

# Understanding women's struggles for justice, healing, and redress: A study of gender and reparation in postwar Guatemala

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*IDRC Project Number: 106616-00020799-003*

*Report Type: Final Technical Report*

*January 27, 2014*

*Country/Region: Guatemala*

*Report authors: Alison Crosby, Brisna Caxaj and M. Brinton Lykes*

*Project administered by:*

*Professor Alison Crosby*

*Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC),  
York University*

*4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3*

*Tel: 416 736 2100 ext. 33691; Email: [acrosby@yorku.ca](mailto:acrosby@yorku.ca)*

*<http://www.yorku.ca/cerlac/>*

*Collaborating Organizations:*

*Maya Alvarado, Executive Director*

*National Union of Guatemalan Women (UNAMG)*

*Tel: 502 2230 4851; Email: [direccion.ejecutiva@unamg.org](mailto:direccion.ejecutiva@unamg.org) /*

*[directoraejecutivaunamg@gmail.com](mailto:directoraejecutivaunamg@gmail.com)*

*<http://www.unamg.org/>*

*Professor M. Brinton Lykes*

*Centre for Human Rights and International Justice, Boston College*

*Tel: 1 617 552 0670; Email: [Brinton.lykes@BC.edu](mailto:Brinton.lykes@BC.edu)*

*<Http://www.bc.edu/centers/humanrights/>*

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## **Abstract**

This four-year feminist participatory action research project examined forms of reparation for Mayan women survivors of human rights violations during the 36-year long armed conflict in Guatemala as a potential contribution to their broader struggles as political actors for justice, historical memory, and redress. The project was a collaborative endeavour between researchers from York University, Boston College and the National Union of Guatemalan Women (UNAMG) and 54 Mayan women survivors of sexual violence during the armed conflict from four different Mayan groups in three regions of the country. Participatory workshops using creative techniques and individual interviews with key reparations stakeholders were used to gather data. Findings revealed an enhanced capacity on the part of Mayan women survivors and those who accompany them to make meaning and create knowledge about reparation and justice in postwar Guatemala. Women survivors have a clear understanding that it is not possible to ‘repair an irreparable harm’ such as sexual violence. At the same time, they understand ‘gendered reparation’ to entail holding the state accountable for the harm that they have suffered to guarantee non repetition, bringing perpetrators to justice, and having access to land and housing. In giving testimony to a Tribunal of Conscience and participating in a paradigmatic legal case of sexual violence as a tool of genocide currently before the Guatemalan courts, many of them developed the capacity to make public demands of the state for reparation and justice. The overall impact of this project was the creation of knowledge that (1) made visible the voices, actions, and demands of women survivors, and (2) informed and influenced reparations policymaking. Such knowledge included a critical questioning of the dialectic between the discursive hypervisibility and invisibility of sexual violence, and an understanding of the complexity of Mayan women’s multifaceted positionings within social structures and relations of power, as they moved beyond their experiences of victimization to highlight stories of resistance, contestation and complicity within the politics of everyday life.

## **Keywords**

Guatemala; gender; sexual violence; reparation; justice; feminist participatory action research

“[I am] old, without suffering, without fear and without shame. Today I am capable of doing all that I can. I am like a bird. I can fly with large wings.”

Chuj Maya woman participant, July 2011

## The Research Problem

This four-year feminist participatory action research project examined forms of reparation for women survivors of human rights violations during the 36-year long armed conflict in Guatemala as a potential contribution to their broader struggles as political actors for justice, historical memory, and redress. In situations of systematic and systemic violations of human rights such as the genocidal war in Guatemala, it is generally acknowledged that it is not possible or even desirable to erase the consequences of violence, nor is it possible to adequately compensate for what has been lost. We cannot “repair the irreparable” (Hamber, 2006). Thus in terms of impact, it is argued that reparation for massive human rights violations during violent conflict must be viewed as largely symbolic, even when material compensation is provided. However, while being in many ways an unattainable ideal, at the same time, an agenda for reparation is increasingly viewed as an urgent and necessary component of efforts to address the wrongs of the past, and most importantly, as a form of justice that is victim-centred. While there has been more focus on forms of retributive justice such as criminal prosecutions, in many ways, reparations may be “the most tangible manifestation of the efforts of the state to remedy the harm victims have suffered” (De Greiff, 2006, p.2). And while reparation is still an under-examined field, empirical or theoretical work that has focused on its gendered dimensions is incipient at best (Rubio-Marín, 2006; Rubio-Marín, 2009). This research project aimed to move the conversation forward by providing the first comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the state-sponsored National Reparations Program (PNR) in Guatemala from the standpoint of women survivors of sexual violence. Drawing on the work of Kleinman (1988), Martín-Baró (1996) and others who emphasize the nature of suffering as deeply social, collective, and historical, rather than only or exclusively individual, and the structural nature of oppression and violence, the project situated reparations strategies within broader struggles for justice. Such an approach seeks to depathologize survivors of trauma and deconstructs the tendency to reduce them to the status of victim-object.

## Objectives

The **broad aim** of this project was to examine forms of reparation for Mayan women survivors of massive violations of human rights during the 36-year long armed conflict in Guatemala, as a potential contribution to women survivors’ broader struggles as political actors for justice, historical memory, and redress. The **specific objectives** addressed in this project were as follows:

1. To increase understanding of reparation as a gendered construct, particularly from the standpoint of women survivors of massive human rights violations;

2. To contribute to empirical knowledge of reparations programs and their gendered nature and implementation, through an analysis of the state-sponsored National Reparations Program (PNR) in Guatemala;
3. To contribute to the further development of transnational feminist action research and collaboration between the North and global South, and academic and activist communities;
4. To contribute to the development of more refined and responsive reparations programs and policies that more adequately address women survivors' demands for justice and redress;
5. To contribute to Canadian policy and practice on gendered approaches to transitional justice.

As the project developed, we created an additional objective, which was:

6. To analyze the use of creativity, including the creative arts (drawing, collage, storytelling), embodied practices (massage, human sculptures, role plays, theatre), and beliefs and practices from the Mayan worldview (ceremonies and rituals), as an intervention and resource in psychosocial and feminist accompaniment processes that have supported Mayan women.

This new objective emerged as we increasingly saw the central role of creativity in feminist and psychosocial accompaniment processes with Mayan women survivors over the past decade in Guatemala, including those we ourselves engaged in, and we came to understand that this role needed further analysis to understand its transformative potential, as well as challenges. As we argue in a forthcoming publication, "In the wake of war and in a context of ongoing violence, where the tension and stress from living in situations of 'normal abnormality' (Martín-Baró, 1996) are carried in one's body, the creative performance of these lived experiences offers possibilities for personal transformation through individual and small group experiences and potential for rethreading community towards social transformation" (Lykes and Crosby, in press a). We developed a Creative Methodologies subproject to understand the role of creativity, and facilitated a series of workshops using creative techniques (thereby using creativity as a method to examine creativity as an intervention) to ask the following question: Can Mayan women's self-representations and performances be understood by themselves and/or interpreted by those who accompany them as reflecting enhanced protagonism? In the project, we have come to use the term protagonist "to deconstruct dominant psychological discourses of women as 'victims,' 'survivors,' 'selves,' 'individuals' and/or 'subjects.'" As such, "the term represents person-in-context, invoking the Greek chorus within theatre or the 'call-response' within African American church contexts, that is, situating women dialectically vis-à-vis accompaniers and/or community wherein empathy is dialogically constitutive of them, that is, of the protagonist. Thus the term invokes the performative within... creative resources... representing the embodied dialogic of Mayan woman in relationships with each other and with those who accompany them" (ibid). We also at times use the term 'survivor' to denote Mayan women's own naming process.

## Methodology

This was a feminist participatory action research project. Such a methodological approach recognizes research participants as active, competent, and knowing subjects, and the importance of praxis to the generation of knowledge. And in order to achieve praxis, theory that results from knowledge production must not only bring about a better understanding of the actual, lived experience of particular social groups, but must also be influenced and shaped by their struggles.

The project was a collaborative endeavour between researchers from York University and Boston College (including graduate students) and the National Union of Guatemalan Women (UNAMG), and 54 Mayan women survivors of sexual violence during the armed conflict from four different Mayan groups (Kaqchiquel, Q'eqchi, Mam and Chuj) in three regions of the country (Chimaltenango, Alta Verapaz/Izabal and Huehuetenango). The agreement between York University, Boston College and UNAMG that governed this research stipulated that all three institutions are joint owners of the data generated from this project, and may use this data to produce outputs aimed towards a variety of audiences – women survivors themselves, as well as academic, policy, and activist communities.

Active participants in the project also included the feminist lawyers' organization *Mujeres Transformando el Mundo* (MTM, Women Transforming the World) and the *Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial* (ECAP, Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team). In 2009, MTM, ECAP and UNAMG formed the *Alianza Rompiendo El Silencio y la Impunidad* (Breaking the Silence and Impunity Alliance) to work with and accompany women survivors of sexual violence in their struggle for justice and redress. They have worked with fifteen Q'eqchi women from the community of Sepur Zarco in the Izabal/Alta Verapaz region who are survivors of sexual slavery at the military base during the war, to prepare a paradigmatic case of sexual violence as a tool of genocide, which is currently before the Guatemalan courts. Preparation of the groundwork for this case included the organization of a Tribunal of Conscience for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence in March 2010, which this research project documented (see Crosby and Lykes, 2011; Mendia and Orellana, 2012). Staff from the organizations who form the Alliance participated in reflection workshops facilitated by the research team. As such, the project became a space for the Alliance to process its ongoing actions and generate learning, and receive training in the use of creative techniques. For more information about the Alliance and its activities, please go to:

<http://www.alianzarompiendoelsilencio.org/>.

### *Primary sources*

The primary method for data collection was a series of participatory workshops using creative techniques that were facilitated with Mayan women survivors and members of the aforementioned Alliance throughout the course of the project, to generate data concerning their understanding of reparation. A series of semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with state and civil society reparations stakeholders. Both these methods are discussed in further detail in the Project Activities section below.

In the Creative Methodologies sub project, we facilitated a series of workshops using creative techniques to understand how women participants viewed creativity itself as a resource that held

transformative potential. To be able to draw out the specificity of Mayan women survivors' experience with creativity, we decided to include a second set of participants in the research, who had also engaged with creative resources, but within their own community, namely Maya Ixil and K'iche' women in the rural town of Chajul and its surrounding villages in the northern Quiché region of Guatemala. These women started working with Brinton Lykes in 1991, engaging psychosocial processes to seek truth telling and justice, participating in community-based economic development work to 'create a better future' for themselves and their children. From 1997 to 2000, some of these women joined Professor Lykes in a participatory photography and action research process (PhotoPAR), taking pictures, interviewing those photographed, telling stories about the pictures and then analyzing those stories. Through these processes they developed a collective story of the armed conflict, local Mayan beliefs and traditions, war's effects on one Mayan community and women's protagonism in response to the war (Women of PhotoVoice/ADMI & Lykes, 2000). Conducting research with both groups gave us access to contrasting experiences of organizing at different moments in the armed conflict/post-conflict transitions. Moreover, we were able to explore whether women's experiences of violence were addressed differently where sexual violence has been or has not been an explicit focus of the work. And what roles have intermediaries played in the design and implementation of creative methodologies, and how has this influenced Mayan women's struggles for their own protagonism? Ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews were also conducted with local intermediaries who have been engaged in this work over many years, developing and deploying many of the creative resources analyzed in our research.

### *Secondary sources*

MTM shared with us the transcripts of 48 individual interviews they conducted with women survivors in all three regions in preparation for the Tribunal of Conscience and the presentation of a claim for integral reparation against the Guatemalan government, which was presented to the InterAmerican Human Rights System in 2013. We removed all identifiers from the transcripts, and then coded and analyzed them for understandings of reparation, to be contrasted with the data generated from the participatory workshops we conducted with these same women. We also drew on previous research with these women conducted by UNAMG and ECAP within the Actoras de Cambio consortium, and in particular, the book *Tejidos que Lleva el Alma: Memoria de las mujeres mayas sobrevivientes de violación sexual durante el conflicto armado* [Weavings of the Soul: Memories of Mayan women survivors of sexual violence during the armed conflict] (Fulchiron, Paz & Lopez, 2009). This groundbreaking volume drew on women's oral histories of the war, including their experiences of sexual violence, and as such provided important baseline data for our project. We also analyzed a series of secondary sources on the reparations process in Guatemala, including publications by the National Reparations Program (PNR), Impunity Watch, and Project Counselling Service (PCS), as well as international policy documents on reparations. We conducted an extensive literature review on English-language academic material on gender and reparations. A second literature review was conducted on the use of creative methodologies by various organizations in Guatemala in their work with women survivors (and was produced in both English and Spanish).

## **Project Activities**

### **1. Participatory workshops**

#### **Mayan women's understandings of reparation(s)**

In February 2012 (to mark the National Day of 'Dignification' of the Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict), July 2012, and June 2013, we facilitated three participatory workshops using creative techniques (including dramatization, drawing, body sculptures, and collage – see Appendix One for examples of the collages) with women survivors from all three regions to draw out their understandings of reparation. Interpretation was provided by Mayan women interpreters who have been accompanying these processes for a number of years. The workshops revealed much agreement among women survivors with Brandon Hamber's contention that it is not possible to repair an irreparable harm, and as such, reparations are always symbolic, even when material compensation is provided. As one woman commented during a workshop, "Reparation is like trying to fix something like an old radio, impossible," with someone else adding, "Reparations are a symbol; they cannot replace what we lost." This sense of irrevocable loss was an ever-present thread in discussions about reparation: "You can't put a price on life or on rape." Its always-partial nature was also noted, it was seen as "recognition of damage caused," and in the Mayan language Kaqchiquel, it is referred to as "a little bit of help" because "it's not the price of a loved one or the cost of being raped."

By 2013, ten years after it was officially created and eight years after the implementation process began, there was a palpable sense of bitterness towards the state-sponsored National Reparations Program (PNR). As one woman commented, "When it started it was to recognize/acknowledge victims, now the government considers it past, they no longer want to talk about it, it's no longer in fashion." Others pointed to how the PNR infantilized and dismissed them: "It's just to distract; treating you like a child so you don't complain"; "It's to shut you up, cover your mouth"; "It's not right, not valid." There was a painful and contested relationship to the money being provided by the PNR. "By paying money they didn't make up for it." As one woman commented, "Reparations money is not used for the people. It came from other countries, and has been stolen by politicians. That's why justice is important, they are discriminating against us as indigenous women." While all the women had applied for reparation, not all had received it, and those who had not, did not know why: "It can never be recovered, they killed my father, they never gave me anything, even if they gave me Q20,000 it wouldn't make up for his life." For some whose husbands were members of the civil patrols or PACs, this relationship automatically excluded them from access to PNR funds. Another pointed to the issue of whether one can receive reparations for more than one harm, saying; "I petitioned again, this time for being raped, they said no, only once, even though the previous payment was for the death of my husband."

The inadequacies of the PNR process are in sharp contrast to the deep material losses of the war, which were continuously referred to: "We left our house, animals, land, our corn was taken by soldiers"; "We left our clothes, our shoes, we fled in bare feet out of fear." Many of the Q'eqchi women are widows whose husbands were killed by plantation owners and the military in a dispute over land. As widows, they have not been able to gain direct access to land and their impoverishment has deepened, with many relying on their children for support. In some regions, the PNR has built some houses, however, this experience has not necessarily been positive, with

references to half-built homes: “They didn’t give us the same building materials, we had to spend out of pocket.” Moreover, one of the conditions that the PNR established to build homes, among others, was that the “beneficiaries” had to own the land upon which the houses would be built, a condition that very few women, and especially Mayan women, were able to meet. The material underpinnings of the effects of the armed conflict on women’s lives were best encapsulated by several Mayan women protagonists in a workshop on reparation we facilitated in July 2012, when they used a newspaper photograph of a woman carrying a heavy burden to depict ‘violence against women.’ What struck us at the time was the inadequacy of the human rights regime and the ways in which it has ‘traveled down’ to the postwar Guatemala landscape through such initiatives as the PNR to respond to such an analysis of ‘violence against women’ and its implicit demand. The irrevocable loss of culture was also noted, particularly by those who had to flee the scorched earth policies: “We left our lives but also our culture, we no longer live as we did before.”

The embodied aspects of the extreme forms of violence experienced by these women are an ever-present reality; many are sick, in pain, and very sad. The workshops we facilitated were filled with many tears and mutual support for one another’s pain: “My body still hurts, my head hurts, my heart hurts. My husband is old, we are orphaned by the war;” “I can’t carry a full load or walk well.” The sense of mutual support was also present in concern for those who have not yet received reparations: “How are we going to accomplish reparations for women who have not received them?” In all the workshops, women recognized the pain that it brings to remember the violence they lived through, as well as the challenges they face in their struggle for justice and redress. Despite this, they insisted on the importance of this challenge: “This is the hope that we have, that justice be done, that the culprits pay for what they did to us. Even though we are afraid because we are alone in our communities, and now that we have a military president, we don’t know what can happen, what we want is that it be proven that what happened wasn’t our fault, and we are abandoned, we are sick.”The importance of activism was emphasized: “We are mobilizing to get the government to comply.”

### **Intermediary understandings of reparation(s)**

In May 2010 and July 2011, we facilitated participatory workshops with intermediaries from UNAMG, ECAP and MTM who are working together in the Breaking the Silence Alliance, including Mayan women who have acted as interpreters for women survivors (some of them are survivors themselves, or have family members who are). These workshops were designed to provide space for Alliance members to reflect on their work with women survivors, and to provide advanced training and capacity-building in the use of creative techniques in accompaniment work. The workshops included discussions of concepts of justice and reparations as they emerge from this work as well as the usefulness of different methodologies to work with women. In the 2010 workshop, participants generated a number of collages reflecting their understanding of reparation, which we subsequently compared and contrasted with those generated by women survivors, to develop an understanding of the conceptual coincidence as well as differences in understanding reparation from the differing standpoints of women survivors and those who accompany them. Discussion also included the role of translation and interpretation in the research process and in struggles for justice and reparations more broadly, which revolved around 1) how to reconcile individual, collective, and institutional / organizational understandings of ‘reparations’ and 2) how to translate these concepts between

Mayan languages and Spanish as well as into ‘legal’ terminology used by the courts and international tribunals in legal processes. Some of the central observations and reflections included:

- Participants who have worked as interpreters with women survivors suggested that instead of *reparation*, they often make reference to “mending,” “patching,” or “putting something together again,” “because it will never be the same again.” They illustrated this by making a paper silhouette of a woman, ripping it up and then taping it back together: even though all of the parts were back in their original place, the whole had changed: it had “scars” where the tape was and was not the same as before.
- Participants also reflected on survivors’ use of euphemisms when speaking of the violence they experienced during the internal armed conflict: instead of naming ‘rape’ or ‘intercourse,’ women survivors of sexual violence during the internal armed conflict often say: “he was with me,” “I had to serve at the military detachment,” or “they played with me.” Participants highlighted the challenge that this poses in legal contexts where literal translation is required and concluded that they need to develop a strategy to address this issue when cases are brought forward. Some suggestions included making use of ‘expert reports’ [*peritaje*] in the upcoming court case.

Shared definitions of integral reparations generated by participants working in small groups included:

- “A process that includes actions in different realms (justice, health, education, work, and decent housing [*vivienda digna*]) and that also covers guarantees of non-repetition and social awareness that denaturalizes the understanding of sexual violence as only a sexual act and instead classifies it as a crime.
- “A process to repair the hurt/damage [*daño*] caused to survivors of sexual violence by the violation of their human rights; through justice, recognition of victims, comprehensive health care, *patrimonio* [restitution of stolen and destroyed property, homes, crops, animals, etc...], and guarantees of non-repetition, improving their individual and social conditions.”

### **The role of creativity<sup>1</sup>**

From July to August 2011, we conducted five workshops with Mayan women protagonists on the role of creativity. Four workshops were conducted with a total of 94 participants in Chajul and the surrounding villages of Juil, Vipech and Chemal who had previously participated in the PhotoPAR project and in multiplier workshops. The fifth workshop was with 11 women from the gender and reparations project who were invited by UNAMG due to their stronger Spanish-language skills, to enable communication within the broader group. They included two Mam and three Chuj women from Huehuetenango and six Kaqchiquel women from Chimaltenango (six Q’eqchi’ women from the Alta Verapaz/ Izabal region were also invited but were unable to attend due to heavy rains making the roads from their communities impassable). Interpretation between Spanish and the various Mayan languages was provided in all the workshops by local

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<sup>1</sup>A revised version of this section will be included in a forthcoming article by Lykes and Crosby, Creativity as Intervention Strategy in Feminist and Psychosocial Accompaniment Processes with Mayan Women Survivors in Guatemala, which has been accepted for publication by *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict*.

Mayan women interpreters. We also conducted an additional workshop with intermediaries from the Breaking the Silence Alliance in July 2011.

A central activity in all the workshops with Mayan women was to invite participants to do individual or collective drawings of how they see themselves today, after their years of working together, in comparison to how they saw themselves prior to participating in feminist and psychosocial accompaniment processes. After making their drawings, participants posted them at the front of the room and the rest of the workshop participants were asked to say what they saw in the drawings, with those who created the drawings then clarifying what they themselves had envisioned. The discussion of the drawings included descriptions as well as elaborations, that is, the drawing became an elicitation prompt, and women described more details about themselves and women's organizing today and themselves in their communities during the war. This exercise provided a window on protagonists' self-understandings, and served as a resource for documentation and interpretation of their experiences of the creative resources. The workshops also included brainstorming activities about the different creative resources in which protagonists remembered having participated, followed by small group dramatizations of favourite techniques and discussion about why they might be performed and with what effects. A range of creative techniques came into play here, including embodied practices of dramatic play, massage, collage, and storytelling. The methods of each workshop differed slightly (for example, in the use of dramatizations or drawings) according to the participants' own preferences or emotional reactions to the issues under discussion.

Three dominant themes emerged in relation to the role of creative resources in enhancing Mayan women's protagonism in actions oriented towards individual and social. Firstly, participants identified the *evolution of a sense of freedom, of no longer being alone and of engagement with other women who had been through similar experiences*. Creative resources were described by participants as contributing to the process of the group's formation and sustenance; protagonists talked about speaking "within the group" and "organizing ourselves." Women across all five workshops noted that the creative resources were key in "explaining new ideas and/or helping us to understand what is being said – especially if we don't speak Spanish;" "when we don't understand the language in a workshop, they don't take us into consideration and then we don't pay attention and we don't learn things." *Dramatic play and dramatizations* were described as resources to develop new ideas about how to move forward: "to share our lives with each other and generate alternative ways of doing things;" "to discover that we are not alone and that we all have the same problems;" to feel "relieved and calmer and more able to face the reality of the everyday;" and, "through dramatizations we were better able to understand what we as women do to take care of the basic necessities of our lives." The *collective drawings* were described as a resource through which "some of the leaders could organize women so that they wouldn't feel so much fear, so that they could begin to feel free. Before we felt much fear." It was clear that the women valued the opportunity to work together in groups and appreciated the many opportunities of doing things together. This was in stark contrast to their multiple representations and descriptions of themselves "before the workshops" in which they were alone or talked about being lonely, about not being able to leave their homes, about not being able to gather together or to speak about what was on their minds.

A second emergent theme was *protagonists' relationships with outsider intermediaries as key to their sense of protagonism and capacity to act*. In discussing their drawing, Kaqchiquel women attributed their “coming out of our fear” as due to the intermediaries who work with them, “who have helped us very much.” These women went on to say that “alone we can’t do anything,” thanking the interpreter for translating for them, and concluding by stating, “We hope that you will continue supporting other women, not only us.” Thus there is not only a recognition of the importance of external aid but also clarity that they are not the only women – either within Guatemala or beyond – who have experienced sexual violence.

Thirdly, in all the workshops, protagonists linked creative resources to *embodied performance that facilitated the articulation of affect*. Thus, group dynamics and warming up exercises were described as “helping share feelings and emotions – sadness, negative memories, suffering that we have lived through;” as “energizers that get rid of our pain;” “we stop being shy;” and, “when we play our body relaxes and goes soft... we are more flexible when we play.” One woman described it this way: “it’s harder to put things into words. With creative methodologies, you use gesture to express yourself through your body.” Another woman described “engagement with her body as a process of becoming aware of changes in herself.”

