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**“Salía de uno y me metí en otro.” A grounded theory approach to
understanding the violence-migration nexus
among Central American women in the United States**

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**“Salía de uno y me metí en otro:” A grounded theory approach to
understanding the violence-migration nexus
among Central American women in the United States**

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the women who shared their stories of suffering, strength and resistance with me and to the many women who remain in danger, in detention, or whose movement about the world is constrained by injustice and intolerable choices.

Antipatriarca
By Ana Tijoux, 2014

*Yo puedo ser tu hermana tu hija, Tamara Pamela o Valentina
Yo puedo ser tu gran amiga incluso tu compañera de vida
Yo puedo ser tu aliada la que aconseja y la que apaña
Yo puedo ser cualquiera de todas depende de como tu me apodas
Pero no voy a ser la que obedece porque mi cuerpo me pertenece
Yo decido de mi tiempo como quiero y donde quiero
Independiente yo nací, independiente decidí
Yo no camino detrás de ti, yo camino de la par aquí*

*Tú no me vas a humillar, tú no me vas a gritar
Tú no me vas someter, tú no me vas a golpear
Tú no me vas denigrar, tú no me vas obligar
Tú no me vas a silenciar, tú no me vas a callar*

*Yo puedo ser jefa de hogar, empleada o intelectual
Yo puedo ser protagonista de nuestra historia y la que agita
La gente la comunidad, la que despierta la vecindad
La que organiza la economía de su casa de su familia
Mujer linda se pone de pie
Y a romper las cadenas de la piel*

*No sumisa ni obediente
Mujer fuerte insurgente
Independiente y valiente
Romper las cadenas de lo indiferente
No pasiva ni oprimida
Mujer linda que das vida
Emancipada en autonomía
Antipatriarca y alegría
A liberar.*

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**“Salía de uno y me metí en otro¹.” A grounded theory approach to
understanding the violence-migration nexus
among Central American women in the United States**

Laurie Cook Heffron, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Noël Busch-Armendariz

The Northern Triangle of Central America is the bridge to North America – a bridge on which human crises wrought by violence and exploitation make indelible marks on migrating women. Women fleeing violence and abuse in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras face trauma and adversity during the journey through Mexico and into the U.S. Motivations to find safety and economic security are woven into the vulnerabilities and the strengths of migrating women. Research has not adequately explored how domestic and sexual violence impact and are impacted by migration, how women respond to risks, nor the role of motherhood in the face of violence.

¹ “Salía de uno y me metí en otro” is a verbatim quote from Hortensia (a pseudonym), one of the migrant women who participated in this research. She used this phrase to express that, in leaving or fleeing one set of violent circumstances, she found herself in yet another.

Grounded in feminist and transnational frameworks, this study used constructivist grounded theory to explore the violence-migration nexus. In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 adult women recently migrated to the U.S. from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Findings include textual accounts of women's motivations to migrate, migration decision-making, travel logistics, and exposure to danger. The study yielded rich description of multiple types of violence encountered by women, as precipitating factors for migration, during border-crossing, and following arrival in the U.S., including sexual, domestic, gang, and state violence. These data reveal ways that types of violence are interconnected across multiple categories of violence and throughout migration. Findings also include thematic analysis of ways women weigh risks of migrating, resistance and shared survival strategies, in addition to motherhood in the context of violence. Analysis and interpretation of interactions among thematic elements result in a provisional theoretical framework to describe the violence-migration nexus encountered by Central American migrant women, reflecting a series of attempts to escape danger only to land in a new dangerous situation, with new backdrops of micro, meso, and macro-level factors of violence and new landscapes of solidarity and resistance strategies.

This study fills gaps in the depth of our understanding about the violence-migration nexus as it pertains to Central American migrant women and provides scaffolding with which to continue improving policy, practice, and advocacy responses to

women and families, in the context of ever-changing dynamics of migration and shifting political landscapes.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xvi
List of Figures.....	xvii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Context-Specific, Practice-Informed Impetus for Research	2
Recent Trends in Migration.....	3
Key Concepts Related to Violence against Women.....	4
The Violence-Migration Nexus.....	6
Impact for the Field	8
Dissertation Research	10
Positionality and Role of Researcher.....	12
Outline of Chapters.....	13
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	15
Introduction & A Note about Borders	15
The Northern Triangle: A Regional Context.....	16
Violence as a Pre-Cursor to Migration	19
Prevalence of Violence against Women in the Northern Triangle.....	20
The Nature of Violence against Women in the Northern Triangle	21
Violence against Women as Motivation to Migrate.....	23
Leave/Stay Decision-Making	25
Violence Against Migrating Women	28
Contemporary Trends in Migration from Central America to the U.S.	28
Migration Through Mexico	30
General Risk of Violence against Migrating Women	33
Violence against Migrant Women in the U.S.....	37
Scope of Violence against Migrant Women in the U.S.....	38
Nature of Violence against Migrant Women.....	39
Transnational Motherhood	46
Synthesis.....	49
Chapter 3: Multi-Level Policy Responses to Violence against Women	51
Country-Specific Policies.....	51
El Salvador	51
Guatemala.....	52
Honduras.....	54

Policy Responses of the United Nations	54
Policy Responses to Migration-Related Human Rights Violations.....	56
U.S. Policy Responses to Violence against Migrant Women.....	57
Asylum Claims Based on Domestic Violence.....	62
Conclusion.....	63
Chapter 4: Theoretical Frameworks.....	64
Theories Seeking to Explain Violence against Women.....	64
Chicana Feminism.....	66
Intersectionality.....	68
Migration Theories.....	70
Decision-Making in Migration.....	73
Forced versus Voluntary Migration.....	75
Grounding Research Methodologies in Feminist and Transnational Theories.....	77
Chapter 5: Research Methodology.....	81
Purpose.....	81
Methodological Approach.....	82
Sources of Data.....	85
Data Collection Procedures.....	88
Data Analysis.....	92
Rigor.....	94
Ethical Considerations.....	96
Limitations.....	97
Chapter 6: The Process of Migration.....	100
A. Grounding in the Narrative.....	100
Hortensia.....	102
B. The Process of Migration.....	106
Pre-Migration: Leaving the Home Country.....	108
Peri-Migration: Transit through Mexico – Walking, Riding, Hiding, and Hurrying:	
On the Move through Mexico.....	120
Peri-Migration: Crossing Borders.....	141
Peri-Migration: Being Detained and Held Hostage.....	147
Peri-Migration: Immigration Apprehension, Detention & Deportation.....	155
Post-Migration: Settling in the United States.....	165
Post Migration/Return Migration.....	176
Chapter 7. Violence, Survival, and Mothering.....	180
A. Constellation of Violence.....	180

Typologies of Violence	182
Interaction of Types of Violence	185
Violence Across the Migration Process	187
B. Decision-Making: Arriesgando Todo/Risking Everything	197
Consulting Others	198
Weighing Risks	200
Sustained Decision-Making	201
Risks into the Unknown	203
C. Survival: Micro-Strategies, Support & Solidarity	205
Micro-Strategies	206
(Re)Building Support	208
Co-Survival & Solidarity	210
D. Transnational Mothering	212
Mothering as Motivation to Migrate	213
Separation from Children	214
Reuniting with Children	216
Mothering Others	219
Chapter 8: Understanding Interconnections: Building Theory around the Violence- Migration Nexus.....	222
A. Context: Motherhood.....	223
B. Conditions: Moving through Ever-Changing Unknowns.....	224
C. Interactions of Power	225
Power & Control Over.....	225
Power & Resistance from Within and Among	228
D. Consequences: Rolling the Dice	230
Chapter 9: Discussion	234
Disrupting Dichotomies	234
Contemporary Responses to Forced Migration	236
Multi-Scale Policy Responses	238
Affirming Migrant Women’s Agency and Voice.....	240
Contexts of Protective Violence	244
Historical Remnants of Violence.....	244
Incorporating the Affective	245
Conclusion.....	247
Appendices.....	249
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide	249

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval Letters	252
Appendix C: Brief Research Participant Narrative Summaries	258
References.....	266
Vita	288

List of Tables

Table 1. Immigration Relief for Migrant Women	59
Table 2. Selected Characteristics of Participants	88
Table 3. Description of Data Sources	94
Table 4. Types of Violence by During any Migration Stage	182
Table 5. Types of Violence by Migration Stage	187
Table 6. Migration Stages with Experiences of Violence	188

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of Central America	16
Figure 2. Migrant Routes Through Mexico	31
Figure 3. Constellation of Violence among Central American Migrant Women	181
Figure 4. Process of the Violence-Migration Nexus for Central American Women	230
Figure 5. Rolling the Dice – Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels of Violence	232
Figure 6. Rolling the Dice in Succession	233

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Hay sueños que se hacen realidad y hay sueños que nada más son como una pesadilla. Esa fue la trayectoria de allá para acá.” (Natalia)

There are dreams that become reality, and there are dreams that are simply a nightmare. That was my path from there to here.

The Northern Triangle of Central America is the bridge to North America – a bridge on which human crises wrought by violence and exploitation make indelible marks on migrating women. Women fleeing violence and abuse at home in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras face trauma, stress, and adversity during the dangerous journey through Mexico and into the United States (U.S.). In addition to economic instability, anti-immigrant sentiment, and separation from families, migrant² women are vulnerable to sexual assault during the journey, often being raped as a price of passage across borders, as well as exploitation or human trafficking upon reaching the U.S. Many migrating women are also mothers who are frequently separated from their children, and their roles as parents extend across country borders. Women continue to live in silence and in the shadows once in the U.S., exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and inhibiting physical and emotional safety, wellbeing, and social justice.

² For the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to use the word migrant and migration to describe the movement of Central American women in the context of violence. The more commonly used word immigration implies unidirectional movement from one place to another, and in the context of the U.S., is often used to describe movement to the U.S. from another country. The term migration, on the other hand, is more inclusive of the multiple and fluid ways people move throughout the world, both within and across political borders. I nonetheless concur that this may feel linguistically clumsy at times, particularly given references to U.S. law policies and detention (and in these contexts I refer immigration status or immigrant detention).

Our understanding of the scope of violence experienced by migrating women is limited, as is our comprehension of the meaning migrant women make of these experiences and the means by which they seek and access support. Social workers and community advocates working with migrant women survivors struggle to understand and make sense of these manifestations of violence, their cumulative impact on individuals and their communities, and appropriate responses. This dissertation research aims to expand understanding of the violence-migration nexus by exploring how women's experiences of domestic and sexual violence impact the process of migration and decision-making related to migration. Research has not adequately explored how domestic and sexual violence impact and are impacted by migration, how women respond to these risks, nor the role of transnational motherhood in the face of violence. Consequently, policies, services, and advocacy responses remain inadequate. This research draws from emerging contexts in order to begin to build a more comprehensive knowledge base from which new responses may be developed.

Context-Specific, Practice-Informed Impetus for Research

As a social worker practicing in the community and as a member of a research team committed to community-based methods, the subject of violence experienced by migrant women represents a persistent theme in both practice and research, particularly in the regional context of Texas. For example, social workers respond to requests by immigration attorneys to provide pro-bono written and oral testimony to federal immigration courts on behalf of Central American women seeking asylum or other

immigration relief based on women's experiences with domestic violence. Rape crisis center advocates in the South Texas border area recount that nearly all women crossing the Texas-Mexico border are raped (personal communication, November, 2010). Advocates around the state support women with past histories of domestic violence and sexual assault who were trafficked to the U.S. for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. Sadly, a Houston-area advocate recently described how a Central American migrant woman experiencing violence in the home that had no access to services, ultimately took her own life and that of her children (personal communication, November 9, 2012).

These snapshots indicate that violence in various manifestations is woven throughout Central American women's migration experiences, revealing the delicate navigation and balancing of both danger and hope. In a sense, women seem to experience migration through an ever-present haze of both experienced and anticipated violence. The complex decisions made when deciding to migrate and when crossing borders are influenced by multiple factors. Internal and external resources impact women's ability to respond to and cope with that violence. We are consequently obliged to better understand and respond to the complex and interrelated phenomena of migration and violence against women, as these phenomena are currently playing out among migrant women from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Recent Trends in Migration

Trends in the migration of Central American women to the U.S. since 1990 serve, in part, as impetus for this research. Economic conditions and neoliberal policies paved

the way for the feminization of migration from Latin America to the U.S. and other receiving countries (Benería, Deere, & Kabeer, 2012; Pessar, 2005). Factors that contribute to increased internal and international migration among women in Latin America include the unemployment and underemployment of men, femicide, governmental tolerance for violence against women, and receiving countries' demand for both domestic labor and sex work (Benería et al, 2012; Pessar, 2005).

Substantial growth in migration specifically from the “Northern Triangle” of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) to the U.S. is a recent and growing phenomenon (Rosenblum & Brick, 2011). More than 39% of the total number of Central American-born residents living in the U.S. (both citizen and non-citizen) migrated in 2000 or later (US Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, the number of “unauthorized immigrants” (foreign-born non-citizens who are not legal U.S. residents) has increased by 44% (El Salvador), 79% (Guatemala) and 106% (Honduras) between 2000 and 2010 (Hoefler, Rytina, & Baker, 2011). El Salvador (1.3 million people, or 41%), Guatemala (850,900 people or 28%), and Honduras (490,600 or 16%) were the top three sending countries from Central America in 2011, and primary destinations in the U.S. include California, Texas, and Florida.

Key Concepts Related to Violence against Women

Global estimates suggest that one third of the world's women experience some type of interpersonal violence (Ellsberg, 2006). Women in the Northern Triangle of Central America experience a range of violence from the everyday experiences of domestic violence to femicide, or the killing of women (Menjívar, 2011). Violence

against women, however, goes largely unreported in Central America and is shrouded in silence (Hume, 2004; Hume, 2009).

For the purposes of this research, I explore domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking³, under the wider umbrella term violence against women – a broad conceptualization of violence that includes physical, sexual, emotional and/or psychological harm or suffering related to gender inequality. The United Nation’s 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides both a call to action and a working definition of violence against women:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (Article 1).

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention defines domestic violence, using the term intimate partner violence, as including “physical violence, sexual violence, threats of physical or sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics) by a current or former intimate partner (Basile et al, 2011). Sexual violence is generally understood as “any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone's will” and includes rape, attempted nonconsensual sex acts, and abusive sexual contact (Basile & Saltzman, 2002).

Often referred to as modern day slavery, human trafficking includes both labor and sex trafficking and has become an increasing focus of the U.S. criminal justice

³ The terms human trafficking and smuggling are distinct. I use human trafficking to describe the crime of using force, fraud, or coercion to make someone perform work or commercial sex acts. It does not necessitate movement across or within borders. Smuggling, on the other hand, involves illegal transportation of people across international borders, and does not necessarily imply exploitation.

system and among international human rights advocates. The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, sometimes referred to as the Palermo Protocol, defines trafficking in persons as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (Article 3, 2000).

An extreme form of gender-related violence towards women, femicide refers to the killing of women. The UN Human Rights Council describes femicide as “the ultimate act of violence which is experienced in a continuum of violence” (UN, 2012, p. 4). While femicide can be understood as parallel to homicide (albeit specific to women) feminicide is a more recent term used to describe the murder of women due to their gender (Bueno-Hansen, 2010) or “the killing of women *because* they are women” (personal communication, Cecilia Menjivar, 2015) and is characterized by the co-occurrence of impunity (Trujillo, 2010).

This research focuses on domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking, and does not cover all types of violence against women, nor violence experienced by men and boys.

The Violence-Migration Nexus

Emerging scholarship is beginning to recognize the role violence plays in decision-making processes, particularly around women’s motivations to migrate as strategies to escape or resist violence and oppression (Haug, 2008; Salcido & Adelman,

2004; Argüelles & Rivero, 2004; González-López, 2007; Kiwanuka, 2008; Upegui-Hernández, 2012; Vogt, 2012; Wagner, 2009). The migration process, however, poses further risks of violence, and Central American women are vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse, sexual assault, rape, and other forms of violence on the route through Mexico to the U.S. (Amnesty International, 2010; Infante, Idrovo, Sánchez-Domínguez, Vinhas, & González-Vázquez, 2012; Vogt, 2012).

Furthermore, many women face further violence and exploitation once resettled in the U.S. (Argüelles & Rivero, 2004; González-López, 2007; Upegui-Hernández, 2012; Wagner, 2009). Some women report an escalation or initiation of violence and abuse by same or new partners after migrating to the United States, despite efforts to escape from battering in the home country (Salcido & Adelman, 2004; Erez, Adelman, and Gregory, 2009). Migrant women in the U.S. face obstacles such as language barriers, lack of awareness or information, fear of immigration consequences, gender role expectations and shame, and structural barriers that inhibit access to safety, support, and empowerment (Acevedo, 2000; Bauer, Rodriguez, Quirog, and Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000; Frías & Angel, 2005; Hass et al, 2000; Levine & Peffer, 2012; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Salcido & Adelman, 2004; Wagner, 2009; Warrier & Rose, 2009).

Policymakers widely acknowledge violence against women as a problem worthy of national and global attention, although recognition of violence against migrating women is more recent. Globally, the United Nations identified violence against women as

a human rights issue through the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and has led multiple special investigation missions on this topic to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico. In the U.S., the Violence Against Women Act, passed initially in 1994 (and subsequently reauthorized in 2000, 2005, and 2013), initiated influential provisions, including legal relief for battered immigrants.

Impact for the Field

As social workers and advocates continue to face the impact of the increased migration of women from Central America to the U.S., we will also continue to be responsible for challenging social injustices faced by migrating women and for developing informed approaches to related policy and practices. Improved and expanded conceptualizations of violence will help advocates; social workers and policymakers better understand how violence shapes migration (in addition to how migration shapes violence) and how to better serve migrants. This research seeks to lay an empirical foundation - related to the recent and specific violence-migration nexus experienced by Central American migrant women - from which to launch improved policies, practices, and advocacy initiatives.

This research will inform the training and education of social workers, legal advocates, medical practitioners, and those who craft and revise policy. Findings will inform those working in a variety of practice settings, including migrant rights organizations, rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, and community organizations serving various communities of migrants. This research will also impact the

way we develop curricula and prepare students in social work (as well as education, law, nursing, public health, psychology, and criminal justice) to fill positions as the next generation of advocates and community organizers.

It will remain difficult to assess the breadth and depth of violence experienced by Central American migrant women as long as the lack of legal immigration status in the U.S. keeps women in the shadows. It is imperative that this research also generates deep and critical discussions of policy discourses and developments, including those related to the detention of women and children fleeing violence and future reauthorizations of the Violence against Women Act and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Dialogue about broad immigration reform is on the horizon and will benefit from improved understanding of the spectrum of violence experienced by migrants before, during, and after migration and how legal immigration status (or lack of status) may impact help seeking. Findings may also indicate new international policy strategies for preventing violence.

It is crucial that this research endeavor be approached within the context of identifying strategies to bring about social justice. As Wendy Vogt states, "violence is not simply destructive, but also generates new possibilities for solidarity and political action through social movements around humanitarianism and human rights" (2012, p. 10). In engaging women who have experienced violence in the migration process, it is my hope that we may jointly examine the strengths and strategies used by individual and collective migrating women, in addition to opportunities for improvement in current organizational and institutional responses. If migrant women tell us that they experienced abusive

relationships, were assaulted during migration, and/or were exploited upon arrival to the U.S., we must ask ourselves questions about how to make sense of that in our responses. In particular, when most legal, policy, and social service strategies are targeted at one instance of violence or one relationship (and categorized as mutually exclusive –rape or domestic violence or human trafficking), are these responses capable of fully addressing the experiences of migrant women? These conversations must take place at the community, statewide and national levels.

Above all, those who have experienced the overlapping experiences of migration and violence must be present at the table, directing research design, contextualizing findings and guiding community responses. Without these voices, we run the risk of forging ahead into naïve and misguided territory or causing additional harm to those who have already experienced great injustices. With improved human rights protections for migrant women facing gender-based violence, expanded research agendas, and activism from within migrant communities, we can begin to transform these journeys through violence into journeys that are neither constrained nor determined by violence.

Dissertation Research

In sum, violence both impacts migration and is impacted by migration, and in turn incurs great medical, emotional, legal, and financial costs for individual women, their families, and the U.S. and Central American societies at large. Given the costs of these intersections of migration and violence, coupled with the increasing numbers of Central American women crossing the border into Texas and the scant literature base, services and policy responses remain inadequate. Improved and expanded conceptualizations of

the violence-migration nexus are critically needed to assist advocates, social workers and policymakers in developing informed approaches to policy and social services addressing migrant women.

This dissertation research aims to expand understanding of the violence-migration nexus by exploring how women's experiences of domestic and sexual violence impact the process of migration and decision-making related to migration. Grounded in feminist and transnational theories, this study used a constructivist grounded theory method to explore the following broad research questions:

1. What is the process of migration for Central American female survivors of violence?
2. What is the nature of the violence experienced by Central American migrants?
3. How does the context of experienced or anticipated violence impact decision-making processes for Central American migrant women?

In broadly looking at the process of migration and the nature of violence, the research also seeks to understand how women identify, define, weigh, and cope with the risks of migration-related gender violence (such as sexual violence and human trafficking). Finally, this research aimed to reveal the ways in which motherhood impacts the process of migration in the face of violence.

Positionality and Role of Researcher

My interest in and inspiration for this field of study emanate from direct work as an advocate, social worker, and researcher among women who have experienced multiple and interconnecting injustices. As a bystander to poverty, inequality and violence while a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer, I collaborated with community leaders to build sustainable capacity around maternal health and well-being. Subsequently, as program coordinator for Green Leaf Refugee Services in Austin, Texas, I provided therapeutic case management services to refugees and survivors of human trafficking, including those from Central America. Throughout my career with UT's Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault, I have been fortunate to be involved the coordination and implementation of numerous community partnerships and research studies related to sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking. I am a founding member of the Central Texas Coalition against Human Trafficking, a federally funded, multi-disciplinary team of service providers and law enforcement, and the co-founder and leader for Allies against Slavery, a community anti-trafficking initiative. Finally, I have more recently begun to volunteer at Posada Esperanza, a shelter for migrant mothers and their children, and serve as an expert witness in federal immigration court cases for women seeking asylum and other immigration remedies in the U.S. based on histories of severe violence.

As I come from a multi-faceted position of privilege and am neither a migrant nor a survivor of gender-based violence, I envision my role as a channel between academia

and practice. It is my hope that this channel may serve as an avenue for the voices of survivors of violence to be heard and for those voices to influence community response, policy, and future research.

Finally, as a mother myself, I am stirred by those who have made commitments to protect their children from the violence they themselves experience and who ensured opportunities for a life with more resources, opportunities and education. That inspiration is inextricably tied to a sense of responsibility to direct my skills, privilege, and power as a researcher and a teacher towards these complicated and desperate questions, discovering new areas of inquiry, and inching ever closer to eliminating violence as a factor in women's mobility and family well-being.

Developing a practice of reflecting on my positionality and role as a researcher is a methodological commitment that aims to enhance rigor and to monitor and regulate the use of power in research. Feminist research values reflexivity, striving for self-awareness and recognition of ways in which the researcher influences and is influenced by the research process (Hume, 2007; Gringeri, Wahab, Anderson-Nathe, 2010; Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006).

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is organized into six subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature, summarizing key scholarly contributions related to violence against women as a pre-cursor to migration, as well as violence during migration and following migration. This chapter also offers a description of the regional context of the Northern Triangle of

Central America. Chapter 3 outlines major national and international policies that impact the violence-migration nexus. Chapter 4 provides an overview of theoretical frameworks that served as foundation for this research. This chapter covers transnational migration theory and feminist theories as they relate to the violence-migration nexus. Chapter 5 describes the research approach, including participant recruitment, methods of data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations. Chapter 6 presents thematic findings of the data as they related to the process of migration, and Chapter 7 offers deeper analysis of Central American migrant women's experience of violence, survival, and motherhood. Chapter 8 begins development of a provisional theoretical framework to describe the violence-migration nexus. Finally, Chapter 9 brings the findings into discussion with potential impacts on the field.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction & A Note about Borders

It is convenient to consider borders as locations fixed both in time and in geography. To some extent this is accurate, and in the context of this dissertation, the border between Guatemala and Mexico and the border between Mexico and the U.S. are important. They both represent boundaries that women migrating from Central America to the U.S. must cross and both entail legal immigration hurdles as well as physical vulnerability and danger, particularly to women and to the undocumented. Furthermore, we recognize that the context of women's lives before making the journey may impact the journey itself. Likewise, the experiences of women after crossing the last border into the U.S. are also influenced by the journey and the crossings.

This chapter employs borders as an organizational tool, in a sense, as it covers women's experiences with violence during pre-migration, migration, and post-migration phases of migration to the U.S. However, we must remain aware that these are not simple or clean delineations. Rather, women's experiences of violence may transcend borders, may be shaped by borders, or may be entirely distinct from what we identify as borders. Levitt and Jaworsky state that scholars' acknowledgement of "the sanctity of borders and boundaries is a very recent development, both in human history and in social scientific theory" (2007, p. 146). They argue "humans continually create and recreate boundaries, moving, trading, and communicating across them, thereby making fluidity and change a part of all human social formations and processes" (p. 146).

This chapter provides background on the regional context of the Northern Triangle of Central America and then summarizes the literature in three areas: violence as a pre-cursor to migration as it relates to migration decision-making, violence experienced by women during migration, and violence experienced by migrant women in the U.S.

The Northern Triangle: A Regional Context

The Northern Triangle of Central America includes El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and marks the area of specific interest for this research. With shared roots in histories of colonization, natural disasters and political instability and conflict, the Northern Triangle is joined by a current array of interconnected trends: criminal gang networks, international drug trade, high rates of homicide and violent crime, and similar socio-economic circumstances (Dudley, 2012).

Figure 1. Map of Central America



A comprehensive description of the geopolitical context of the region is not possible given the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize the long-standing roles that outsiders have played in the lives of Central Americans. Legacies of colonization and more recent neoliberal policies and globalization, including U.S. economic and political interests in Central America, negatively impacted and continue to impact the region. Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodríguez (2005) argue, “state-directed political violence developed as a byproduct of a regional political structure in which U.S. political interests have weighed heavily” (p. 3). They also argue that the U.S. government has strongly supported state violence in Central America through the provision of weapons and military training. This complex landscape of regional and U.S.-supported violence has resulted in systematic displacement of people from their lands and continues to impact the current violence in and migration from the region (García, 2006).

The Northern Triangle’s political and civil conflict of the 1980s created an environment ripe for the legacy of violence against women and proliferation of organized crime (Chazaro, Casey, & Ruhl, 2010; Dudley, 2012; Paley, 2014). Routes used during guerilla wars became routes used by traffickers of drugs, weapons, and illegal contraband, and former guerilla fighters were hired as traffickers of drugs, humans, and weapons, and governmental corruption and impunity increased. Simultaneously, Central Americans deported from the U.S. for participation in criminal gang activity (such as prominent gangs Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18) initiated similar activities back in their home countries. From 2001 to 2010, the U.S. government deported 129,726 Central

Americans convicted of crimes, and more than 90% of those were deported to the Northern Triangle (USDHS, 2013).

Such transnational criminal activity creates greater risks and vulnerability for migrants crossing through Mexico, many of whom are migrating from the Northern Triangle to the U.S. Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos [CNDH], 2009) estimates that as many as 18,000 migrants are kidnapped in Mexico each year, and many more are presumably vulnerable to rape, murder, and extortion by criminal networks. Officials and advocates alike agree that migrants moving through Mexico encounter increasing danger.

This regional context is further complicated by the highest rate of homicide in the hemisphere. Murder rates of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras average 58 per 100,000. This is well over the rate of Mexico, for example, which is 18 per 100,000, or Costa Rica at 1 per 100,000 (Dudley, 2012). Furthermore, El Salvador has the highest femicide rate in the world (Small Arms Survey, 2012).

The importance of this regional focus is illustrated by recent attention in governmental reports, human rights organizations, research institutes, and private foundations. In particular, the topic of violence in the Northern Triangle has garnered focused consideration by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Migration Policy Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center, and MacArthur Foundation. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, referring to the region as the "bridge" to North America, recently commented on the high rate of homicide: "This is more than a spate of killings, it is a crisis – bringing with it great fear

and instability to societies. Beyond these appalling numbers, other crimes have emerged – kidnappings, migrant smuggling and human trafficking.” He called for solutions and responses “rooted in the rule of law and respect for human rights.”

The notion of an interconnected web of violence – the idea that experiences with one type of violence impact experiences with other types of violence - is an important backdrop to this discussion. While criminal networks and homicide, for example, do not necessarily directly cause violence against women, these acts of violence may be interconnected. In other words, violence exists along a continuum, though it should not be used to construct a hierarchy or pit one type of violence against another in meriting attention and response (Kelly, 1987). In addition, these other types of chronic violent activity, sometimes referred to as urban violence, street violence, or “public” violence, often complicate the ability to understand and recognize domestic violence or what has traditionally been considered “private” violence (Hume, 2004; Hume, 2009). When these other types of “chronic” violence become the hot button issue, as has arguably become the case with homicide in Central America, domestic violence and violence against women in general are rendered invisible.

Violence as a Pre-Cursor to Migration

This section explores the ways in which violence against women operates in the Northern Triangle and influences women’s decisions to migration. It also looks at migration as a potential strategy women use to cope with and protect themselves from abusive partners. In essence, this represents an exploration of the literature that describes the role of migration in women’s efforts to seek a life free of psychological, physical,

sexual, and economic abuse and control. This section provides a summary of literature related to the scope and nature of violence against women in the Northern Triangle, followed by violence as a factor in migration decision-making.

Prevalence of Violence against Women in the Northern Triangle

Global estimates suggest that one third of the world's women experience some type of interpersonal violence (Ellsberg, 2006). Women in the Northern Triangle of Central America experience a range of violence from the everyday experiences of domestic violence to femicide (Menjívar, 2011). In fact, the UN describes femicide as increasing in prevalence, particularly in Central America (UN 2004; UN 2005; UN 2006; UN, 2011; UN, 2012). Violence against women in the Northern Triangle remains a severely underreported crime due to societal pressures, fear of reprisal, fear of publicity and stigmatization, discriminatory practices by authorities, and low confidence in the justice system (UN, 2004). Impunity rates remain high, and existing laws are minimally enforced (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2012; United States Department of State, 2013). During a recent mission to El Salvador, the UN (2011) reported,

“the failure of authorities to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for gender-based violence contributed to an environment of impunity that resulted in little confidence in the justice system; impunity for crimes, socioeconomic disparities and the machista culture fostered a generalized state of violence, subjecting women to a continuum of multiple violent acts, including murder, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment and commercial sexual exploitation.” (UN, 2011, p. 1)

The Nature of Violence against Women in the Northern Triangle

In exploring the context of the Northern Triangle, Mo Hume maintains that structural inequalities and violence persist, leaving violence against women largely underreported and shrouded in silence (Hume, 2004, 2008, 2009). Hume also argues that the perception of street or public violence as "real" violence and violence against women as simply "normal," is problematic across policy and research. While gang violence (portraying men as both perpetrators and victims) is predominant, domestic violence is still considered a private issue, and thus silenced (Hume, 2004, 2009). Private violence, she asserts, is normalized, tolerated, and rendered acceptable, invisible, and legitimate. While it may be considered widespread, it is not prioritized (as public violence is) in social narratives. However, even though violence in El Salvador is "blamed on street gangs and drug traffickers, the most risky place for girls and women is still at home" (Lakhani, 2013).

Hume also argues that violence is related to gendered ideas of femininity and masculinity and that impunity is the tacit acceptance of men's aggression towards women and children (Hume, 2008). She reports that women's fear of reporting is related to the broader context of public and gang violence. She suggests that men use this wider context as a way to threaten and control the women they abuse.

Sociologist Cecilia Menjívar maintains that while it is useful to explore everyday violence and abuses, these exist within larger and multiple social structures of inequality, violence and oppression. Consistent with Hume's work, Menjívar argues for recognizing the interconnectedness of various forms of violence, because "the violence that occurs in

intimate relations is connected to the violence that occurs between ethnic groups, which in turn is linked to global patterns of interstate wars, because the same mechanisms sustain them" (2011, p.36). Menjívar asserts that the differences between wartime and peacetime Guatemala are imperceptible, in terms of the current state of violence against women being rooted in the atrocities committed during the political conflict. Rachel Pain (2015) links violence against women to militarization, conflict, and post-conflict eras, arguing that increasing lethality in domestic violence relationships is associated with greater availability of weapons in times of conflict. She notes that violence against women shifts from the public sphere back to the private sphere during transitions from war to peace.

Domination and control permeate women's lives in Guatemala, in that men control where partners can and should go, how long they have for visits and errands, and who can accompany them (Menjívar, 2011). This is normalized as male "protection" of women. Mothers, in-laws, and other women may be a source of comfort for abused women, but they may also encourage women to endure the violence.

Nawyn, Reosti, & Gjokaj (2009) also describe sexual violence and rape as a strategy of war, colonization and genocide. While men's persecution is often related to state violence, "women who are persecuted more often are targeted by family members, neighbors, or other acquaintances, and the violence is often sexual" (2009, p. 193). These cases are often dismissed as being personal and private, rather than political or a violation of human rights. Rather than being impermeable, the link between public and private is grounded in historical, cultural, and political patterns of gender oppression.

Consequently, gendered violence has largely been ignored by studies of violence and forced migration, considering gendered violence as part of the private sphere and women's roles in forced migration as primarily dependents of men who have been persecuted.

Violence against Women as Motivation to Migrate

Scholars are beginning to suggest that violence plays a role in decision-making and motivations to migrate and to recognize transnational migration as a strategy to escape or resist violence and oppression (Haug, 2008; Salcido, & Adelman, 2004; Argüelles & Rivero, 2004; González-López, 2007; Kiwanuka, 2008; McCallister, 2012; Upegui-Hernández, 2012; Vogt, 2012; Wagner, 2009). Analysis of data collected at migrant shelters participating in the Kino Border Initiative in Arizona demonstrates that many recent migrating women experienced multiple episodes of violence from the time of childhood until the present, and that in this chronic context of violence, migration is used a strategy for survival (Conrad, 2013).

Again, given the limited availability of research directly related to migration from Central America to the U.S., it may be useful to draw from potentially complementary studies. For example, Wagner (2009) argues that domestic violence can serve as an invisible motivation for migration among Ecuadorian women who migrate to Spain. Using a life history narrative of Antonia, a Peruvian battered migrant mother in Chile, Parson (2010) introduces evidence that fleeing violence is often a motivating factor for migration and discusses how racism, poverty and violence are interrelated. Kiwanuka's (2008) work with migrant African women in the U.S. illustrates the role of domestic

violence as one of several precipitating factors to migration. In addition, Salcido and Adelman (2004) found that Mexican battered women might cross the border to seek both safety from violence and economic security.

Belanger and Rahman (2013) published compelling research concerning migration of Bangladeshi women and the role of violence. A third of the sample (n=23 migrant women) indicated that migration was used as an escape from domestic violence. The authors recognize that domestic violence in concert with economic issues may motivate women to migrate for employment, and they argue that pre-migration decision-making involves "intersecting and overlapping problems with domestic violence, family economic crises, family social status," (p. 365), underemployment and/or limited employment opportunities in the home country.

In addition to domestic violence as motivator, González-López explored the role of sexual violence in the lives of Mexican migrant women, and describes the ways in which migration may be considered a strategy women use to “cope with the social and cultural prescriptions that promote injustice and sexual violence” (2007, p. 227). Her study reflects women’s lived experiences with sexual violence on both sides of the border and reveals sexual violence as a major and immediate motivation to migrate among participants. Migration offers some strategies for coping with the shame surrounding sexual violence by providing distance from family and a sense of anonymity in a new country.

Given recent increases in crime in Latin America, it is also important to consider the implications of victimization, in general, on individuals' decisions to migrate to the

U.S. (Wood, Gibson, Ribeiro, & Hamsho-Diaz, 2010). Wood et al used public opinion surveys in estimating that those who reported being a victim of crime or having family members who had been victims of crime were 30% more likely to consider migration to the U.S. While this study begins to explore the implications of violence on migration decision-making, it is limited in that it does not specifically include crimes of violence against women.

Leave/Stay Decision-Making

Scholars who explore violence against women note that decisions to stay in or leave violent relationships are not made in single moments, but unfold over time. Women's movement into and out of abusive relationships is fluid and complex (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng, 2003; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000). In general, decisions are impacted by a wide variety of factors, including trauma, self-efficacy, social stigma, emotional commitment to abusive partner, shared children and childcare responsibilities, economic dependence, fear of harm or retribution to self or children, police response, and lack of social support (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng, 2003; Kim & Gray, 2008; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000). Rachel Pain (2015) argues that ethnic minority women and those with lower incomes may be more likely to migrate in order to flee domestic violence.

Kim and Gray (2008) highlight several key reasons women remain in violent relationships, supporting previous literature on the topic. First, those economically dependent on their partners are less likely to leave. In addition, those with lower self-esteem, lower internal locus of control, and higher levels of fear are less likely to leave.

Their research also countered previously held beliefs about the role the criminal justice system's response plays in women's decision-making, finding that a negative police response did not keep women from leaving.

While the literature on the stay-leave decision is important in identifying main factors among women experiencing violent and abusive relationships in the U.S., it is limited in its consideration of migrating women or women living in other countries (whose criminal justice systems, gender norms, and expectations for relationships and marriage may be varied). One recent study, however, took an in-depth quantitative look at factors that inform and predict leaving abusive relationships for both migrant and non-migrant women (Amanor-Boadu, Messing, Stith, Anderson, O'Sullivan, & Campbell, 2012). Amanor-Boadu and her colleagues found that migrant and nonmigrant women have both similar and differing elements in their decisions to leave a relationship. Findings were related to Choice and Lamke's (1997) two organizing questions "will I be better off?" and "can I do it?" In responding to the "will I be better off?" question, researchers found that in comparison to nonmigrant women, migrant women have greater financial, legal, and social risks to leaving. Migrant women also perceive greater risk of personal physical harm. In terms of the "can I do it?" question, Amanor-Boadu and her colleagues found that migrant women were more afraid of and felt more controlled by their partners and had greater legal commitments to them. In other words, migrant women faced greater structural obstacles to leaving than nonmigrant women. The barriers to leaving also impacted decision-making more than their perceptions of risk. Both groups (migrant and nonmigrant) were more likely to leave when the perceived risk to

others (primarily children) was higher if they stayed. Interestingly, social isolation was not found to predict migrant or nonmigrant women's leaving.

The Amanor-Boadu et al study is limited in its scope and ability to directly inform the experiences of recent migrants from Central America. The sample includes migrant women from 58 different home countries. It did not collect information about length of time spent living in the U.S. or where and when migrant participants experienced violence (pre-migration, during migration, or in the US). Nonetheless, it remains useful in examining decision-making factors for migrant women.

Ultimately, the discussion around women's decisions to stay in or leave a violent or abusive relationship is a controversial one. While some think of leaving a violent relationship as necessary for safety, evidence suggests that staying in an abusive relationship can be a survival tactic, given the potential for continued or increased violence upon leaving (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000). Additionally, a narrow focus on how and why women decide to stay in or leave a violent relationship can be a misplaced, or even harmful, focus. That is, placing the responsibility for staying safe on those experiencing violence is problematic. Rather, research and practice should include a focus on holding perpetrators accountable for their actions and on primary prevention of violence and must pay attention to the multiple structures of oppression that contribute to relationships of unequal power and control.

Violence Against Migrating Women

While much of the migration literature focuses on sending communities or receiving communities in isolation, there is merit in investigating the migration journey itself (McDowell, 1999). This section will focus on contemporary patterns of migration and the literature that covers the nature of violence – be it physical danger, sexual violence, or human trafficking - experienced by women during their journeys from Central America to the U.S.

Contemporary Trends in Migration from Central America to the U.S.

Factors that contribute to increased internal and international migration among women in Latin America include the unemployment and underemployment of men, femicide and governmental tolerance for violence against women, and receiving countries' demand for both domestic labor and sex work (Benería et al, 2012; Pessar, 2005). In fact, given lack of housing and shelter options and insufficient income, it remains very difficult for women experiencing abuse in Central America to escape by relocating within their home countries. This leaves migration as one avenue for safety (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2012; United States Department of State, 2013).

The Central American isthmus has a long history of trade and migration from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere. Nearly tripling in number since 1990, Central American immigration to the U.S. has grown more quickly than other regional migration patterns from Latin America in the last decade (Rosenblum & Brick, 2011; Stoney & Batalova, 2013). Rising from less than one percent in 1960, Central American

migrants now represent almost 8 percent of the migrant population in the U.S. Between 2000 and 2010; the Central American migrant population in the U.S. grew from 2 million to 3.1 million, an increase of 51%. More than 39% of the total number of Central American-born residents living in the U.S. (both citizen and non-citizen) migrated in 2000 or later (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). El Salvador (1.3 million people), Guatemala (850,900), and Honduras (490,600) were the top three sending countries from Central America in 2011, and primary destinations in the U.S. include California, Texas, and Florida. Specifically, the numbers of “unauthorized immigrants” (foreign-born non-citizens who are not legal residents) have increased by 44% (El Salvador), 79% (Guatemala) and 106% (Honduras) between 2000 and 2010 (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2011).

While migration from Central America to the U.S. is frequently recognized as economic migration, and the migrants as economic migrants, some disagree with this categorization (García, 2006; Jonas & Rodríguez, 2014). Given the social violence, corruption, and criminal gang activity that many migrants are fleeing, some experts argue that this migration is better understood as “forced displacement from violence and crime” or “forced migration” (Jonas, 2013). Nawyn, Reosti, & Gjakaj argue that "scholars should not assume a dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration and instead examine migrants' process of decision-making (however limited it might be at times) in response to gendered violence" (2009, p. 195). Susanna Snyder (2012) also tackles this dichotomy, recognizing that a more accurate understanding allows for a continuum of migration with different combinations of force, choice, and agency.

Migration Through Mexico

Considering Central Americans' migration to the U.S. without understanding the role of Mexico paints only a portion of a complex portrait. The journey from the southernmost border of Mexico to the U.S. is a long and arduous one. It is more than 1,700 miles long, for example, from Tapachula to Ciudad Juarez. Migrants travel by a variety of means and routes. Figure 2 illustrates common routes of migration. During the 1990s, the Mexican government stepped up efforts to stem unauthorized migration north, in part due to political pressure from the U.S. (Castillo, 2006). Monitoring the southern border with Guatemala is particularly challenging, because it has more than 100 unofficial crossing points (Human Rights Council, 2008). Approximately 1.5 million people cross the southern border each year (González-Murphy & Koslowksi, 2011). Despite difficulties officials have in enforcing borders, the numbers of Central Americans deported from Mexico has grown each year since the 1990s, reaching a high of 200,000 deportations in 2004 and 2005. The majority of migrants deported from Mexico are Guatemalan, Honduran, and Salvadoran.

Figure 2. Migrant Routes through Mexico

Migrant Routes Through Mexico



Border control strategies by the Bush and Clinton administrations involved concentrated border enforcement and electronic surveillance. Immigration officials argue that these strategies have reduced the number of illegal border crossings at the targeted gateways (Cornelius, 2001). Immigration scholars, however, contend that these strategies simply re-channeled illegal entry to other locations, increasing the physical risk and cost to migrants. Professional people-smugglers (coyotes) increased fees, and Wayne Cornelius argues that illegal migrants may decide to permanently reside in the U.S., rather than risk circular migration or travelling back and forth for family and other reasons. Fatalities of illegal border crossers (due to environmental causes - hypothermia, dehydration, and heat stroke) also increased over the same time period (mid 1990's to

early 2000's). Border patrol activities have "herded unauthorized border-crossers into increasingly inhospitable and dangerous areas" (Cornelius, 2001, p. 675).

As the journey became more difficult, in terms of avoiding border security and Mexican immigration officials, