rural areas represent a socially disadvantaged group surviving at the intersections of structural poverty, racism, and heteropatriarchy (Menjívar, 2008; Merry, 2009; Sittig & Florinda González, 2016). Their ongoing marginalization in varied social contexts stems from historically grounded racialized gendered practices and material circulations of power that frame women's subordination to men and indigenous subordination to ladinos (descendants of Spanish; non-indigenous) (Menjívar, 2008; Merry, 2009). State violence perpetuated against indigenous

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communities, including sexual violence as a weapon of war, has roots in colonial times, and is one of multiple causes of a nearly 36-year armed conflict in Guatemala (CEH, 1999; Cooper & Yarbrough, 2010; Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Moane, 2011). The Department of Quiché, where the photovoice project discussed herein was facilitated, suffered one of the highest numbers of massacres perpetrated by the military against the Maya. One Zacualpan village in El Quiché served as a paradigmatic case supporting the U.N. Commission on Historical Clarification's (1999) argument that the Guatemalan state was responsible for genocide against the Maya. Peace Accords signed in 1996 marked an end to this genocidal violence, but gave way to new forms of violence triggering past traumas and persistent inequities (Hartry, 2012). The historic trial and initial conviction of Efraín Ríos Montt, former head of state and dictator in 1982 and 1983, acknowledged his responsibility for ordering widespread sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, which was perpetuated by the Guatemalan military against Mayan women during the civil war, and confirmed the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war for a Guatemalan public as well as the international community. Additional evidence of this crime against humanity is evident in the case of 15 Q'eqchi' women from the village of Sepur Zarco against two Guatemalan military officers who used them as sexual slaves during the armed conflict. This historic case concluded in late February 2016, with the conviction of Lieutenant Esteelmer Reyes Girón, the former chief of the Sepur Zarco military base, and Heriberto Valdéz Asij, the former military commander in the region.

This legacy and ongoing violence fueled by national and international economic policies (including, for example, CAFTA, 2005)¹ have dramatically influenced Mayan migration North to Mexico and the United States (Monzón, 2011). Despite the above-mentioned trials and other transitional justice processes, and the work of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG, for its Spanish name) in fighting corruption in Guatemala², ongoing impunity and the absence of the rule of law have contributed to increasingly high levels of urban violence, including gangs and trafficking of drugs and people (Hartry, 2012; Lucchi, 2010). Gendered violence, economic marginalization, and ongoing urban violence are regularly reported as reasons for Guatemalan women's migration to the United States during recent decades (Carey & Torres, 2010; Musalo & Bookey, 2013; Sittig & Florinda González, 2016).

2. Situating Mayan Women and Photovoice

2.1 *Mayan Women and State Violence*

¹ The Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) extended the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to five Central American nations, including Guatemala, and to the Dominican Republic. It was signed in May 28, 2004, and passed by the United States congress on July 27, 2005.

² Guatemala sought assistance from the United Nations to strengthen the rule of law through independent investigations complementing the work of the Guatemalan prosecutor and to recommend policies to help fight the criminal groups that had infiltrated state institutions and were undermining democratic gains since the end of the armed conflict. The Agreement between the UN and the Guatemalan government established a two-year mandate that has been renewed three times and will extend through September 2017.

Anthropologists and feminist researchers have documented searing poverty in Guatemala disproportionately affecting Mayan women and their children (Carey & Torres, 2010; Lykes & Crosby, 2014; Menjívar, 2008). These populations' precarious conditions were exacerbated by the 36-year internal armed conflict and genocide (Crosby & Lykes, 2011; Menjívar, 2008). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Guatemala stands as one of the poorest countries in Central America (WHO, 2014) and women and children are the most vulnerable populations undergoing health complications and educational deficits, social realities to which many socially privileged individuals and institutions have turned a blind eye (Cooper & Yarbrough, 2010; Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010).

Researchers in varied fields have identified extreme poverty as one of the multiple forms of structural violence in Central America (Martín-Baró, 1998; Merry, 2009). Spanish-born Jesuit priest and social psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró (1998) described state violence as a corollary to psychosocial trauma at individual and societal levels. He specifically defined psychosocial trauma as structural, collective, social, and rooted in histories of colonization. Psychosocial and Mayan healing processes have begun to be recovered (Asociación Médicos Descalzos, 2014; Grupo de Mujeres Maya Kaq'la, 2011) or engaged (Duque, 2009) towards integrating indigenous and Western praxis in demilitarizing and de-ideologizing pervasive oppressive discourses and practices towards healing. The participatory work described in this research seeks to contribute to these transformative processes by learning how to best challenge these human rights violations from Mayan women's lived experiences while building transformative relationships at multiple levels. This study also contributes to previous research initiatives that have documented and denounced the Guatemalan state's gendered and racist politics that promote Mayan women's subordination to the heteropatriarchal state through gendered policies and practices that negate Mayan women's experiences (Lykes, 2010; Menjívar, 2008; Musalo & Bookey, 2013).

2.2 “New” Forms of Violence against Women: Femicide

In April of 2008, the Guatemalan Congress approved the *Law Against Femicide and other Forms of Violence Against Women*, which officially recognized that gender-based violence was a serious crime. The law specified four types of violence against women, including femicide (i.e., gender motivated killing of women with the complicity of the state), physical/sexual, psychological, and economic violence. Yet, formal laws for the protection of women's fundamental rights have been lagging behind as the country's increasing levels of violence against women illustrates (Musalo & Bookey, 2013; Sieder & Macleod, 2009). The rates of femicide in Guatemala stand among the highest in Latin America (Carey & Torres, 2010). In the last decade, more than six thousand women and girls have been brutally murdered in the country (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010) within an impervious climate of impunity (Musalo & Bookey, 2013; Sanford, 2008). Many scholars and organizations have argued that Guatemalan women are particularly vulnerable to gendered violences, and that these cases rarely make it to court due to ethnic discrimination and deeply rooted misogynist and heteropatriarchal practices (Merry, 2009; Musalo & Bookey, 2013; Sanford, 2008). Anthropologist Victoria Sanford

(2008) links the Guatemalan state-supported invisibility of femicide to the indifference of a patriarchal culture by asserting that “impunity, silence and indifference play a role in femicide” (p. 118). The author writes specifically about femicide as the institutionalized killing of women in Guatemala, wherein perpetrators have deployed some of the very same strategies used during the armed conflict, including rape, torture, and mutilation (see also Merry, 2009).

The anthropological literature borrows the term femicide from local and international organizations to denounce the Guatemalan state’s responsibility in the murders of women whether through the commission of the actual killing, toleration of the perpetrators’ acts of violence, or omission of state responsibility to ensure both the safety and rights of women (Merry, 2009; Sanford, 2008). Within a climate of impunity, the Guatemalan state and its politicians have also excluded Mayan women’s voices from decision-making processes and treated their bodies as disposable (Merry, 2009). Despite the fact that all women are targeted, sexual and gender-based violence against Mayan women are deeply racialized (Crosby & Lykes, 2011; Velásquez Nimatuj, 2012). Several generations of Mayan women have been historically discouraged from and oppressed for raising their voices against gender-based discrimination and other forms of state violence (Carey & Torres, 2010). Political states’ denial to take responsibility in not just protecting Mayan women’s safety, but also punishing heteropatriarchal abusers has placed the killing of women within “a continuum of feudalism, and development aggression”, constraining women’s choices and opportunities to flourish (Santos, 2009, p. 66). As a result of its gender blindness, the Guatemalan state has failed to address Mayan women’s educational and health concerns both locally and globally (Cooper & Yarbrough, 2010; Stern, 2005). One result of these oppressive structural conditions in the aftermath of the Guatemalan armed conflict is an increasing number of Mayan women who have sought refuge through migration to the United States, a fact that challenges oppressive gendered roles, such as economic independence and reclusion in domestic arenas (Sittig & Florinda González, 2016).

2.3 *Opting Out or Opting In through Heading North*

As a result of multiple forms of violence including but not limited to war, extreme poverty, limited or low quality education, and few to no work options upon graduation, the late 1990s witnessed increasing waves of migration to the United States (Merry, 2009; Monzón, 2011; Passel, 2011). Recent reports confirm that 100,000 unaccompanied children and youth crossed the border into the United States during 2015. Many have been caught up in an unwelcoming United States immigration system that offers few public services, and frequently threatens them with immediate deportation (Pierce, 2015); hence showing little concern about these youth’s vulnerability to violence in their countries of origin.

Mayan young women, more so than young men, are encouraged to remain in their Guatemalan communities to care for their families, thus fulfilling traditional gendered roles as wives and caregivers (Lykes & Sibley, 2013). Despite these deeply constraining gendered norms and expectations, staggering numbers of unaccompanied Mayan girls, particularly those who have family members abroad, are increasingly migrating to the

United States, including at higher rates than boys during 2014 (Krogstad, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Lopez, 2014; Sittig & González, 2016). Mayan women face multiple threats as they navigate the politics of *la Frontera [the Border]*, enduring interlocked violences, including rape; thus, their migratory experiences become highly gendered and racialized as controlled by heteropatriarchal states (Hartry, 2012; Merry, 2009).

The scholarship on transnationalism describes the searing socio-emotional effects of migration on youth and families on both sides of the United States-Mexican border (Dreby, 2006; Lykes & Sibley, 2013). These effects vary for people left behind and those that migrate. For instance, children that live separated from their parents and siblings over many years due to migration, and grandparents who are aging as the infants and young children with whom they were left as guardians over a decade earlier become young adults, are newly challenged to reconcile their varied needs and experiences of migration (Hershberg & Lykes, 2015).

Research conducted with local communities has identified Mayan adolescents living in transnational families' awareness and understandings of the push and pull factors forcing their parents to migrate (Lykes & Sibley, 2013). Despite this, "the literature often glosses over the voices of those 'left behind' while emphasizing their parents' sacrifice and material benefits of remittances" (p. 14). Some recent research reveals that the separation from loved ones endured by those living in transnational families is associated with socio-emotional concerns. Family physical distance or separation creates a "brecha [rupture]", which has been documented as having a negative influence on the socio-emotional wellbeing of youth left behind, despite the economic benefits they receive (Hershberg & Lykes, 2013; Lykes & Sibley, 2013).

Participatory methodologies with youth have been engaged by some researchers to help them connect with multiple and complex psychosocial issues while challenging social representations and internalized stigma, and developing strategies towards change (Kessi, 2011; Winton, 2007). In addition, critical scholarship on participatory action research (PAR) with young people warns researchers of the need to value children and youth's competence (Skelton, 2008), and their shared solidarities through these and other interpersonal social processes.

2.4 Intersectionality: Theorizing State Violence that Genders and Racializes the Maya

An intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1991) is adopted to examine Mayan young women's varied experiences of gendered and racialized migration. In her definition of intersectionality, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) demonstrated how feminist and anti-racist agendas have sometimes paradoxically helped to further marginalize the problem of gender-based violence against women of color. She argued that these women's "specific raced and gendered experiences, although intersectional, often define as well as confine the interests of the entire group" (p. 1252). Intersectional theory helps situate Mayan migrants at the interstices of indigeneity, gender, class, and state power as they grapple with how their subjectivities and circulations of power are continuously negotiated as the women resist social exclusion and state violations of their rights and dignity as indigenous women (Anzaldúa, 2012; Crenshaw, 1991). The widespread targeting of rural

Mayan women by the Guatemalan military during the armed conflict evidences both the racialization and the gendering of their indigeneity as inferior, inflicting heteropatriarchal state abuse on their bodies and personas (Stern, 2005).

Significantly for this project, these intersectional dynamics also socially construct the Maya in the United States. as “illegal”, reflecting a discursive construction of all migrants alongside uneven gendered dynamics (Anzaldúa, 2012; Hartry, 2012). Mayan women within Guatemala and beyond its borders navigate racialized heteropatriarchy in ways that are parallel to but differ from strategies deployed by ladino women in Guatemala. It is therefore imperative to visibilize intersecting axes of oppression perpetuated through racialized gender violence and through immigration policies that deploy gender and racial differentiation in ways that systematically threaten Mayan girls and women’s safety within Guatemala and beyond its borders. In order to examine ways in which Mayan young women understand and construct meaning of these complex processes, this collaboration deployed photovoice methodology with Mayan young women in a rural community within the Southern Quiché region, which has been deeply affected by these political dynamics. Within this context, intersectional theory works as a resource for framing data analyses as well as the problematization of relationships between women, the state, voice, and circuits of power. This critical lens emphasizes the centrality of gender and race in state violence while situating gendered and racialized violences against Mayan girls and women, which all too frequently render them “as impossible decision makers” (Dyrness, 2008, p. 30).

2.5 *PAR and Photovoice: Developing Transnational Collaborative Processes*

Feminist participatory action research (PAR) has its roots in epistemologies that prioritize women’s active participation in society in order to challenge their exclusion from resources, opportunities, and public services (Lykes, 2001). Photovoice was developed by Caroline Wang and Maryanne Burris (1997) in rural China to foster participation of rural, non-formally educated women in the documentation of their lived experiences towards improving their own and their children’s lives through policy interventions. In this regard, photovoice promotes partnerships across communities by supporting women’s self-determination recognizing their critical engagements across socially constructed gendered, racialized, and classed locations (Higgins, 2014; McIntyre & Lykes, 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997).

This feminist photovoice project sought to foster young Mayan women’s protagonism through situating them as experts in knowledge construction processes (Krieg, 2006). Informed by Wang and Burris’ photovoice methodology, these young women took a total of 24 individual pictures that conveyed challenging personal and work conditions for Mayan women within everyday heteropatriarchal milieus. Then, they selected five photographs that reflected their experiences and individually analyzed these images, assigning themes to each of the five photographs that they had taken. Each woman then individually wrote a narrative for each of the five selected pictures on the topic of gendered migration. The remaining images were organized in a collective collage. Finally, the women engaged in a participatory process of looking across all the images, analyzing them collectively towards constructing a shared analysis. These female

protagonists identified intersecting dimensions of gender, class, and race as framing their experiences of state violence, and their perceptions of migration as an anticipated potential future horizon.

Furthermore, these PAR processes were informed by popular education, a multidimensional framework that nurtures a sense of belonging while engaging participants from socially marginalized backgrounds in transformative processes for social change (Freire, 2000), and included multiple creative resources (e.g., storytelling and dramatic play). The latter have been deployed widely with Mayan communities (Lykes & Crosby, 2014; Women of PhotoVoice/ADMI & Lykes, 2000), mobilizing the power of the visual and of embodied practices to galvanize grassroots-led social change efforts among the actors. Paulo Freire (2000) underlines the central process of critical education being “important [...] for individuals to come to feel masters of their thinking by discussing how views of the world explicitly and implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades” (p.81). Mastering one’s feelings alone may reproduce biases. To counter this, Freire argues that those who are socially oppressed, including, for example, Mayan women facing structural violence, take leadership in facilitating critical consciousness for themselves and their peers through engaged conversations and transformative actions (Lykes & Crosby, 2014).

Drawing on Freirian pedagogy, this project deployed the creative arts as resources through which to collaborate with Mayan youth, facilitating their development and enhancement of personal strengths, interpersonal relationships, and political understandings and actions (Moane, 2011). As a feminist PAR project within the context of a multiple year collaboration among the University, high school, and the local immigration office, these young women focused their engagement with migration on state violence as it intersected with their understandings of and experiences with family migration.

This photovoice project therefore employed an interactive methodology designed in partnership among the young women participants, their teachers and school administrators, and the authors who accompanied them. Considering that PAR processes are never neutral, it was vital to break the silencing of uneven power dynamics in collaborative processes (Lykes, 2010), and particularly between the youth and adults (Skelton, 2008). The project was initially framed to examine the social imaginaries of indigenous youth with transnational family ties who were also contemplating migrating to the United States. Below we discuss the women’s documentation and interpretation of some of the complex relationships between migration and structural violence, including gender-based, racial, state, and economic oppression. We then explore the *in-betweenness* entailed in transnational collaborations through feminist participatory research processes.

3. Methodological Considerations

3.1 Local Context and Participants

Researchers from the United States, including the authors, have engaged in a multi-year collaboration between a local migrant organization and a high school in Zacualpa, a small town in the Department of El Quiché, Guatemala. The Center for Human Rights

and International Justice at Boston College co-sponsors this multifaceted transnational migration and human rights PAR process, “Migration and Human Rights Project (MHRP)”. The interdisciplinary, transnational work has supported migrant communities for over a decade with a focus on Central American and Mexican transnational and mixed-status families in the United States and sending families in the Southern Quiché region of Guatemala. This larger PAR project has included in-depth interviews, participatory workshops, and a community-based survey with families, returnees, and deportees in Zacualpa and its surrounding villages towards better understanding and responding to some of the multiple effects of migration from the perspective of sending communities. The authors are members of this University-based research team and the second author is the Principal Investigator of the overall MHRP process. As mestizo and white, Galician/ Spanish and United States citizens, and highly educated outsiders, they have benefited from the legacies of colonialism that permeate the social fabric of Guatemala and the dynamics of racism that oppress and marginalize indigenous populations from many social and political spaces. Despite these complex privileges, the researchers are committed to critically redressing racialized gender violence alongside the communities of Maya they are accompanying through the MHRP PAR processes. This paper reports on one of these collaborations between these Boston-based researchers and female Mayan students in the local high school. The University’s ethical review committee approved the project that stressed the need to critically address tensions in the participatory research processes among participating youth and the main female researcher/outsider and co-author. To grapple with power differentials, the outsider female researcher talked about her positionality and was clear about the collaborative goal of the photovoice project within the larger MHRP partnership. She shared her previous experiences conducting photovoice in global contexts, and discussed ethical concerns of the project with the youth and school staff who added their concerns. Their concerns centred on parental or familial disapproval, which was later addressed with the co-author and the parents. The participants expressed a desire to create a collaborative space for women to share their experiences and anxieties pertaining to migration on both sides of the border. Pseudonyms have been used for the young women participants throughout this article in order to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

The 14 K’iche’ and Spanish speaking female protagonists in this photovoice project were between 15-19 years old and studying in the local high school when the project was developed, that is, during July and August of 2013. All of the students were bilingual, speaking their indigenous language of k’iche’ as a first language and Spanish. Participants lived in conditions of poverty and all had parents (a mother, a father or both) and some had siblings living in the United States at the time of the project. Many were being raised by grandparents or older siblings that struggled to respond to the youth’s socio-emotional needs in the absence of parents, who, despite the distance, sustained parental engagement through sending remittances and giving *consejos* [advice] via regular phone calls (Hershberg & Lykes, 2015).

The school prioritized participation of young Mayan women who reported currently considering or having previously thought about migration to the United States, a priority that informed the students’ inclusion in the project. Their reasons for migrating were multifaceted. Some spoke of a desire to join a parent or parents thereby reuniting their family, whereas others talked of yearning for economic mobility. Others referred to

escaping violence as the leading reason for seeking to migrate to the United States. Most women reported knowing each other outside of the school. In fact, most had been together in classes for a number of years. Their ongoing relationships contributed to bonds of trust or “*confianza*”, in Spanish, or “*izoc*” in k’iche’, relational dynamics that were important for establishing the photovoice project.

Administrators and teachers in the high school collaborated in the design of the project. The authors met with the high school principal, teachers, and outreach coordinators to discuss the needs of the school vis-à-vis migration and possible goals for a project with young Mayan women contemplating migration that sought to meet some of their socio-emotional needs. Thus, the thematic focus of the photovoice project was informed by a fit between the school’s identified interest in supporting a program that addressed gendered migration issues and on findings from previous work in this community as well as on the skills and expertise of the co-researchers. The high school hosted workshops, meetings, and a final exposition and presentation of the young women’s findings in a gallery walk, which various local audiences attended. The co-authors wrote a Spanish-language report of the main findings and selected images that were distributed to members of the school and to local community organizations.

Accompanied by the high school’s outreach coordinator, outsider researchers visited classrooms, and discussed the idea of a photovoice project designed to explore issues of migration to meet the socio-emotional needs of youth affected by it. Initially, large numbers of young women showed an interest in the project. Due to numerous responsibilities or the inability to secure parental consent, some were unable to join the project. Those who were able to participate embraced the focus on migration and added the theme of gender violence in initial discussions pertaining to the project’s goals.

Several older Mayan women who had lived in the United States were workshop resource people, providing the youth with interlocutors with whom they exchanged their hopes, fears, and needs around gendered issues and migration. During these interactions, the participating youth also shared stories from other local family members who were affected by transnational migration.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Ethnographic observations, researcher’s field notes, genograms, photographs, and semi-structured individual interviews constitute the PAR project’s data. Personal and collective exchanges of beliefs and experiences were facilitated through community maps, interpretations of newspaper reports, drawings, and theater of the oppressed processes, including Image Theater (Boal, 1992), by which multiple audiences collectively embody and perform social issues, such as gendered migration. Prior to engaging with the cameras, participants created genograms or family trees, processes that facilitated reflections on and engagement with each participant’s family’s migratory histories both within Guatemala and beyond its borders (see a collage developed from individual participants’ family trees in Figure 1). Individual drawings of how the women imagined themselves in the United States tapped into their migration imaginaries, which were portrayed in later drawings.



Figure 1. Participants' Collage of their Family Trees



Figure 2. Ana's Drawing: Migratory Imaginaries

The women drew from transnational knowledge about information their United States based relatives had shared with them, experiences of deported relatives, and other community members, as well as their social imaginaries of the migratory experience to render and reflect upon these creative representations (see Figure 2).

Disposable 24-image cameras were provided for 13 women in the photovoice project, with the 14th using her own digital camera; no other young woman owned or had access to a digital camera. Some women took pictures on their cell phones, but because these images could not be subsequently printed, switched to the disposable cameras. The first author drew on previous experiences facilitating photoPAR projects in the United States

to organize biweekly two-hour workshops. Topics initially included conversations about the goals of the project, trainings pertaining to the use of cameras, the ethics of photovoice research, such as asking permission to take pictures in the case of human participants, and later focused on discussions about migration and other social concerns.

Each female took 24 pictures over an eight-week period, generating themes to focus their weekly picture taking through small group discussions. The latter included power point presentations and creative activities that focused primarily on migration, gender, and racial issues. The youth initially took pictures reflecting their ideas of why adults and youth migrated North, later shifting to pictures about gender violence. Finally, they took pictures pertaining to their migration imaginaries. This latter exercise proved more challenging as the women were unable to physically document their imagined realities of life in the United States, and thus engaged in more abstract representations.

Once the 14 participants had taken all pictures on their disposable camera, the first author took the film to have the photographs developed, and returned them to participants within one week. Each participant labeled their images with a title that represented a theme. These included, among others, “government corruption”, “abusive relationships”, and “poverty”.



Figure 3. Collective Photo Collage: “Reasons for Migrating”

The group later put together collective photo collages, clustering images with similar themes (see Figure 3). These posters facilitated critical discussions about migration, including diverse reasons for leaving one’s country. Then, the women selected five thematically labeled images among the ones they had individually taken about which they would write narratives, in the language of their choice. Most chose Spanish for this exercise that had been designed to facilitate a process of collective criticality among peers, schoolteachers, and other invited community members.

In their presentations, the young women engaged audience participants (teachers, other students, school staff, local organizers, relatives) in discussions about their own possible migration while exploring the effects of real or imagined migration for themselves. Other topics of group conversations included poverty, state violence on both sides of the United States-Mexican border, and gender violence in these contexts as well as in their communities of origin. Individual interviews were conducted at the end of the photovoice project to gather additional participant interpretations of the data, and to document their perceptions of and reflections on the photovoice project.

4. Mayan Young Women Represent Themselves

The first author's field notes and interview data contributed to the sequencing of the findings summarized below. Photovoice processes involved iterative discussions (Krieg, 2006) on migration. The youth's conversations and narratives about their photographs and their collaborative products including performances of embodied ideas and drawings of family trees and social imaginaries constituted the co-analyses presented below. These were facilitated through focus groups during the creative workshops and audio-recorded. Local female teachers in the school often joined these workshops to support the youth and exchange ideas about the purpose and implementation of creative techniques, suggesting their interest in operationalizing these resources in the future in their classrooms. These collective data analytic processes contributed to the group's identification of common themes, including gender violence, racism towards Mayan communities, and political corruption in economically oppressive transnational spaces.

Once the images and narratives were combined and organized, the young women put together a photo exhibition or gallery walk to which their families and other community members were invited. The youth also collaborated in analyzing audience responses from gallery exhibits showing appreciation for community support to meet their socio-emotional needs, and the validation of their voices in their work and presentations.

Intersectional and participatory lenses contributed to the inductive identification of several salient themes across photographs and narratives. Participants grappled with salient themes that emerged in the focus group discussions. Thus, the main findings discussed below were generated dialogically from the themes explored by the protagonists in their group conversations. All co-analyses were done in Spanish. The co-researchers translated texts included in this article into English.

4.1 *Weaving a Sense of Self "Acá y Allá [Here and There]"*

The creative arts including photography functioned as critical resources that mobilized personal and collective transformations reflected in the interviews with the Mayan young women's and in the ethnographic data. Through the collaborative photovoice process, they created spaces in which to share their feelings and experiences and to make meaning of gendered migration.. In these analytic processes, the women and the first author discussed issues of state violence. The women negotiated and reaffirmed their Mayan identity in the process, which was evidenced in their allusions to a sense of pride in being

Guatemalan and Mayan in contrast to adopting an American identity in the migration imaginaries of themselves living in the United States. Despite this pride, the group interrogated the Guatemalan economic system as one of “big differences” and “racism against indigenous peoples”, as one young woman denounced.

During one focus group discussion of the images, Esperanza put it simply, speaking both proudly and nostalgically about her national identity: “It has a lot of issues, but my Guatemala is far more beautiful! What mountains! They will always be part of me”. Esperanza validated her right to land and life as a Mayan woman living in the Guatemalan highlands by asserting her place within her nation. In an individual interview, Esperanza noted that she did not personally want to migrate to the United States, but felt responsible to support her mother and much younger siblings who had been “abandoned” by her immigrant father long ago. As a Mayan young woman with limited resources and opportunities, she expressed that “there is no other way to move forward”. Her vision of migration was one of economic and socio-emotional survival.

Through discussions and sharing their families’ transnational experiences, the women were weaving a sense of self and human dignity. Contrary to socialization processes that devalue Mayan heritage, these youth expressed a desire to hold on to their Mayan heritage transnationally. The youth knew of the need to hide this identity while crossing the borders in their journey to the United States, exposing their knowledge of Mexican and Unitedstatesian racialized violence towards Mayan communities. The women also discussed the need to validate their identities as young Mayan women vis-à-vis the migratory processes.



Figure 4. Sofia’s Photograph of “Being Separated from my Mother”

Sofia elaborated on her picture of a young girl following her mother (see Figure 4), reporting that it represents female Mayan girls and women suffering both when they are left behind by their mothers, but also when they risk everything to cross these borders and make it to the United States. In the midst of such pain, Sofia affirmed her own and other women’s self-worth and dignity as women: “women suffer a lot when they stay, but also

when they leave, and I learned that going to the United States is not everything, being a woman I have to value myself and take care of myself wherever I am”.

In these creative processes, the youth validated their own sense of womanhood while identifying fluid, dynamic selves that are shaped by interlocking socially and individually constructed locations, such as gendered and racialized roles, transnational experiences, and varied strengths developed along their multiple, sometimes colliding, and sometimes divergent paths across the mountains.

4.2 *Varied Reasons for Migrating North*

The Mayan female protagonists discussed reasons for migrating to the United States as due to both hope and suffering. They spoke of the need to migrate in the absence of a stable life or a sense of dignity as women in Guatemala. Carmela described extreme poverty as a reason for migrating (see Figure 5). She noted how “poverty is the reason. Here, in the countryside, there is no work and people cannot bring enough money home to support their families. Many people look for work and cannot find it or they are paid little so they go to the United States”. Alluding to the difficulty of receiving liveable wages, Judith spoke to the group about youth’s limited educational options in Guatemala: “youth think that it is not worth it to study here and believe that they have to work to support their families”. Her words revealed female youth’s gendered responsibilities having to do with providing care to younger siblings, doing house chores, and working to bring some income home, while underscoring challenges to education.

The photovoice group discussed issues related to crossing multiple borders on the journey North, the reasons why one does it, and their understanding of life in the United States as an undocumented female young Mayan migrant. In her drawing about migratory imaginaries (see Figure 5), Ana pictured herself in the middle of a big city, expressing a sense of confusion and fear. She depicted a police car close by as well as a church, reflecting opposing feelings of threat and security. In an individual interview, she declared “I want to go to see my father [...] and meet other people and learn English [...] I can fight for women’s rights from there”. Ana’s varied reasons for wanting to migrate to the United States included family reunification, a desire to live abroad and improve her English skills, as well as to have the power to undermine gendered discrimination. She and her mother had personally endured multiple forms of gendered violence in the town and beyond. For her, the reasons for migrating were closely connected to violence against Mayan communities and towards them specifically as Mayan women. Ana also pointed to Mayan women’s right to land as well as freedom of movement, which is denied by heteropatriarchal states and cultures.

At the same time, the participating women appreciated their relatives’ migration describing it as a “human sacrifice” in most cases. Because all had immediate relatives in the United States, they benefited from remittances, funds that ensured survival and their access to an education. Yet, some had lost that financial support due to a family death and were left to flounder. Through personal narratives about their images, the youth described the pain they had undergone that they associated with migration and state violence. All of the women described traumatic experiences due to migration despite having not personally crossed the border.



Figure 5. Extreme Poverty and Limited Work as “Reasons for Migrating”

Some lost relatives *en route* to the United States or in a North American nation; others were abandoned by parents and/or coped with abusive relatives back in Guatemala. Challenging violent countrywide conditions exacerbated the pain of separation due to migration.

As previous research confirms, some participants noted socio-emotional challenges due to migration. For instance, Luna’s two siblings, her father and other relatives live in the Boston area. Missing them, she recalled: “it has affected me emotionally because I don’t see my family, especially my brother, but especially now that I know the conditions he faced crossing the border and living in the United States”. Luna’s remarks evidence transnational knowledge garnered from the family males’ personal narratives. Despite the challenges she and her family were facing, she showed appreciation of the remittances that allow her to go to school. In addition, Luna showed an interest in joining family in the United States. In other cases, however, some women that had been abandoned by their immigrant parents declared not wanting to reunite in case of migration, despite the imagined challenges of being alone in a country that does not welcome them, such as in the case of Esperanza, which was discussed above.

4.3 Imaginative Re-Presentations of Migratory Desire

The youth shared a conflicted image of life in the United States. On the one hand, the women represented this capitalist nation as a place of possibility and escape. They explained their desire for independence in relationship to cultural gendered expectations that in Guatemala all too frequently relegate women to domestic spaces. Some spoke of escaping abusive relatives. For instance, Carlota described an abusive situation living with her uncles in the town - and her desire to join her parents in the United States, noting: “if I were there, not with my uncles, I imagine myself free of problems, with my

parents, nobody tells me what to do nor hurts me, and I can help my family with money and other things”. Similarly, Esmeralda alluded to this female longing for independence arguing: “on the other hand I want to be independent because here I suffer, but I have two little siblings that I need to support and be with them”. Esmeralda explained the contradiction she felt in this process: longing to be independent, freed of pain while churning inside to support her younger siblings. Other youth expressed a parallel desire to travel and “meet different people from different places and share with them”. On the other hand, the women discussed fear of sexual violence crossing the border and fear of discrimination in the United States as their individual drawings on the topic of imagined lives in the United States illustrated. During an interview, Esperanza, who, as previously discussed, referred to economic reasons in the case of future migration, pointed out that she did not think she could stay very long in the United States, and hoped “to save money and come back” to her country.

4.4 Gender-Based Representations of and Responses to State Violences

The women attributed migration to the corruption of the Guatemalan government and to discrimination endured by indigenous peoples. When reflecting on the photovoice project, Carlota noted: “I have learned that the state makes indigenous people suffer due to racism, like they do not treat you well due to skin color”. During one workshop using Image Theater (Boal, 1992) to talk about state violences, Ana argued how “we need to talk against political corruption in (name of the town) and Guatemala [...] that creates division in the community”. Luna similarly reflected on electoral tensions and local conflicts over resources, representing state corruption and its economic and racial discrimination towards Mayan communities through a photograph of the local town hall (see Figure 6). In a whole group discussion of the selected images, Tessa, another protagonist, reacted to Luna’s image of the town hall explaining that “the town hall looks nice, it is big like a mansion, but people who work there do not treat other people well”.

During and at the end of the project, the participating youth expressed a need to have spaces for young women in which they could share their experiences and understandings of migration as they intersected with state violence. Reflecting on the photovoice project, the young women negotiated their learning and future hopes. Olaya noted: “it is important to have this space for us as women to talk about our feelings and reasons why we want to leave our Guatemala”.

Similarly, Ruth described a sense of relief experienced through her participation in the project: “I was touched when I presented because this feeling that I keep inside should not be there. I felt good when I expelled it and shared what I guard in my heart”. Luna summarized the group’s appreciation for having a space, which they had co-constructed and in which they creatively exchanged experiences through their engagements in diverse creative activities: “about the activities that we did, like Image Theater, we were able to express how a girl feels when staying or leaving”.

Therefore, findings from the photovoice project point at the urgency to challenge state-promoted gendered forms of violence. In their analyses, these Mayan women showed complex understandings of migration as shaped by varied experiences. Contrary to a dominant image of the United States as the land of opportunity, peace and the

“American Dream”, these young women’s social imaginaries of the United States illustrate the above-mentioned dualism of privilege and anti-migrant discrimination.



Figure 6. Luna’s Representation of Political Corruption

The photovoice processes encouraged the women’s creative representations and critiques of many of the factors pushing them and their families North – and those that they might re-encounter there – including gender discrimination, sexual violence, economic hardship, states’ corruption, and educational vulnerabilities – and their performances of Mayan women’s protagonism.

In addition, the women expressed contradictory feelings about parental migrations, noting fear, bereavement, hope, and gratitude. Their social imaginaries of life in the United States were shaped by those emotions as well as by their relatives’ experiences and social media. Their own reasons for migrating to the United States were likewise complex. The women spoke of a desire for social mobility as one reason for migrating. They also pointed at multiple experiences of gender-based discrimination that, as young Mayan women, they endured in Guatemala. Norma summarized the experiences of many saying that “as a woman, I felt good being able to share with my friends in the project and show the school and people in my community the work we did so that they can understand our feelings because we typically don’t have an opportunity to share these topics”. These female protagonists verbalized their needs and performed their appreciations for this space, albeit temporary, through which they came together to explore who they are and who they envision becoming in contexts of ongoing marginalization and oppression.

5. Ethical Considerations and Implications

Some of the multiple challenges in conducting photovoice with youth (Camarota & Fine, 2008; Chabot, 2012; Kessi, 2011; Winton, 2007) have important implications for educators, researchers, policy makers, and community leaders. Despite the school's commitment to the participatory research processes and their interest in the students' engagement in discussions about migration, many teachers regularly opposed students' expressions of interest in migrating North. According to Skelton (2008) "adultist construction of research ethics" often overlook youth's needs and epistemologies, being more concerned with avoiding research risks as defined by review boards and institutions (p. 28). In fact, the female protagonists in this project expressed a desire to have women rather than men participate in their photovoice space, since they felt more conformable to talk about gender violence between women. In fact, only female teachers and guest speakers came into the space. Yet, there were three initial times when male teachers and social workers approached the space without previous notice, despite the first author's having discussed with the school and the teachers the importance of the women's space not being disrupted, in hopes of protecting students' privacy and confidentiality. In addition, parents, including immigrant parents who lived in the United States were informed and gave consent regarding their daughters' participation. Those parents and relatives who encouraged their participation noted the need to support the youth emotionally due to the stress related to parental absences. Some parents and relatives expressed an interest in meeting or talking with the first author over the phone to better understand the goals of the photovoice project.

Despite shared communication about and negotiation of the respective contributions of outsider researchers, teachers, and local migrant office staff, these diversely positioned adults experienced tensions at different points in the process. For example, although all shared a deep commitment to the human right to migrate, teachers often communicated messages to the participants – who were also students in their classes - that could only be interpreted as advice against "migrating to the United States". We learned over time that they hoped that after young female participants explored feelings about migration, they would be "dissuaded" from "leaving home". The first author learned that the school staff often reminded students of the threat of sexual violence on the journey North. As participatory researchers and critical pedagogues we (the authors) did not take part in local Mayas' decisions to migrate, understanding the overarching goal of the photovoice process as that of facilitating a space in which young Mayan women could explore their fears, hopes, and experiences of migration while engaging in critical analyses towards deeper intersecting understandings of migration, gendered violence, and enhanced well-being. Yet, students also knew that the authors and their colleagues from the United States had visas that facilitated their ability to travel to and from the United States and Guatemala, visas that were beyond the reach of local participants. Therefore, despite transparency the circulations of power surrounding our diverse access to migration constrained and facilitated particular processes in the context of the Southern Quiché.

Additional challenges included the present photovoice study's commitment to a feminist indigenous youth-driven framework in a Mayan context. As self-identified feminist co-researchers, we struggled to define what is meant by the terms "participation" and "participants" in a Mayan context wherein women's voices are all too frequently socially racialized and gendered through silencing (Lykes, 2010), and anchored in

domestic chores that negate their contributions as protagonists and/or decision makers. As discussed above, all collaborators believe that women have the right to migrate, if they choose to do so, and that that this right is theirs alongside their other human rights. Yet, as discussed above, local gatekeepers who support that right “in the abstract” often opposed local photovoice participants’ decisions to do so. Despite these tensions, within the often-contradictory encounters with their experiences – and the adults in their lives – these young women’s shared imaginaries facilitated their development of social female solidarity within a sociopolitical context that oppressively genders Maya women’s political participation (Chabot, 2012).

As human rights activists, we are also well aware of the multiple risks and challenges facing migrants without proper authorization both *en route* to the United States and once there. Based on many years of collaborating with Mayan communities we are also deeply conscious of the sociopolitical conditions that lead Mayan youth to leave their homes seeking to escape violence, poverty, and deeply constrained life options. Thus, we focused our work on understanding participants’ feelings and imaginaries about migration, as we collaborated with them to facilitate spaces for their socio-emotional wellbeing.

This study confirms our understanding that feminist participatory research processes must define participation collaboratively *in situ*, recognizing that it varies vis-à-vis circulations of power and decision-making among various stakeholders including participants, sponsors, those who provide a space, and us, as co-researchers. No community is homogenous and “it is impossible for every individual in a community to become research partners” (Tobias, Richmond, & Luginaah, 2013, p. 135). As outside researchers and educators, we sought to develop a collaborative project focus through dialogue with the leadership of the local communities, including the high school and the migration office and then to negotiate the process with young protagonists. Ongoing tensions described above had to be negotiated repeatedly as multiple collaborators navigated the dynamics between youth’s migration desires and their teachers and community members’ reluctance to see them risk crossing borders. Ultimately, this photovoice research shows and values participants’ competence in critically analysing social themes and determining actions for social change, which included community presentations on gender issues. The young women’s agency in the research analyses demonstrated their transnational understandings of family and home, which contributed to their hopes, resistance, and complex migratory imaginaries.

Finally, the limited time during which outsider researchers were on site and power relations between students and their teachers contributed to our recognition of the need to critically interrogate the limits constraining co-researchers’ relationships with youth. As importantly, the educational system itself –and its hierarchical and centralized decision-making structure – facilitates certain types of student and parental decision-making and participation that was not easily compatible with the assumptions underlying the photovoice process.

6. Concluding Remarks

Researchers and participants in this photovoice project engaged as teachers and learners, exchanging their knowledge of migration and violence at the intersection of gender, race, and poverty as performed within an educational context in rural Guatemala. Through presenting their drawings, photographs, and personal narratives in a community forum, Mayan female participants embodied and performed their determination to effect change through working with others, including their peers, teachers, and relatives, that is, those within and beyond the local community.

Photographs, narratives, and other creative resources functioned as tools to enrich and extend more traditional interview methods facilitating the sharing of sensitive themes among youth who are socially and personally marginalized and suffering. This photovoice project was led by Mayan young women and facilitated by outside mestizo and white participatory researchers. It respected local protagonism and agency while generating shared contexts through which these could be recognized by and in their local communities. The photographs and narratives represented starting points for discussing their experiences with migration and violence – and their imagined futures in the North.

The photovoice processes also visibilized the need to counter overt and subtle forms of state violence, including gender and racial discrimination, by providing womanist spaces for Mayan youth to share their inquietudes and strengths, engage in collaborative educational exchanges, and envision more extensive actions for social change. This was an isolated space of Mayan women taking actions on their own behalf, one that demonstrates young women's varied skills to facilitate personal and familial change. Through a wider distribution of the photovoice project's findings the young protagonists could invite the Guatemalan state as well as the United States government to examine alternative constructions of how they are perceived, including their representations in buildings, colors, and objects, reflecting these young women's hopes as well as their embodied suffering. Mayan women threaded images and words through this photovoice project, imagining their futures and asserting their protagonism. Those working and collaborating with them, including the researchers, are challenged to acknowledge their self-determination while accompanying them in fluid and sometimes contradictory transnational arenas.

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