## **2. Community engagement**

Over the course of the project, UNAMG staff made regular visits to the three regions where women survivors live, facilitating a series of workshops with women survivors in which they reflected on their own understandings of justice and reparations and organizational strategies. In the Alta Verapaz / Izabal region, these workshops centered on the various steps of the process in the legal case of sexual slavery as a tool of genocide that a subgroup of fifteen women survivors in this region has decided to undertake, as well as to generate reflections on the exhumation process underway in that region, in which some of the women were directly involved as family members of the disappeared. For example, fifty-one women participated in a two-day workshop in May 2012 that focused on women's rights and national and international mechanisms that uphold these rights and that provide tools to seek justice for rights violations. A follow-up workshop then provided more ample space for these women to reflect on the recent exhumations and on how they understand these processes in relation to their wider struggle for reparations and justice:

- Justice was understood not only as a form of reparation but also as a form of recognition of the violence they experienced during the armed conflict.
- In relation to the exhumations, women in AV/Izabal talked about how, despite the pain that comes with “remembering what happened,” it is important to them to be able to give their loved ones a decent burial.
- Some of the women clearly articulated the exhumation processes as part of their struggle for justice: “Taking our husbands wasn’t enough, they also raped us, they used us, they discriminated against us, they saw that we were poor, that we didn’t have a husband. It’s sad, it can never be erased from our hearts, but now we see the truth, we see it’s not a lie. Like they say, it’s part of our struggle. What they are finding is the proof.”

A similar workshop focusing on women's rights, national and international conventions, and the mechanisms they put in place to uphold and defend these rights was held in Huehuetenango in June 2012. Thirty-three women survivors of sexual violence from that region participated in this

workshop. The goal of these workshops was to disseminate results and the declaration of the Tribunal of Conscience (held in March 2010) and to raise awareness of issues of reparations and justice for women survivors of sexual violence during Guatemala's internal armed conflict – which is one of the community-level measures of reparations and 'dignification' that women survivors have identified in past workshops.

UNAMG also facilitated ongoing meetings with community leaders and local representatives of governmental institutions as a way to raise awareness and organize local support networks for women survivors as the legal case against perpetrators of sexual violence during the internal armed conflict was being prepared to present to the Guatemalan courts.

Commemorative dates were important to raise awareness about sexual violence and the importance of women's leadership in engaging change at the community level. The National Day of 'Dignification' of the Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict became an important date for participants, especially in the Alta Verapaz/Izabal region where in the last three years they participated in activities organized with other community leaders and victims of war. Kaqchiquel women also participated in events in Chimaltenango on this date and on June 30<sup>th</sup>, historically, "Army Day: and re-signified as "National Martyrs and Heroes' Day."

On International Women's Day (March 8<sup>th</sup>) and the International Day against Violence (November 25<sup>th</sup>), many of the women participated in marches or forums held in favour of women's rights. These are spaces in which participants were able to express their own demands. In 2012, participants created slogans they wanted to carry, especially in the Alta Verapaz/Izabal region.

### ***3. Individual interviews on reparations and the use of creativity as a resource***

Over the course of the project we conducted 33 semi-structured interviews with members of the PNR technical team, high-level government officials, members of civil society and international organizations actively engaged in the reparations debate in Guatemala as well as with feminist and indigenous activists who use creative resources in their work accompanying women survivors. It should be noted that direct access to the PNR has been difficult, due to numerous changes in staff and mandate, and a reluctance amongst the PNR leadership to engage with civil society. We were able to interview the current PNR director in June 2013. However, gaining access to specific data around the implementation of the program has been challenging.

### ***4. Capacity-building***

This project has supported the development and strengthening of research skills within the project partner organization through the active participation of the coordinator of UNAMG's Research Team and of members of its Non-Violence Program since the project's inception. UNAMG's Research Team has been involved in ethics training, coordinating and conducting interviews and workshops, transcription, and data analysis. Initiatives such as the note-taking workshop facilitated by Crosby and Lykes in July 2011 for all UNAMG staff provided the opportunity for the institution as a whole to strengthen its research and administrative capacity, by providing a space to reflect on note-taking practices as an essential part of the research process as well as project management, and to develop an institutional model for note-taking for all of the institution's activities, meetings, and workshops. The participation in project activities

of members of other organizations from the Breaking the Silence Alliance has also extended the capacity-building impact of this project beyond the project partners: workshops held with members of the Alliance provided space to reflect on their work with women survivors of sexual violence, on the strengths and weaknesses of different methodologies they use in this work, and on inter-organizational collaborations.

Three graduate students (two PhD, one Masters) associated with the Centre for Research on Latin American and the Caribbean (CERLAC) at York University, as well as four PhD students from Boston College have also worked as research assistants on this project and have had the opportunity to strengthen a number of research skills through their participation in the project: coordinating and participating in interviews and workshops, taking fieldnotes, transcribing interviews, organizing and coding research data (and using programs such as NVIVO), putting together literature reviews, and fact checking, editing and formatting academic articles.

## **5. Dissemination and evaluation of research results**

### **Dissemination**

Research results were disseminated by research team members in more than 20 presentations made to seminars and conferences in Guatemala, Canada, the United States, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom. UNAMG also used its radio program *Hablan las mujeres* [Women Talking], and TV show *Mujeres Convocando* [Women Convening]<sup>2</sup> to disseminate research results, and produced announcements on the radio and in newspapers following the verdict in the Rios Montt genocide trial to highlight sexual violence as a tool of genocide. February 26<sup>th</sup>, the official Day of Dignification of Victims of the Armed Conflict, and June 30<sup>th</sup> National Martyr and Heroes' Day was also used to promote public awareness campaigns in support of Mayan women survivors of sexual violence and their struggles for justice and redress.

### **Evaluation workshop with civil society stakeholders**

In June 2013 we held two dissemination and evaluation workshops in Guatemala with participants to assess the project and its results. The first workshop brought together nine civil society reparations stakeholders whom we had interviewed on an individual basis for the project (we had extended the invitation to everyone we interviewed in the project). Nine members of the research team also participated, including five UNAMG staff, two graduate students (one from York University and one from Boston College), and project team leaders Alison Crosby (York University), Brinton Lykes (Boston College) and Brisna Caxaj (UNAMG). In addition to sending everyone the transcripts of their interviews to review, we had also sent all interviewees ahead of time some of the outputs from the project, namely:

- 1) The Spanish version of an article Crosby and Lykes published in 2011 about the Tribunal of Conscience held in 2010, "Mayan women survivors speak: The gendered relations of truth-telling in postwar Guatemala", published in the *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (Vol. 5, pp.456-476);
- 2) The Spanish version of a draft of a forthcoming chapter, Creative methodologies as a resource for Mayan women's protagonism, that Lykes and Crosby are contributing to the

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<sup>2</sup> This show is coproduced with other organizations (Qanil, FLACSO, and Red de mujeres al aire).

volume *Peacebuilding in Conflict Situations from a Psychosocial Perspective* (edited by Brandon Hamber & Elizabeth Gallagher) (New York: Springer);

- 3) A draft of an article written by UNAMG staff Brisna Caxaj, Xiomara Chutan and Norma Herrera on the struggle for gendered reparations in Guatemala, *Memoria histórica, justicia y reparaciones a mujeres sobrevivientes de violencia sexual en Guatemala* (Historical memory, justice and reparations for women survivors of sexual violence in Guatemala).

The purpose of the workshop was to receive input and feedback into these initial research results, and to foster a conversation amongst participants about the current state of play of the reparations debate in Guatemala. Participants represented a cross-section of Guatemalan civil society, including indigenous activists, lawyers, psychologists and women's rights activists. UNAMG staff facilitated the discussion, which we received permission to record, and York and Boston College graduate students acted as notetakers. Participants were particularly interested in the tension between the invisibility and hypervisibility of sexual harm that Crosby and Lykes raised in their 2011 article on the Tribunal of Conscience and the implications for indigenous women survivors struggles for agency and voice. This issue had particular resonance for indigenous women participating in the conversation. Discussion included the need to further develop theoretical approaches to understanding racism in Guatemala. The usefulness of the comparative approach to understanding the role of creative techniques in this work was also highlighted. In general, participants found this an extremely useful space to be able to debate the current status of transitional justice in Guatemala, and asked UNAMG to continue fostering such spaces for discussion and dialogue.

### **Evaluation workshop with women survivors, interpreters and UNAMG staff**

A second evaluation workshop designed and facilitated by Crosby and Lykes in June 2013 brought together 14 Chuj, Mam, Q'eqchi and Kaqchiquel women survivors from Huehuetenango, Alta Verapaz, Izabal and Chimaltenango with whom we have been working over the past four years. Three interpreters – Chuj, Q'eqchi' and Kaqchiquel respectively – who have been working with the groups of women survivors over a number of years also participated, along with five UNAMG staff (two of whom also act as interpreters in these processes) and two graduate students from York University and Boston College, who served as notetakers and facilitators. The workshop was designed for women survivors to assess results to date and present their own reflexive understanding of reparation. After a series of warm up exercises, the first set of participatory activities focused on a review and assessment of a series of collages on reparation produced in previous workshops by women survivors and by intermediaries from the Breaking the Silence network. A second set of activities used Augusto Boal's methodology of image-based theatre of the oppressed wherein each of the four Maya groups as well as UNAMG designed and then performed a series of body sculptures that presented an image of reparation, based on their reading of the collages.<sup>3</sup> These performances were then collectively analyzed by the group, with the audience first recounting what they had seen, then the performers providing their explanation. These body sculptures were then re-performed that evening to an invited audience of civil society activists who have participated in the project alongside us (several of whom had participated in the first evaluation workshop described above), and were video-taped

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<sup>3</sup>For more information on this methodological approach, see Augusto Boal, Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schurtzman, Theatre of the Oppressed Workshops with Women: An Interview with Augusto Boal. *The Drama Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990), pp.66-76.

by UNAMG for further analysis (unfortunately, given the need for confidentiality due to security concerns, particularly with the upcoming sexual violence legal case in which several of these women are participating, we are currently unable to disseminate these images publicly). While we are still in the process of analyzing the data from this workshop, below is an excerpt from workshop field notes on the performance of one of the body sculptures:

*The room is absolutely quiet as they walk up to the stage and one of the women is placing the others where she wants them. Two women are standing at the front of the room holding hands, one has a binder in her hand. The third woman is crouched down in the back corner of the 'stage', with a towel over on her head, covering her face. The 'director' walks over to the woman in the corner, takes her by the hand to the other two women. She puts her hand in theirs, and takes the towel off her face and head bit by bit. She is manipulating her face (someone explains later that she was opening her eyes and her mouth). The 'director' then moves the three women's feet, putting one foot towards the front, for each. They seem to be walking hand in hand, going forward.*

In debriefing and analyzing this image-theatre performance, the women talked about how important organizing has been to them, helping to combat the isolation they felt, “when we couldn’t talk, when no one listened to us,” and the importance of reaching out to other women who are alone. The other performances contained similar images of isolation and reflected the importance participants placed on mutual support and organizing, highlighting racist mistreatment by the state, “We wanted to represent how they treat us because we are Mayan and wear *traje* [Mayan dress],” and the effects of the violence on their health: “No one ever paid attention to the illnesses we have suffered for so many years [as a result of the violence].” Coming together to organize and advocate for redress helped them find their voice: “Now we are happy, before we were ashamed to give opinions and speak, but not any more.”

## **Project Outputs**

### ***Research***

### **Publications**

Caxaj, Brisna (2010). La discusión sobre las políticas de reparación o resarcimiento a nivel internacional [Approaches to reparations policies at the international level]. *La Lupita*, Year 2, Vol. 3, June, pp.12-16.

Caxaj, Brisna, Chutan, Xiomara and Herrera, Norma (2013), *Memoria histórica, justicia y reparaciones a mujeres sobrevivientes de violencia sexual en Guatemala* [Historical memory, justice and reparations for women survivors of sexual violence in Guatemala], UNAMG.

Crosby, Alison and M. Brinton Lykes (2011). Mayan women survivors speak: The gendered relations of truth-telling in postwar Guatemala. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 5, pp.456-476 (also available in Spanish from the authors).

Desgranges, Elisabeth (2010). El resarcimiento desde las mujeres sobrevivientes de la violencia sexual durante el conflicto armado [Reparation from the standpoint of women survivors of sexual violence during the armed conflict]. *La Lupita*, Year 2, Vol. 3, June, pp. 17-21.

Herrera, Norma (2010). Programa Nacional de Resarcimiento [National Reparations Program]. *La Lupita*, Year 2, Vol. 3, June, pp.3-8.

Lykes, M. Brinton and Crosby, Alison (in press a), Creative methodologies as a resource for Mayan women's protagonism. In *Peacebuilding in Conflict Situations from a Psychosocial Perspective*. Edited by Brandon Hamber & Elizabeth Gallagher. New York: Springer (also available in Spanish from the authors).

Lykes, M. Brinton and Crosby, Alison (in press b). Creativity as Intervention Strategy in Feminist and Psychosocial Accompaniment Processes with Mayan Women Survivors in Guatemala. *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict*.

Lykes, M. Brinton and Alison Crosby (2014), Feminist Practice of Action and Community Research. In *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (Second Edition). Edited by Sharlene Hesse-Biber. Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications, pp. 145-181.

Mendia Azkue and Guzman Orellana, Gloria (2012) (eds). *Ni olvido, ni silencio: Tribunal de Consciencia contra la violencia sexual hacia las mujeres durante el conflicto armado en Guatemala* [No forgetting, no silence: Tribunal of Conscience against sexual violence against women during the armed conflict in Guatemala]. Bilbao, Spain: Universidad de Pais Vasco, Hegoa, UNAMG & ECAP.

#### Publications Forthcoming

Crosby, Alison, M. Brinton Lykes and Brisna Caxaj. Gendering genocide: Reparation struggles of Mayan women survivors of sexual violence. To be submitted to a special issue of the *Journal of Genocide Research* on the Guatemalan genocide (will also be translated into Spanish).

Crosby, Alison and M. Brinton Lykes. *Reparation Struggles: Mayan women's protagonism in transitional justice processes in postwar Guatemala*, co-authored book manuscript to be submitted for review to Stanford University Press (Human Rights Series).

Lykes, M. Brinton and Crosby, Alison. Participatory Action Research. Invited book chapter for volume *Research Methods in Peace Psychology*. Edited by Diane Bretherton and Siew Fang Low. Springer Publications, Peace Psychology Book Series.

#### **Creative outputs**

UNAMG, along with the other organizations in the Breaking the Silence Alliance, have continued their work to raise awareness of the issue of sexual violence committed against women during Guatemala's internal armed conflict and women survivors' struggles for justice – including the dissemination of the resolution of the Tribunal of Conscience held in March 2010. To this effect, a popularized version of the resolution of the Tribunal of Conscience has been

produced. This booklet is being used in regional workshops with women's, human rights, and other community-based organizations to sensitize these groups to the theme of justice and reparations for women survivors of sexual violence and to begin to organize local networks that would provide support to survivors when cases go to trial.

To generate awareness and support for the Sepur Zarco sexual slavery legal case, the Breaking the Silence Alliance published a book of photographs documenting the process of putting the case together, *Nuestra Mirada esta en la justicia* [We are looking towards justice] (November 2012). The Alliance is also working on a forthcoming documentary about the case.

The second edition of a booklet on women's human rights (titled *Derechos humanos de las mujeres*) was also produced and published by UNAMG. In addition to being a resource to help explain judicial processes and mechanism in workshops with groups of women survivors themselves, this booklet serves as a tool for awareness-raising work with the wider community.

UNAMG also produced further episodes of the 'radio-novela' *Victoria Rompio el Silencio* in Spanish, Mam, Kaqchiquel, Chuj and Q'eqchi' to popularize and disseminate the results of the Tribunal of Conscience through the community radio network. Financial support from IDRC was crucial to the production of these episodes in the various Mayan languages (these versions are currently in the final stages of production).

We also plan to produce a popularized version of the Lykes and Crosby article forthcoming in the journal *Intervention*, for dissemination to participants.

### **Capacity**

This project has led to the strengthening of UNAMG's capacity to conduct research. UNAMG's Research Team has received training in research ethics, interviewing, data coding and analysis, resulting in UNAMG staff publishing several research reports and articles, and making a number of presentations to academic conferences, including the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). Training in notetaking for staff as a whole strengthened the institution's research and administrative capacity and resulted in the development of an institutional model for note-taking for all of the institution's activities, meetings, and workshops. The participation in project activities of members of other organizations from the Breaking the Silence Alliance has also extended the capacity-building impact of this project beyond the project partners: workshops held with members of the Alliance provided space to reflect on their work with women survivors of sexual violence and on the strengths and weaknesses of different methodologies they use in this work. The project trained facilitators in the use of creative techniques in the accompaniment of women survivors, and generated a series of tools and training materials in the use of creative resources.

Three graduate students (two PhD, one Masters) associated with the Centre for Research on Latin American and the Caribbean (CERLAC) at York University, as well as four graduate students from Boston College have also worked as research assistants on this project and have had the opportunity to strengthen a number of research skills through their participation in the project: coordinating and participating in interviews and workshops, taking fieldnotes, transcribing interviews, organizing and coding research data, putting together literature reviews,

and fact checking, editing and formatting academic articles. These students have also had the opportunity to make a number of presentations to academic conferences.

### ***Policy and Practice***

UNAMG has used research results to contribute to policymaking that seeks to integrate gender into the reparations debate in Guatemala. The Tribunal of Conscience for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence, which they organized in 2010 in conjunction with several other organizations, and which we documented for this research project (see Crosby and Lykes, 2011; Mendia and Orellana, 2012), served to increase public awareness about the issue as well as enable women survivors to speak publicly for the first time. This was a transnational event, and included participants from Peru, Uganda, Japan, Canada, the United States and Europe. UNAMG also facilitated an exchange, via Skype, with women survivors of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, increasing Mayan women's awareness that they are not alone, and that this violence has been experienced and resisted by others. UNAMG produced a policy proposal for a reparations law in Guatemala, and published a special issue of their magazine *La Lupita* on reparations and the public budget. In 2013, together with MTM and ECAP in the Breaking the Silence Alliance, they presented a demand for integral reparation for Mayan women survivors of sexual violence against the Guatemalan state to the InterAmerican Commission for Human Rights. MTM and UNAMG also worked with 15 Maya Q'eqchi' women survivors a legal case of sexual slavery that is currently before the Guatemalan courts. UNAMG was one of the organizers of a forum on sexual violence and femicide during the armed conflict in Guatemala held in June 2012 as part of the Nobel Women's Initiative international campaign against sexual violence and gendered violence in conflict. In November 2012, UNAMG organized the *International Seminar on Security and Justice for Indigenous Women in Guatemala* in coordination with Global Action to Prevent War and Armed Conflict (GAPW). This was an assessment and planning workshop that brought together indigenous and other voices from Guatemalan civil society as well as officials from the government, UN Women and other international agencies. The general recommendations made in the seminar were presented by GAPW staff at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meetings in New York in March 2013, which focused on the Elimination and Prevention of all Forms of Violence against Women and Girls.

In Canada, Alison Crosby presented a paper drawing on results from this project entitled "Gendering historical memory processes" at the research seminar *Dialogues on Memory: Strategies for reconstructing memories in conflict and post-conflict zones* organized by the Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia. This seminar was an opportunity to engage with Canadian as well as international policy makers and practitioners on transitional justice issues, and included the participation of researchers from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The seminar resulted in the production of a toolkit, *Remembering and narrating conflict: Resources for doing historical memory work*, which is available at <http://reconstructinghistoricalmemory.com/>. Alison Crosby also organized a seminar *Excavations, Contestations and Collusions: A Symposium on Memory and Memorialization* through the Centre for Feminist Research at York University, to begin to develop a network of scholars working on these issues. Keynote speakers included Indian feminist academic Dr. Urvashi Butalia, author of *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (2000) and Sri Lankan feminist academic Dr. Malathi de Alwis, co-editor of *Feminists Under Fire*

(2003) and *Embodied Violence* (1996). Canadian speakers included Professor Honor Ford-Smith from York University and Professor Alissa Trotz from the University of Toronto, as well as Alison Crosby.

Alison Crosby and Brinton Lykes contributed a Guatemala case study drawing on research results from this project to the transnational research project *Trauma, Development and Peace building: Towards an integrated psychosocial approach*, headed by Professor Brandon Hamber, director of the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) at the University of Ulster (and also funded by IDRC). In addition to a forthcoming edited volume, which highlights case studies from Northern Ireland, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Mozambique and Israel/Palestine as well as Guatemala, and a special issue of the journal *Intervention*, the project is also producing a series of policy-orientated recommendations for psychosocial practitioners working in conflict and post-conflict situations.

## **Project Outcomes**

### ***Outcome One***

*An enhanced capacity on the part of indigenous women survivors of sexual violence during the armed conflict in Guatemala, and those who accompany them, to make meaning and create knowledge about reparation and justice in postwar Guatemala.*

Our research has found that Mayan women survivors have a clear understanding that it is not possible to ‘repair an irreparable harm’ such as sexual violence, while at the same time conceiving of ‘gendered reparation’ as entailing holding the state accountable for the harm that they have suffered and to guarantee non repetition of this harm, bringing perpetrators to justice, and having access to land and housing. Through their participation in a Tribunal of Conscience for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence, as well in the presentation of demand for reparation against the Guatemalan state to the InterAmerican Commission for Human Rights, and the participation of 15 Q’eqchi’ women in a paradigmatic legal case of sexual slavery currently before the Guatemalan courts, they have developed the capacity to make public demands of the state for reparation and justice. The organizations who accompany them have formed the Breaking the Silence Alliance to advocate for reparation and justice on their behalf, and have developed legal and policy briefs using data generated from this project, as well as popular education materials (including a ‘radio-novela’ series in Spanish and several Mayan languages and a collection of pamphlets) to communicate knowledge about these issues to groups of women survivors, Guatemalan civil society, and the general public.

### ***Outcome Two***

*An enhanced capacity to generate knowledge about how reparations programs are implemented.* Our research data has shown that while the PNR did hand out cheques to some individual victims (including some women survivors of sexual violence) as well as build some homes, it failed in its objective to provide ‘integral reparations’ to survivors, particularly in terms of the provision of psychosocial support and more community-orientated forms of reparation.

### **Outcome Three**

*An enhanced capacity of Canadian and Guatemalan institutions to conduct feminist action research and engage in collaborative and transnational forms of knowledge production oriented towards social transformation.*

In its essence, this project has been a collaborative endeavor between York University, Boston College and the National Union of Guatemalan Women (UNAMG). All three institutions are co-owners of the data generated from this project, and have worked together in the research design, implementation and analysis, including facilitating workshops together, co-authoring policy documents, popular education materials, articles, book chapters and a book manuscript, and presenting together on panels at conferences such as the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). The project has included the participation of three graduate students from York University and four from Boston College as research assistants. It has also engaged two other Guatemalan organizations, MTM and ECAP, as well as a number of other Guatemalan civil society organizations and state institutions, the Inter American Human Rights Commission, international organizations such as Impunity Watch and Project Counselling Service, the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, and the Canadian institutions Inter Pares and the University of British Columbia.

### **Outcome Four**

*An enhanced capacity of Guatemalan institutions to generate knowledge that contributes to and influences policymaking on gender and reparations, sexual violence, and transitional justice mechanisms more broadly speaking, in Guatemala, and within the international human rights regime;*

and

### **Outcome Five**

*An enhanced capacity of Guatemalan institutions to generate critical reflections on lessons learned from research processes that can be shared with others.*

Using data generated from this project, UNAMG has participated in policy engagement in Guatemala, including gender focused policy recommendations in support of the introduction of a reparations law (reparations is currently a government program but has not been legally institutionalized). UNAMG staff has also participated in forums on these issues organized by international institutions, including the UNDP, UN Women, and Impunity Watch, presenting policy recommendations on reparation stemming from the data generated in this project. UNAMG, ECAP and MTM have also presented a demand for integral reparations for women survivors of sexual violence against the Guatemalan state to the InterAmerican Human Rights Commission, and have presented a legal case of sexual slavery on behalf of 15 Q'eqchi' women to the Guatemalan courts.

### **Outcome Six**

*An enhanced capacity of Canadian institutions to generate knowledge that contributes to and influences policymaking on gender and reparations, sexual violence, and transitional justice mechanisms more broadly speaking, in Canada, and within the international human rights regime;*

and

### **Outcome Seven**

*An enhanced capacity of Canadian institutions to generate critical reflections on lessons learned from research processes that can be shared with others.*

This project has engaged with other Canadian institutions working on these issues, including Inter Pares and the Liu Institute for Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia, as well as researchers from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. A particular contribution of this project has been to provide insights into the tensions that arise in working on the issue of sexual harm, in particular the dynamic between invisibility and hypervisibility. Specifically, we found that it is important to ‘break the silence’ concerning the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, while at the same time, not reifying survivors as abject victims, which can often serve to preclude survivors’ own search for an identity outside of that of ‘the rape victim’ and occlude an understanding of the broader gendered dimensions of violence beyond the experience of bodily harm, as well as the daily lived experience of struggle and survival. The project is also providing recommendations for methodological strategies for long-term engagement in participatory and action research on these issues, as outlined in the section below.

### **Overall Assessment**

The institutional agreement between York University, Boston College and UNAMG was very effective in governing the parameters of our engagement throughout this project, and created an atmosphere of trust from the beginning. In particular, it was very important to make clear from the outset that all three institutions are joint owners of the data generated from this project, and may use this data to produce outputs aimed towards a variety of audiences – women survivors themselves, as well as academic, policy, and activist communities. Overall, communication between the three institutions was quite fluid. We set up an interactive Web site that allowed us to store research data and relevant articles, and to communicate amongst ourselves as a transnational research team. All research team members had to undergo ethics training and certification and be approved by the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and York University’s Ethics Review Committee before they could participate in research and gain access to the Web site.

It is important to acknowledge the challenges presented for effective project management and coordination of activities by the differing rhythms of North American academic institutions such as York University and Boston College, and an NGO such as UNAMG. For example, Professors Crosby and Lykes and their graduate students’ travel to Guatemala was mainly restricted to the summer months, due to ongoing teaching and administrative responsibilities, and the timing of such field visits sometimes conflicted with UNAMG’s own institutional cycle. The summer months tend to be the busiest in terms of UNAMG’s internal evaluation processes and reporting to international funders. Time was the most precious commodity in this project; finding time to conduct research as well as to write, within the context of multifaceted sets of responsibilities held by all participants, but in particular for UNAMG, given the limited time they were able to allocate to research and writing. The Northern academics participating in this project have been able to write and publish more academic outputs, although UNAMG has also produced an

impressive number of multifaceted outputs, from academic articles to radio plays to popular education materials to legal and policy documents.

UNAMG contributed an enormous amount of in-kind resources to this project, given that the research project was in fact studying their actions supporting Mayan women survivors in their struggles for justice and reparations. So we were able to integrate a research focus into UNAMG's ongoing program activities and workshops with women survivors in all three regions of the country. This allowed us to engage far more extensively with women survivors than we would have been able to do with just our research funding.

While acknowledging the degree of support by UNAMG to this project, multifaceted donor support for this research was significant to this project's success. Most importantly, IDRC's multi-year support ensured UNAMG's ability to actively participate in the research process, including funding for key workshop activities, salary for staff, and travel support to enable staff to participate in the dissemination of research results to international conferences. Indeed, UNAMG has said that this support from IDRC effectively ensured the institution's ongoing capacity to conduct research; without it, this would have not been possible. We also received funding from a four-year Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Standard Grant, which provided important support to the participation of York University in this project, and in particular, support to three graduate students as research assistants, including their participation in fieldwork in Guatemala along with Professor Crosby. Successive grants from IDRC also supported York graduate student participation in this project. The increasing financial support from Boston College's Center for Human Rights and International Justice to this project was also critical, ensuring Professor Lykes' participation in the project, along with several Boston College graduate students, and providing support for interview transcription. Support from SSHRC, IDRC and Boston College for translation costs enabled us to work towards fulfilling a key commitment in this project, which was to ensure that as many research outputs as possible were available in English and Spanish as well as Mayan languages.

Despite the commitment to ensuring as many outputs as possible appeared in English and Spanish as well as Mayan languages, language was a multifaceted challenge in this project. We were not able to ensure that all products were minimally available in both English and Spanish; for example, due to limited funds, the literature review on gender and reparations put together by one of the York graduate students was only in English (the second literature review on the use of creative techniques by another York graduate student was produced in both languages). Most UNAMG staff members were thus not able to draw on the gender and reparations literature review in writing articles on reparations. Interview transcripts were produced in Spanish; workshop field notes were produced in both languages. Given the unevenness of the project's bilingual capacity, the success of the project was particularly reliant on the ability of Brisna Caxaj, who coordinated the research project for UNAMG, to speak fluent English, which enabled her to gain access to all project outputs and communications, which was not possible for her colleagues. Her English-language capacity increased her already too-heavy workload. And while York University, Boston College and UNAMG researchers all spoke Spanish, none of us spoke a Mayan language, and many of the Mayan women with whom we were working spoke only their language – which inhibited both their communication amongst one another, and with the research team. We were particularly reliant on the key role played by Mayan women

interpreters in this work (and indeed, facilitated a series of discussions with interpreters about their role, as a key facet of this work). In most cases, the interpreters were the local staff of UNAMG and ECAP, and their experience as “promotoras” gave them the ability to interpret and translate the discussions on generally silenced topics. In many of the workshops we facilitated, small group work occurred within language groups, although processing did always occur within the larger group, but mediated through interpretation. We did change this up in the final evaluation workshop with women survivors, where we had enough interpreters (two for each language group) to be able to work across languages, which was a positive evolution in the process of facilitating spaces for Mayan women to organize and work together across their particular language group. The use of creative resources in all the workshops also helped to overcome the language difficulties as well as issues of literacy, and create research outputs included drawings and creative performance.

The biggest negative impact on the project was the adversarial political context in Guatemala following the election of former army general Otto Perez Molina as President of Guatemala in January 2012. The new government’s declaration that genocide did not occur during the armed conflict directly contradicted the findings of Guatemala’s Truth Commission, and ran contrary to the efforts by Guatemalan civil society, including our research partners, to seek justice for survivors of the atrocities committed during the armed conflict, including genocide. In the workshops we conducted, women survivors themselves were very clear that the election of Perez Molina presents a roadblock in their search for reparation and justice. The current Guatemalan Attorney General, Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey, has been instrumental in ensuring that genocide cases have moved through the legal system, and the tension between the judicial and executive branches of government affected the action-research activities our project has supported. Our paramount concern was the safety and security of the women survivors with whom we were working, as well as those who accompany them, and we proceeded at a cautious pace in all our work, with UNAMG taking the lead in this respect. This is the advantage of a participatory action research process, given that the mechanisms are already in place to ensure that the needs of those who are the most affected by these difficult political circumstances – the women survivors themselves – take centre stage and in fact have governed the practice of this research project. UNAMG, ECAP and MTM adopted enhanced security measures to address the increasing adversarial political context within the past two years. We ended up conducting many of the collective participatory workshops in Guatemala City to ensure anonymity and confidentiality for participants.

A concern shared amongst the research team is how to respond to Mayan women survivors’ demands for improvements to their extremely precarious health and livelihood situations. All 54 women live in conditions of extreme impoverishment and are ill and elderly (one participant suffering from cancer passed away in 2013), a direct consequence of the devastation of the armed conflict – the destruction of their homes, crops, the dispossession of their land and the violation of their bodies. Very rightly, they are tired of talking about what happened to them, or of telling us what they understand by reparation. They want action that leads to transformations of the conditions in which they live; indeed action is necessary for them to feel any sense of reparation. They want the Guatemalan state to punish the perpetrators and provide them with homes, land and access to health care. Such clear material demands throw into sharp relief the deep-seated inadequacies of processes such as ours. Talk about reparation is not enough. It has to

be translated into concrete actions. In the evaluation workshop, we focused on actions at the community level towards reparation, which surfaced a number of actions women themselves are already taking to improve their lives and those of their children, and allowed us to ground the discussion within the material realities of everyday life in rural Guatemala, rather than within discourses of human rights that often fail to address economic concerns in any real way.

Despite all the challenges that are inherent to this research, and which stem from deep histories of colonization and imperialism and gendered racism within which we are all intimately implicated, this project presented an opportunity for us to learn from one another, and indeed, this research would not have been possible without the engaged commitment of all concerned, and in particular, on the part of women survivors themselves, who despite their frustrations at the lack of action on the part of the Guatemalan state, made clear how important this ongoing space for mutual learning and collaborative engagement has been to them in their struggles for justice and redress. Below we provide a series of recommendations for future research interventions in conflict and post conflict situations, drawing on what we have learned in this project.

## **Recommendations<sup>4</sup>**

### ***Recommendation One***

***That research interventions be consonant with cultural and educational capacities of participants – and sufficiently flexible to allow for the kinds of transformative practices necessary to overcome decades of militarized gendered racialized violence.***

This research project has emphasized the important contributions of creative methodologies as a resource for “listening” (Fine, 1992) to indigenous meaning making and facilitating Mayan women’s protagonism. Specifically, these resources facilitated the active participation of rural non-formally educated Mayan women in a wide range of processes that contributed to their personal transformation. The creative resources were situated to interface with Mayan beliefs and practices – many of which were deployed by Mayan co-facilitators in both projects. Thus the resources mobilized through performances in the creative workshops resonate with knowledge rooted in local experiences (Lykes, 1989) and reflect critical ways of re-theorizing women’s knowledge, embodying and complexifying earlier constructions that tended to essentialize ‘women’s ways of knowing’ (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). Mayan women’s knowledge is performed through their imaginings of a ‘new future,’ one that is rooted in the ever-present sadness attendant to the violations of the past yet performed through embodied protagonism. Such knowledge contrasts with both an epistemological framework of post-traumatic stress disorder that dominates many psychological theories of trauma and attendant interventions as well as essentialized gender and racialized discourses that homogenize ‘women.’

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<sup>4</sup>Revised and adapted versions of this section will be included in two forthcoming publications by Lykes and Crosby: Creativity as Intervention Strategy in Feminist and Psychosocial Accompaniment Processes with Mayan Women Survivors in Guatemala, which will be published in a special issue of *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict* on psychosocial work and peacebuilding in February 2014; and Creative methodologies as a resource for Mayan women’s protagonism. In *Peacebuilding in Conflict Situations from a Psychosocial Perspective*. Edited by Brandon Hamber & Elizabeth Gallagher. New York: Springer.

## **Recommendation Two**

***That social transformation is a long-term process and requires long-term commitment from ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’***

Protagonists in this research project engaged in social transformation in particular ways that reflected, on the one hand, their personal experiences of transformation, and, on the other, the particular historical moments and social spaces (within a geographic community, as in Chajul, or within a community of women, as in the groups of women survivors of sexual violence) wherein they engaged in the creative workshops described herein. The current research project built on previous research initiatives that took place over considerable lengths of time. The Chajul relationship was initiated with Brinton Lykes in 1991 and ongoing collaborations extended through the publication of the PhotoVoice book in 2000. The women of Chajul have extended that work into local villages and workshops in the town and surrounding villages with women and, most recently, with youth, continue today. Support to Mayan women survivors of sexual violence was initiated in 2003 and accompaniment of the 54 women in the original group by a range of civil society actors continues to this day.

## **Recommendation Three**

***That research interventions in conflict and post-conflict situations characterized by gross violations of human rights that strive for social transformation should problematize and critically interrogate the presence and participation of intermediaries.***

The role of a diverse set of intermediaries has been key in this project and is not without numerous challenges. Sally Engle Merry (2006) writes about interpreters or intermediaries who straddle international and local contexts, translating international human rights norms into local languages and thus disseminating these norms and practices more widely; a process of “traveling down.” Participatory and action research and creative methodologies enhance the probability for local interpretations and understandings to “travel up,” as well as possibilities for reflexivity. The significant number of Mayan, mestiza, and international intermediaries in this project facilitated multiple participatory processes which sought to generate spaces through which Mayan women performed their experiences and narrated their understanding of the causes and consequences of gross violations of their rights. Power circulates within and through these ‘insider-outsider’ relationships (Bartunek, 2008) wherein intermediaries seek to “work the hyphen” (Fine, 1992), generating a hybridized ‘third voice’ (Lykes, TerreBlanche, & Hamber, 2003). The latter is neither a singular, essentialized narrative of Mayan women survivors nor the work of a ventriloquist who facilitates or manipulates their creative and performative liberatory acts as protagonists. And some intermediaries themselves are survivors of gross violations committed during the Guatemalan armed conflict, including sexual violence, which complicates an binary assumption of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider.’ What travels then are hybridized voices accompanied by embodied narratives that more easily journey beyond local communities to national and international listeners. However, despite the opportunity for critical engagement with these hybridities, intermediaries’ power can be deployed in ways that negate or complicate these important efforts to disrupt interlocking gendered, racialized and class-based structures, highlighting the importance of critical reflexivity throughout these collaborative processes.

## **Recommendation Four**

***That research interventions draws attention to some of the strengths and some of the contradictions of working with Mayan women ‘within’ local geographic communities versus working ‘within’ communities of women.***

The question of ‘community’ that emerged in discussions throughout this project is one of considerable conflict and contestation in Guatemala, given the centrality of Mayan community to Mayan women within histories of colonization and racism that saw active attempts by the state to destroy Mayan community, including through the perpetration of genocide during the war. The accompaniment of women which our research has sought to document took place within a wider socio-political context in which Mayan communities demanded their rights – struggles which enhanced and restricted Mayan women’s efforts to speak out about their experiences of racialized and gendered violations. Yet, as our research has found, there is no single ‘community’ nor is community any longer only – or even primarily – a geographic space or defined cultural and linguistic set of practices. The work with the groups of women survivors who came together from three different regions of the country and the work in Chajul, engaged these issues in radically different ways. Mayan survivors from the former participated in women-only spaces crafted by intermediaries due in large part to ongoing violence and stigmatization in their local communities. The explicit focus on sexual violence forced them to exit in order to participate in truth-telling and justice seeking processes – as well as in our research project. In sharp contrast, the work in Chajul was deeply embedded in the geographic spaces that the military sought – and in many cases, at least temporally, succeeded in – destroying. The decision in the early to mid-1990s to facilitate work that was embedded in and responded directly to local initiatives constrained the exploration of deeply silenced stories of sexual violence. Research interventions within conflict and post-conflict contexts must problematize and deconstruct ‘community,’ recognizing and reclaiming the strengths of local alliances while critically embracing ‘identity communities’ when the latter afford safer spaces in which to tell stories of violence.

## **Recommendation Five**

***To engage in research with men that takes up the complexities of their varied positions as perpetrators-survivors and to problematize the essentialisms of gender.***

This project has been woman-focused, initiating and/or responding to Mayan women who were deeply concerned to tell their stories, demand justice and redress for the harm suffered, and create a better future for themselves and their children. The groups with whom we have worked were largely widows or single or (re)married women who had survived the horrors of war. Thus men were largely present ‘in the shadows,’ as perpetrators, slain husbands, survivors of yet unspoken experiences of violence against men, disappeared sons and/or as children of militarized rape. As the work that we document in this research, women-centered spaces seemed the best – or only – option for initiating accompaniment of Mayan women. Yet, over time, it has become clear that projects seeking to confront the effects of war and, more specifically, of gendered and racialized violence against Mayan people against whom genocide was targeted, must take up the challenges of working with men. A major preoccupation and concern of our research partners who are working with Mayan women who have self-identified as survivors of sexual violence is the long-term consequence of having transformed themselves ‘outside’ of local community which includes women, men and children. As court cases proceed and survivors and perpetrators are publically identified, the ‘community secrets’ which women kept are being exposed. ECAP

has initiated work with men and boys in some of these communities to prepare for these next stages in the truth- and justice-seeking processes.

## Acknowledgements

Many people made this research project possible through their hard work, dedication, unfailing encouragement and support. Alison Crosby, Brinton Lykes and Brisna Caxaj would like to most gratefully thank and acknowledge the following:

First and foremost, the 54 Chuj, Mam, Kaqchiquel and Q'eqchi women who so graciously opened a space for us to engage with them. They made long and difficult journeys to work with us, and for that we are eternally grateful.

UNAMG staff and associates, including executive director Maya Alvarado, who from day one was with us every step of the way, Luz Mendez, Carmelita Chonoy, Sofia Ramirez, Jeannette Asencio, Sandra Sanchez, Norma Herrera, Xiomara Chutan, Modesta Perez and Olivia Tox. This project would not have been possible without the steadfast political, administrative and financial support of UNAMG for this project.

The other members of the Breaking the Silence Alliance, MTM and ECAP, who accompanied us throughout the project.

The interpreters-*promotoras*, from UNAMG and ECAP as well as those who work independently, for their invaluable support throughout the project: Carmelita Chonoy, Maria Domingo Paiz, Ana Alicia Ramirez Pop, Asunción Telón, and Olivia Tox.

M. Luisa Cabrera Pérez-Armiñan who worked as a consultant, and Ana Caba Mateo who worked as an interpreter and workshop facilitator, in the Chajul component of the project.

Fabienne Doiron, Emily Rosser, Caren Weisbart, Erin McDonald Sibley, Rachel Hershberg, Rocío Sánchez-Ares and Shaun Glaze, who worked tirelessly as research assistants on this project.

Megan Thomas, who did the translation work for us and was a constant source of support, advice and feedback. Melisa Flores, who transcribed the individual and group interviews in a timely fashion.

The Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC) at York University, and the Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College, who provided the essential institutional bases for this project, along with important political, administrative and financial support.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for their invaluable financial support to this project.

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