International Feminist Journal of Politics

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfjp20

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To cite this article: Julia Hartviksen (she/her/hers) (2021): A matrix of violences: the political economy of violences against Mayan women in Guatemala's Northern Transversal Strip, International Feminist Journal of Politics, DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2021.1976066

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2021.1976066

Published online: 05 Oct 2021.

INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST JOURNAL OF POLITICS
https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2021.1976066

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

A matrix of violences: the political economy of violences against Mayan women in Guatemala's Northern Transversal Strip

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ABSTRACT

Following the signing of Guatemala's 1996 Peace Accords, which brought an end to 36 years of conflict culminating in a genocide against Mayan communities, violences have persisted at alarming rates. Research has noted a high number of reports of violences against women and femicide, highlighting legal battles and challenges to address this issue. This article aims to make an empirical contribution, in that it explores the political economic dimensions of violences against women in predominantly Maya Q'eqchi' communities in Guatemala's development corridor, the Northern Transversal Strip region. Furthermore, the article emphasizes how women community leaders have linked violences against women in the contemporary context to the historical gendered violences of colonialism and armed conflict, as well the postwar extractivist development model and related ecological violences, particularly in relation to palm oil. Drawing on qualitative research and expanding on "continuum" theoretical approaches, the article concludes by suggesting that violences against women in postwar Guatemala can be understood as existing within an intersectional matrix, illustrating the dynamics of continuity and change. Violences against women are shaped by political, economic, historical, and social factors, which in turn shape how women organize to resist and address the violences against them in the Northern Transversal Strip region.

RESUMEN

Después de la firma de los Acuerdos de Paz en Guatemala en 1996, para dar fin a 36 años de conflicto y genocidio de las comunidades Mayas, todavía se registran niveles alarmantes de violencia en contra de estas comunidades. Varios estudios han demostrado tanto la ocurrencia de un significativo número de denuncias por feminicidio y violencias contra las mujeres, como las batallas legales y desafíos que enfrentan las mujeres para abordarlos. Este artículo explora las dimensiones de economía política de la violencia contra las mujeres Q'eqchi de las comunidades Mayas, quienes se ubican en el corredor de desarrollo de Guatemala conocido como la región Franja

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Transversal del Norte. Asimismo, este artículo pone en evidencia cómo las lideresas comunitarias vinculan las violencias contra las mujeres que se viven actualmente con aquellas generadas a partir del colonialismo, del conflicto armado, y del modelo de desarrollo extractivista de la postguerra relacionado con las violencias ecológicas y, en especial, con la producción de palma de aceite. A partir de un análisis cualitativo y con el ánimo de complementar los actuales enfoques teóricos sobre el continuum de las violencias contra las mujeres, este artículo sugiere que es posible comprender las violencias contra las mujeres bajo el marco de una matriz interseccional. Esta permite ilustrar las dinámicas de continuidad y cambio, en particular, cómo en la región Franja Transversal del Norte las violencias en contra de las mujeres, y la organización y resistencia contra dichas violencias son moldeadas por factores políticos, económicos, históricos y sociales.

KEYWORDS Violences against women; development; feminist political economy; palm oil; Guatemala

PALABRAS CLAVES Violencias contra las mujeres; desarrollo; economía política feminista; palma de aceite; Guatemala

Introduction

In 1996, Guatemala's Peace Accords brought an end to 36 years of internal armed conflict. The war also encompassed the state-led genocide against 200,000 Mayan Indigenous civilians in mostly rural communities. Yet, despite being a country officially at peace, violences, crime, and insecurity persist at alarming rates. High rates of femicide and gender-based violences have been highlighted by scholars and practitioners alike (Casaus Arzú 2015; Garcia 2015). Gendered violences are not unique to the postwar condition. The coloniality of social relations in Guatemala reflects legacies of exclusion and oppression that pre-date the internal armed conflict and characterize racialized, gendered, and classed oppressions more broadly. Research has noted the prevalence of gendered violences in Guatemala, pointing to problems of impunity, violent crime, and *machismo* as important underlying causal factors. Furthermore, research has explored the emergence of the important 2008 Law on Femicide and Other Forms of Violence against Women (hereafter referred to as the Law on Femicide), which criminalizes such violence (Drysdale Walsh 2016; Musalo, Pellegrin, and Roberts 2010; Prieto-Carrón, Thomson, and Macdonald 2007; Torres 2008; Velasco 2008).

Sexual violences committed against Mayan Indigenous women during the conflict and genocide were also recognized by the Commission for Historical Clarification as an important military strategy (CEH 1999; ODHAG 1999). Many atrocities were perpetrated in rural, Indigenous communities, which today are the site of the extraction of natural resources, corresponding with the Peace Accords' prescription for neoliberal development (Reilly 2009; Short 2007). Guatemala has become an important regional locus for the

exploitation of natural resources, both by national firms and multinational companies, particularly in the so-called "development corridor," the Northern Transversal Strip (Franja Transversal del Norte, FTN) region. How do gendered violences manifest today, in this context, given such legacies of conflict and development?

In this article, I explore how violences against women (VAW) have manifested and how they are resisted in rural Guatemala, specifically in the FTN region. In doing so, and drawing on the perspectives of Maya Q'eqchi' women living in the FTN, I argue that there exist inextricable links between the political economy of VAW and the environmental transformations linked to development, which ultimately blur the distinctions between violences perpetrated in times of conflict and peace and are rooted in colonial legacies. The aims of this article are twofold. First, I draw on qualitative field research to illustrate the ways in which VAW are understood and manifested in the context of postwar development in Guatemala's FTN as multiple, mutually reinforcing, and linked to and shaped by diverse histories and intersecting oppressions. As I argue, drawing on interviewees' insights, postwar development, particularly in the palm oil sector, creates and intersects with particular vulnerabilities that exacerbate VAW. This is indicative of the dynamics of the political economy of VAW and the ways in which they interact with gendered vulnerabilities linked to environmental transformation. Second, I propose conceptualizing VAW as existing within a matrix of violences; the matrix framework broadens individualized understandings of VAW, contextualizing their various forms. In drawing on this framework, I show how VAW and neoliberal economic expansion can be reconceptualized in relation not only to historical legacies, but also to the environmental, social, and political economic transformations operating as transgressions against women's autonomy.

The article is divided into four sections. Initially, I highlight key contributions to research on VAW in postwar Guatemala. I then provide a note on methodology and site selection, before presenting the findings and illustrating how women community leaders linked palm oil cultivation to VAW. I conclude by proposing a matrix framework for understanding VAW in postwar rural Guatemala.

VAW in postwar Guatemala

Research on VAW in postwar Guatemala has emphasized high rates of postwar femicide, drawing attention to the issue in urban metropolitan Guatemala City. This research has rightly pointed to impunity within government institutions, institutional shortcomings, *machismo*, cultural and social norms, and gang violence characteristic of postwar economic inequalities and violent crime as underlying causal factors (Bellino 2010; Carey and

Torres 2010; Costatino 2006; Drysdale Walsh 2008; Garcia 2015; Musalo, Pellegrin, and Roberts 2010; Prieto-Carrón, Thomson, and Macdonald 2007; Torres 2008; Velasco 2008).

The 2008 Law on Femicide represented an important juncture, criminalizing femicide (men's murder of women due to their gender) and economic, physical, sexual, and psychological VAW and mandating the creation of specialized tribunals (Drysdale Walsh 2016; England 2014; Musalo and Bookey 2013). In practice, new legal efforts to address VAW in postwar Guatemala encompass cases of intimate partner violence (Fuentes 2016). The effectiveness of this law has been limited given the strains on resources and accessibility of services.

Scholarship has emphasized the impossibility of isolating contemporary manifestations of VAW from historical trajectories of colonial violences and genocide. Sanford (1999, 2003, 2008) correctly insists on the importance of linking femicide in the postwar context with the kinds of gendered violences that were committed by the Guatemalan military during the genocide and internal armed conflict, paralleling Boesten's (2010, 2014) work on the Peruvian case.

War and peacetime VAW are not isolated from struggles over land, territory, and development, a context in which this research intervenes. Such struggles were inherent to colonial and postindependence projects in the nineteenth century and tethered to violences against Indigenous groups. In Alta Verapaz in the early twentieth century, German coffee plantation owners and settlers committed sexual violence against Q'eqchi' women in the context of a broader climate of Q'eqchi' resistance and reclaiming of lands from settlers (Gibbings 2016, 2020). The links between control over land and sexual violence continued to be forged over the latter half of the twentieth century. Land conflicts were central to the Guatemalan internal armed conflict, in particular the genocide and mass displacements that were perpetrated. The violence often took expressly gendered forms: the military employed tactics of sexual terrorism and VAW to "break the social fabric" in Indigenous communities (CEH 1999; ODHAG 1999). The FTN region was the site of 368 officially documented massacres during the internal armed conflict and genocide (ODHAG 1999). The concentration of guerrilla mobilization, coupled with ruthless counterinsurgency, meant that Indigenous communities were often caught in the crossfire and, at the height of the conflict in the 1980s, became the targets of scorched-earth campaigns (Grandia 2012; Solano 2012, 2013).

Bearing in mind these histories, distinguishing between the violences of conflict and peace in Guatemala is problematic (see McAllister and Nelson 2015). Elucidating this point, Cockburn (2004) suggests conceptualizing VAW as they occur between times of war and peace as existing along a historical continuum, thereby blurring the distinction between the two (see also

Boesten 2017). This points to the normalization of violences in the everyday, including intimate partner, symbolic, and structural violences. Drawing on Menjívar's approach, which was inspired by Bourdieu, by symbolic violence I refer to "the internalized humiliations and legitimations of inequality and hierarchy that range from sexism and racism to intimate expressions of class power" (Menjívar 2014, 43; see also Menjívar 2008, 2011). I also follow Farmer's (2004) framing of structural violence as specific social forces and material conditions enabling exclusions and suffering, facilitating exposure to risk.

Feminist scholars have linked neoliberalization with increased precarity and higher rates of VAW worldwide, particularly in Latin America (Olivera 2006; Sutton 2010; True 2012; Wright 2006). As Olivera (2006, 104) observes, rates of femicide in neoliberal Mexico dramatically increased "in direct relation to the expansion of neoliberalism" in the country, where "the systemic violence of the neoliberal social structure" fostered the emergence and performance of hypermasculinity legitimizing and enabling the persistence of VAW. How might these gendered political economic dynamics interact in the context of development and the communities most impacted by its transformations?

Postwar development in Guatemala is embedded in historical legacies of coloniality, transforming economic activities, and struggles over land and territory. Following Escobar (2004), development is contingent on violence and displacement. This is not without gendered implications; research has shown the links between the Guatemalan military's perpetration of gendered sexual violence in Alta Verapaz and contemporary cases of gang rape of Maya Q'eqchi' women being evicted by a Canadian mining company (Méndez Gutiérrez and Carrera Guerra 2015). Similarly, Indigenous feminist scholars and activists have developed a framing of *cuerpo* (body) and *territorio* (territory), which are often erased in mainstream and critical research on VAW in Latin America (Cabnal 2010; Cumes 2014; Gomez Grijalva 2012). The parallels drawn among notions of gender, history, territory, colonialism, autonomy, and the body, as well as resistance, reflect the dynamics of structural and symbolic violences and allude to a different kind of understanding of violences rooted in broader power relations (Cabnal 2010). Research has nonetheless been limited in exploring how understandings of VAW might be extended in the context of postwar development, a lacuna that I address below.

A note on methodology and site selection

This article draws on ten months of qualitative doctoral field research conducted over three separate field trips between July 2015 and August 2017. I conducted approximately 80 semi-structured interviews with Maya

Q'eqchi' women community leaders, non-governmental organization (NGO) professionals, lawyers, and activists, predominantly in the Alta Verapaz department of the FTN. Importantly, I did not aim to interview victim-survivors, to mitigate risks of re-victimization. Following Boesten (2014, 15), "the more I learned about the theme, the more I became convinced that the focus of critical research should not lie with the suffering of individual women, but with the process and structures that make their suffering possible." Names were changed to protect identities, and the interviewees were given the option of choosing their pseudonyms. I focused on three neighboring municipalities: Chisec, Raxruhá, and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, sites of development in the postwar years (discussed below). I conducted participant observation at community events, meetings, and development forums; at regional Women's Commission monthly meetings; and, on one occasion, at the Municipal Women's Directive, where victim-survivors access frontline services in the region. This research also drew on policy documents collected during the fieldwork and two access to information requests made to the Secretariat of Planning and Programming of the Presidency (SEGEPLAN) and the Public Ministry, to obtain access to state planning documents, internal presentations, and statistics on VAW and femicide in the FTN.

My research in the FTN emerged through an interest in understanding how VAW exist in the context of postwar development. The FTN reflects these political economic dynamics: its borders emerged more formally as part of a state-led settlement process to promote agricultural and extractivist development over the latter half of the twentieth century. Officially, Guatemala's Congress established the region and its boundaries, splitting northern and southern Guatemala, through Decree 60-70, aiming to facilitate development. Today, the FTN splits the Petén from the southern departments of Guatemala, spanning 21,784 square kilometers of the country over the departments of Izabal, Alta Verapaz, Quiché, and Huehuetenango. Demographically, 75 percent of the population is Indigenous, and 77 percent of the population lives in rural areas (relative to the national average of 54 percent) (SEGEPLAN, access to information request). The poverty rate in the region is 80.0 percent (SEGEPLAN, access to information request). Historically, diversified, small-scale agriculture and ranching were common economic activities, but the contemporary development model has expanded to include natural resource extraction and more recently, agro-extractivism, an agrarian model of extractivism relying on land grabbing and dispossession to cultivate primary agricultural products (predominantly monocrops) such as palm oil (Petras 2014). The region experienced high levels of violence during Guatemala's internal armed conflict and genocide (1960–1996).

Epistemologically, my research drew inspiration from feminist standpoint theory's central claim that "knowledge is always socially situated" (Harding 2004, 7). Official documentation of VAW in Guatemala is limited by resources

and contingent on women victim-survivors reporting cases in a context where to do so exposes them to risk and social stigma, should they even have access to the appropriate reporting mechanisms. As a result, my research recognizes the need for an epistemic shift in knowledge construction, as well as for decentering knowledge claims by framing knowledge from subaltern perspectives: situated knowledge is feminist objectivity (see Anzaldua 1999; Haraway 2004; Harding 2004; Hartsock 1983; Hill Collins 2000; Letherby 2003; Sandoval 2004). Ultimately, following Haraway, I aimed to privilege "contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections and hope for transformations of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (Haraway 2004, 8).

In doing so, centering the voices of women living in the FTN was key in the knowledge construction process. While using the established abbreviation VAW throughout this article, I understand and refer to violences as a plurality, to emphasize the multiplicities and intersecting nature of violences, a point that emerged through the research findings. Indeed, as Catalina, a community leader from Raxruhá, stated to me, "For us, palm oil is a form of violence against women!" In this respect, VAW are understood not only as being perpetrated by male partners; as I illustrate below, the origins of VAW are also located in development and related environmental transformations. While conventional uses of the term in its singular form recognize its multiplicities, I chose to draw on its plural form to expressly highlight this point with every articulation, recognizing that VAW not only take multiple forms, but also stem from multiple locations, particularly in terms of environmental violence. I also follow the work of Guatemalan scholars Camus, Bastos, and López García (2015), who use the term "violences" to differentiate between their visible and invisible manifestations across time and space.

Most of the interviews were carried out in Spanish; in some cases, in particular 26 interviews conducted with members of a regional women's commission and three interviews conducted with independent community leaders, the interviewees preferred to speak Q'eqchi'. In these interviews, local translators assisted, with further translation and transcription support from a translator employed at the Institute of Mayan Languages in Cobán. I take responsibility for any errors of Spanish–English translation. Translation is not limited to text, but also includes ideas and practices and reflects the coloniality of power relations. Feminist research therefore must consider "the unequal traveling and translation of feminist practices, theories and texts, and their reception" (Klahn 2014, 43; see also Alvarez 2014). Taking into account the politics of translation, throughout the research I remained reflexive of my positionality as a queer, white, female, and foreign researcher from a British university and of the reality that "the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted in many cases in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the

group spoken for" (Alcoff 1991, 7). Attentive to the potential role of the researcher as "messenger" and the call for learning from, rather than "extracting," findings (see Kvale 2007), I aimed to mitigate potential epistemic violences (see Alcoff 1991; Hill Collins 1986; Letherby 2003).

To ensure that I best represented the voices of those who shared their stories with me, I aimed to "check in" throughout the research process, carrying out multiple field trips, maintaining research relationships, and participating in community events to do so. Conducting follow-up interviews and presenting key findings to those most directly implicated was important to the research process. By way of example, I presented my research at a community conference organized by a local Indigenous development network in Cobán, and I was invited to guest lecture at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. Although the interviews were semi-structured, many of the interviewees guided the conversation, speaking without pause, allowing for themes to emerge. Indeed, when asked about VAW, interviewees in affected communities most often steered the conversation to one about palm oil, a theme that I address below.

"For us, palm oil is a form of violence against women!": the multiplicity of VAW in the FTN

An important theme that emerged through interviews with women community leaders was palm oil cultivation understood as a form of and in relation to persisting VAW in the FTN. This relationship was articulated in two ways: first, in relation to political economic inequalities generated by the introduction of palm oil into communities, and second, in terms of the gendered environmental transformations that it provoked. Specifically, these dynamics were understood as transgressions against women's autonomy. Importantly, in Q'eqchi', sexual violence is often referred to as *xminb'al ru li ixq chi wank rik'in junaq winq*, which translates as "forcing a woman to have sexual relations with a man," echoed in Segato's (2013) understanding of rape as a violation of sovereignty. Conceptually, the transgression against women's bodily autonomy is embedded within local understandings and the context of VAW: "The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 4). Interrogating how various forms of VAW might be linked to such transgressions illuminates how VAW might be understood in relation to development, specifically of palm oil. Importantly, this is not to argue that individual perpetrators play no role in acts of VAW; rather, VAW are perpetrated in a given material context and are thus exacerbated.

In the communities where I conducted this research, palm oil was an emerging industry, profoundly shaping the political economic and social landscape. Palm oil was first introduced in the 1980s, experiencing more rapid

growth in 2008–2009 due to the global industry boom. Guatemala is the second largest producer of palm oil in Central America and 11th largest global producer. In the years leading up to 2017, Guatemala's palm oil production increased by 10 percent annually (USDA 2018). In Alta Verapaz, 24,824.63 hectares of palm oil are cultivated per year (GREPALMA 2016, 2017).

Interviewees described the development of palm oil as contributing to the degradation of personhood and gendered suffering in two ways. First, it reinforced structural gendered violence, which created conditions of precarity and inequality. In some cases, this inequality exacerbated cases of intimate partner violence. Second, palm oil was not isolated from broader social norms and systems of oppression; rather, by reinforcing gendered inequalities and provoking a sense of "uneven development" (discussed below), it reinforced symbolic violence. Both structural and symbolic violences associated with palm oil reinforced gendered suffering. Women community leaders also highlighted the role that colonial legacies and the internal armed conflict and genocide had played: first, in normalizing gendered oppressions and VAW, and second, in foregrounding the extractivist model of development characterized by the palm oil industry in their communities. VAW were not considered a recent phenomenon; rather, they were understood as normalized by the conflict and exacerbated by contemporary material conditions. As Rosa, a community leader and NGO worker told me, "the violence that we women experience is part of the 500 years of colonialism in our lands."

Bearing in mind the intersections between structural and symbolic violences discussed above, palm oil was understood by the research participants as being linked to VAW in four key ways: environmental disruptions, economic transformations, land tenure and community relations, and political violence (Figure 1). These issues do not exist in isolation from gender norms,

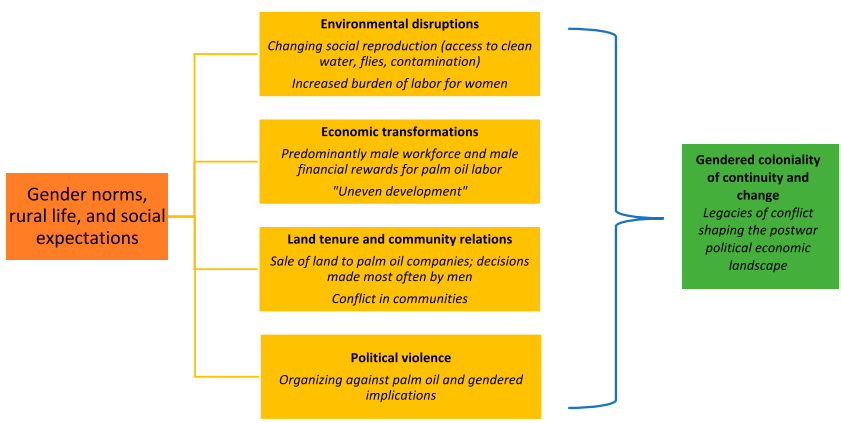

Figure 1. Dynamics of VAW in the FTN.

rural life, and social expectations. Furthermore, the introduction and expansion of palm oil in rural communities are not ahistorically situated; rather, they hark back to the violences of Spanish colonial, German postcolonial, and Guatemalan conflicts over land and are now embedded in the postwar development model (Gibbings 2020).

The link to a violation of bodily sovereignty, or autonomy, was also inherent to women's framing of palm oil's environmental, economic, and social impacts in relation to VAW. By way of example, a Q'eqchi' community activist and leader, Serapia, explained this dynamic in her community, highlighting the broader observation noted in my research:

> In the [nearby] *finca* [plantation] … many trees have been cut down … [I]t was the habitat of many animals, and now the animals are coming to where we are. When we try to cultivate [subsistence agriculture], the animals eat our crops and we don't have the same harvests as before … and so *the palm is killing us, little by little*. (emphasis added)

Environmental degradation was linked not only to destruction of biodiversity, but also to Indigenous livelihoods and subsistence agriculture. Furthermore, Serapia referred to palm oil as "killing off" communities, epitomizing the language of violence that is often associated with palm oil in my research. This association is particularly poignant given the indigeneity of the demographic and the legacies of genocide in the region. As a local activist from Raxruhá stated, "For us, palm oil is a form of violence against women!"

Transnational research has indicated that women often absorb the impacts of environmental transformations disproportionately compared with men, exacerbating other vulnerabilities (Nagel 2016; Rahman 2013). In this vein, interviewees linked palm oil's environmental disruptions to gendered violence by pointing to women's social reproductive roles within communities. Women explained that water contamination provoked further gendered suffering: they had to travel further to collect water, which is used for cooking, cleaning, bathing, and care work. Furthermore, any injuries or illnesses associated with palm oil represented an exacerbation of women's labor. Interviewees also noted that women perform most of the non-remunerated social reproductive labor, and consequent to the expansion of palm oil, the precarity of the conditions in which this work is performed is exacerbated. Thus, the interviewees connected palm oil to structural forms of VAW. Relatedly, women also expressed concerns about the future of their communities, drawing on the language of motherhood to express fears for the sustainability of life for future generations.

Contamination of water sources as a result of expansion of the palm oil industry was cited as a key concern by many of the interviewees. The 2015 ecocide in Sayaxché, a result of Reforestadora de Palmas del Petén SA's (REPSA's) palm oil plantation and processing plant in the community,

provoked the contamination of the La Pasión River and the killing off of fish populations. In September 2015, local community leader Rigoberto Lima was assassinated after filing an official complaint. Sayaxché neighbors the FTN communities impacted by palm oil, and interview participants echoed fears of a similar spill occurring in their villages. In 2016, a spill allegedly occurred in Chisec when community members found dead fish appearing in the river, but government officials reportedly failed to collect the water samples or document the incident.

Palm oil did offer some benefits for communities, in particular as an alternative source of employment in a changing economy. However, the economic possibilities afforded by the industry were gendered. Indeed, as Blanca, a social worker working in the region, noted, "Palm oil [cultivation] reinforces gender inequality because it is mostly the men who work, not women, so men's condition might improve, but certainly not women. It is *uneven development* in this sense" (emphasis added). In many communities, the shift from subsistence agriculture to wage labor predominantly benefited men. Yet, women repeatedly noted throughout my research that in reaping the benefits, men were often less inclined to spend money on household needs. Specifically, women spoke about the ways in which men employed in palm oil would often "*chupan su dinero*" ("drink their money"). Reina Elisabeth, a Q'eqchi' community leader and member of the regional women's commission, explained:

> There is economic violence – it is because of [palm oil], because the husbands work in palm, and there are those husbands who like to drink a lot, and spend the money that should be for the children, but it is spent in the *cantinas* [bars] … Us women, we get up at 3 am, and to receive nothing? This is hard, this is what is happening to my *compañeras* [female comrades], this is what I see happening in my community.

Scholars have also noted the linkage between *machismo*, men's performances of exaggerated/hegemonic masculinity in relation to other men as well as a means to assert dominance over women, and excessive alcohol consumption elsewhere in the region (Chant 2002; Lancaster 1992). While I remained wary of reproducing harmful stereotypes about men in Latin America, interviewees frequently described the *palmeros*' alcohol consumption being linked to different forms of VAW. These links between alcohol consumption, *machismo*, and economic violence became evident in my research in terms of economic exclusion and other forms of VAW. Indeed, Reina Elisabeth highlighted this important linkage, which was made by many of the women whom I interviewed. Relatedly, a community leader named Andrea initiated a local mobilization to regulate the sale of alcohol in *cantinas* to 7 pm. Andrea recounted that alongside other community members, she "went out in shifts, walking from 6 pm to 11 pm … so that we would be

able to close the places selling beer after 7pm" and eventually helped to pass a municipal regulation to do so.

Furthermore, interviewees made the link between physical VAW and economic violence as a result of the *palmeros*' drinking, pointing to the ways in which different forms of gendered violences can be mutually constitutive. In this vein, economic disruptions and tensions intersected with prevailing social norms, specifically the exaggerated performance of men's power, pride, and masculinity, which subordinates femininity and contributes to the normalization of men's control over women, their bodies, and their lives (Chant 2002; Lancaster 1992; Melhuus and Stolen 1996). The transgression against women's autonomy in this context was thus further exacerbated in relation to men's excessive alcohol consumption and its ripple effects. Furthermore, as Eber (2000) notes, excessive alcohol consumption in Mayan communities was a byproduct of the colonizers in areas where alcohol use was primarily ritualistic. While alcohol consumption is nothing new in the FTN, palm oil wage labor has exacerbated and paralleled colonial dynamics of alcohol consumption.

Indigenous women were on the frontlines of resistance to palm oil in their communities, highlighting the gendered impacts of the industry and the inequalities that it provoked and drawing on the language of violence to do so. On one level, resistance manifested through efforts to educate communities about the consequences of palm oil, and this was often done in inadvertent ways. In monthly meetings of women community leaders, *charlas* (local talks), and community development forums, palm oil's environmental and social impacts were highlighted by the speakers, even if palm oil was not a central focus of the meeting. By way of example, the final women's commission meeting that I attended before finalizing the fieldwork, aimed at addressing domestic violence in rural communities, was steered by community leaders to focus on a recent contamination of a local river due to palm oil and its gendered implications.

Another key area in which women related palm oil to VAW concerned landownership, which provided another space for resisting the industry's expansion. An important issue for many communities was the sale of land to palm oil companies, which has ultimately led to the deterioration of subsistence livelihoods, dependence on new forms of labor, and destruction of biodiversity. Indeed, following the aftermath of the Peace Accords, the Guatemalan government pursued a World Bank-sponsored, market-led agrarian reform program, called Fontierras, that sought to privatize and individualize communal land titles. The program has been widely regarded as ineffective, particularly because it has led to *campesinos* (peasant farmers) entering into debt with the program, thereby enabling the sale of individual land plots to private corporations, such as palm oil companies

(Alonso-Fradejas 2012, 2013; Fontierras 2012; Garoz and Gauster 2006; Garoz, Alonso, and Gauster 2005; Gauster and Isakson 2007).

Women community leaders linked the sale of land to palm oil companies with gendered oppressions experienced in FTN communities. For instance, Ximena, a Q'eqchi' activist and local political leader who works with an Indigenous rights organization and runs its gender program, explained:

> As I told you, we don't have an area [in the office] to receive victims, we don't have lawyers or anything like that … but us, what we have seen most, is that *women suffer violence because of land too*, so this is what we have succeeded in resolving. (emphasis added)

Ximena and others noted the links between intimate partner violence and women's exclusion from decision-making power in the household. Women who were landowners had earned a greater sense of respect within their communities, and many leaders viewed their access to landownership as a means to alleviate intimate partner violence. In particular, Ximena's organization has begun working within the Fontierras scheme to alleviate VAW and exclusions:

> So [we] began working in this area … a very difficult theme to work with in the communities … but eventually, Fontierras began granting land titles in the name of women. Because before, if women asked for land titles, Fontierras didn't grant them, they would only grant them to men. Or they would give them, but only if the women were in a partnership with a man … So we kept pushing for a few years … [W]hen the papers are granted, now, they give one for the woman and one for the man. So, in the communities where we work, if there is a family that breaks down, the [separated couple] each has a part of the land.

By working to ensure that both men and women had access to land titles, she explained that this strategy had twofold aims: first, to promote gender equality and respect for women as landowners, and second, to add a layer of prevention against the sale of land to palm oil companies given that the co-owners would both have to consent to the sale. Indeed, the theme of the need to improve women's access to land, to promote gender equality and alleviate economic violence and erasure, as well as the other violences associated with the expansion of palm oil, was prevalent throughout the research. This initiative of Ximena's organization, reflective of *campesino* agency and wider negotiations within neoliberal reforms (see also Granovsky-Larsen 2013, 2017), is an important area for future research. Indigenous communities, whose land was traditionally held communally, were engaging in the promotion of private land ownership as a means to confront and challenge the expanding palm oil industry, arguably using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house (see Lorde 1984). The work done by Ximena and

her colleagues illustrated the ways in which resistance was structured in relation to land ownership.

Opposition also exposed women community leaders to risks of attack and criminalization. For instance, a Q'eqchi' community leader, Petrona, explained her role in her community:

> Well, we were four women, there were another three from [another community] who told me that they were going to help and I met with the COCODES [Community Councils of Urban and Rural Development] of 12 communities. And we started to see what we could do, because already the palm oil company was starting to work and it was going to destroy our rivers. And I started to question the engineers, given that they were already contaminating our rivers, and their big trucks would pass through our communities, to the point where they almost ran over the children, and they did not respect [our communities], and the big machinery and agronomists were passing through. And I would stand in the road and stop those big trucks and the agronomists and the foremen. They were so big, those agronomists, and they asked me who was I? I was only a simple woman who did not amount to anything. And I told them, that I may only be a woman, but that I had a responsibility, and I can help my *compañeras*, because where were they going to go to bathe and to wash? [They then said:] "What are you looking for in all of this, to fight with us?" This is what they told me.

Petrona reported harassment from the company for her resistance. Likewise, another Q'eqchi' community leader, Elena, had traveled to Washington, DC, as part of a 2016 international delegation reporting abuses linked to the extractive sector in Guatemala. She discussed the gendered implications of palm oil in her community, where she was actively involved in opposing the expansion of the industry. Upon her return, she was arrested by local authorities on falsified charges of kidnapping, but eventually released "because they had no case!" Elena was subsequently elected to municipal office. The cases of Petrona and Elena, who were both involved in coordinating the regional women's commission addressing VAW, are illustrative of the broader trend toward resisting palm oil, as well as the challenges women faced in opposing it. Regionally, women have been subjected to violent attacks for environmental activism. Cases such as the attempted assassination of Yolanda Oqueli in Guatemala (see Pedersen 2014) or the murder of Berta Caceres in Honduras (Lakhani 2020) reflect this trend. Petrona's and Elena's cases reflected a broader pattern of women community leaders linking the environmental, social, political, and economic impacts of palm oil and VAW in the FTN.

The aims of political organizing thus manifested as twofold: the alleviation of VAW was tethered to halting the expansion of palm oil and its impacts, through diverse avenues, such as engaging with the Fontierras program, organizing to regulate the sale of alcohol, organizing and participating in *charlas* and community meetings, and carrying out everyday practices of

resistance, such as blocking traffic onto plantations and processing plants. Ultimately, the participants illustrated how the political economy of postwar development in relation to palm oil shaped not only how VAW were constituted in contemporary times, but also how these dynamics were not unique to the present condition. Development and its discontents were understood in relation to a broader colonial project, which had particularly gendered implications. This is not to say, however, that women absolved individual perpetrators for their roles in cases of VAW; rather, perpetrators were understood to exist as part of a broader set of multi-sited power relations. Symbolic and structural forms of gendered violences were tethered to these relations, transcending conventional understandings of VAW, as I discuss in the following section.

A matrix of violences: extending understandings of VAW in postwar Guatemala

The interviewees illustrated how VAW in the FTN take multiple forms and exist in relation to historical legacies of conflict and coloniality, which have shaped contemporary development. Specifically, the development of palm oil and VAW were understood as inextricably linked. How might these relationships be further conceptualized?

As this research illustrates, intimate partner violence was evidently present in the FTN, but it was often causally linked to the political economy of development, environmental change, and broader histories and impacts of colonialism more generally. The findings discussed above suggest that while the distinction between times of conflict and the postwar years in Guatemala must indeed be understood as problematic, new dynamics of development and exploitation and hence violences have emerged more recently. Furthermore, for Indigenous communities, the violences and traumas of Guatemala's internal armed conflict itself are rooted not in the 1980s genocide but rather in the centuries of colonialism and coloniality that pre-date and shaped the conflict and its legacies. This includes postindependence settler-colonial dynamics, such as German coffee plantation expansion in the twentieth century in Q'eqchi' communities (Gibbings 2020). In some respects, then, talking of a war/postwar dichotomy is thus irrelevant in the Guatemalan context; although the dichotomy reflects an important historical juncture, it risks erasing how embedded conflict, development, and violences are in much broader legacies.

A continuum framework highlights how violences, including VAW, occur in times of both war and peace; broadening the framework further enables the incorporation of a political economic analysis and potentially affords a further disruption of the war/peace binary. Thus, building on continuum approaches, and to emphasize the dynamics of continuity and change, I propose a matrix

of violence to conceptualize VAW in the case of the FTN. In doing so, I aim to emphasize the multiple sites and articulations of such violences (Camus, Bastos, and López García 2015).

I draw inspiration from O'Rourke's concept of the "web of harms" illuminating "commonalities across public and private harms, pre-, during and post-conflict harms against women" (O'Rourke 2013, 122). Indeed, power manifests through many avenues – not only in the private sphere but in public spaces as well. Similarly, Heise (1998) proposes an integrated ecological framework to conceptualize VAW in relation to their multiple – sociocultural, situational, and personal – origins, echoing findings from the interviews with the women community leaders.

Non-state actors exercise power – palm oil companies being a case in point. In the interviews, I found that four key areas shaped how VAW occurred, were understood, and were resisted: gendered social relations, gendered historical violence and its legacies, relations of land and territory, and gendered dimensions of the political economy of development. The areas, axes, and logic of the matrix that I propose (Figure 2) should not be understood as exhaustive or weighted equally; rather, they reflect key themes that emerged through the research. The matrix is intended to illustrate

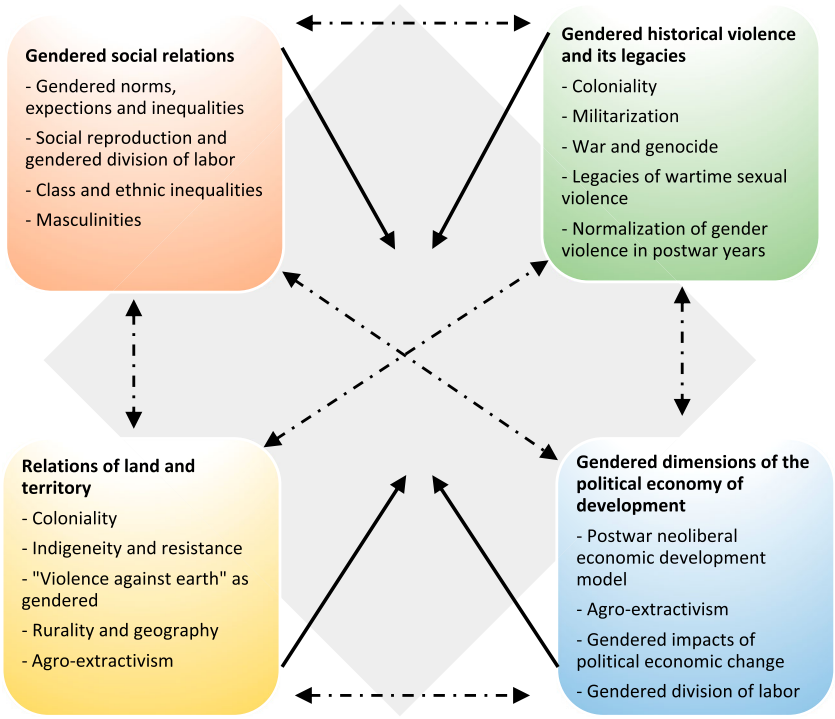

Figure 2. A matrix of VAW in the FTN.

how different forms of gendered violences intersect and interlock, similarly to how oppressions must be understood as intersectional (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Crenshaw 1989). Here, I draw on the logic of intersectionality less in terms of identity; rather, I emphasize the political, social, historical, and economic dynamics at stake, following Hill Collins's matrix of domination, which "describes this overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained" (Hill Collins 2000, 228).

The intersections of these factors were particularly relevant to linking palm oil to VAW in the FTN. Palm oil expanded through the postwar development model in a region tethered to settler colonialism, militarization, conflict, and genocide – legacies that foreground the coloniality of power in the region today (Gibbings 2020). Furthermore, the gendered dimensions of the political economy of development and their intersections with symbolic social norms reflect how women are positioned to suffer the impacts of palm oil in gendered ways, as noted by the interviewees in the previous section.

The matrix that I propose does not aim to weigh factors of VAW against each other; rather, the axes mentioned above represent factors that were mutually reinforcing and constitutive of the multiplicities of violences: gendered histories of conflict shape and are shaped by the gendered dimensions of development. Similarly, gendered social norms reinforce the unevenness of development, specifically attributed to the palm oil industry, and vice versa. Access to land was also linked to gendered social norms and had been conditioned by the political economy of development as well as by broader histories of conflict and genocide. Considering these factors blurs the distinction between public and private violences and draws attention to the ways in which multiple gendered violences and oppressions are linked.

Importantly, the Maya Q'eqchi' women who shared their knowledge with me are not devoid of agency. They are actively implicated in the struggle over their lands and sometimes criminalized as a result. Resistance was in response to unwanted development in their communities and illustrated how specific understandings of development were linked to gendered violences and oppressions. Bearing in mind the linkages that have been made between development and violence (see Escobar 1995), development does not occur within a socio-historic vacuum. Rather, development shapes and feeds into histories and social relations, and thus violence must also be considered in relation to the broader context. Furthermore, communitarian feminist notions of *cuerpo-territorio* complicate understandings of violences as necessarily stemming from a single perpetrator. Instead, violences are situated in the context of coloniality, linking transformations surrounding land and territory with bodily experiences of violence (Cabnal 2010; Cumes 2014). Indeed, gendered violences in the context of neoliberal globalization and development are embodied and embedded in the everyday (see Coleman 2007; Sutton 2010).

Relatedly, my findings suggest that there were important links between transformations to the political economic landscape, as well as the ways in which VAW materialized, were understood, and then ultimately resisted by women in the FTN. On the one hand, symbolic and structural factors and violences intersect, particularly in relation to the environmental and economic impacts of palm oil. The symbolic violence of gendered social norms renders women more vulnerable to the environmental transformations linked to palm oil. Furthermore, Indigenous communities hold particular links to land and territory (see Cabnal 2010). In the interviews, the dispossessions related to the industry were framed as destructive; this is especially relevant considering the legacies of conflict and genocide. Recognizing the intersectionality and multiplicity of VAW in this way points to the coloniality of power and development and complicates the universality of VAW.

On the other hand, the experiences and suffering that women felt and linked to palm oil became an important point of resistance for community leaders, manifesting through land ownership, community events, and physical protest. Women such as Ximena, Elena, and Petrona, who were active in resisting the industry, either by vocally opposing it in community meetings and events or by physically protesting and blocking entry into plantations, exposed themselves to risks and threats of further violence.

Conclusion

Research has rightly highlighted the role of the neoliberal state in exacerbating VAW in Guatemala and Latin America more broadly. As this work in the FTN has shown, the political economy of VAW can also be illustrated through the environmental disruptions that it provokes. This contribution highlights that the inhibition of women's autonomy and added burdens attributed to the introduction of palm oil in their communities exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. In particular, the women whom I interviewed throughout the research made important links between VAW and the experience of development in the region, specifically in terms of the expansion of the palm oil industry. These links were made in terms of environmental disruptions, economic transformations, land tenure and community relations, and resistance. While the forms of violence linked to palm oil expansion were sometimes linked to intimate partner violence, the violence of palm oil could also be understood as being encompassed within the frameworks of structural and symbolic violence. This intersection is illustrative of how violences are indeed multiple, intersecting, and historically and socially contingent.

The accounts of the interviewees suggest that the political economy of development, legacies of conflict, and gender power relations are inextricably linked in the Guatemalan context and cannot be understood in isolation. This research also bears important consequences for understanding broader

social issues in the FTN and Central America, such as possible violences linked to gang violence, a prominent issue in the FTN region, and recent migration trends north. These issues disproportionately impact women and call for further research.

Building on these findings, I propose conceptualizing VAW as existing within an interlocking matrix. This highlights the gendered intersections of historical and colonial forms of violence and oppression with contemporary manifestations of violences and development. Furthermore, this framework foregrounds not only the multiplicities of VAW, but also the context in which resistance emerges. Ultimately, relations of coloniality, territory, neoliberal capitalism and the political economy of development, historical context, and gendered social relations all shape the multiplicity of violences women endure in the FTN, beyond the scope of mainstream understandings of VAW. Situating the analysis in findings drawn from the perspective of women living, enduring, and resisting VAW in the FTN extends understandings of how VAW are constituted in relation to development, in the communities absorbing its shocks most acutely. This research has shown how diverse factors related to the political economy of VAW and its environmental implications intersect to foreground the experiences of VAW in the FTN and the ways in which they are resisted.

Acknowledgments

Deepest thanks to participants at the *IFJP* 2019 Polycentric Conference "Gender Violence and Feminist Resistance in Latin America" in Sao Paulo, and to the anonymous reviewers, for their helpful and generous feedback. Special thanks also to Esperanza Caal, Laura Ramos Jaimes, Angela Bohorquez Oviedo, Robin Dunford, and Priya Raghavan. Finally, thank you to the women community leaders who took time to share their insights and knowledge with me.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

The research for this article was generously funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship and an LSE PhD Studentship.

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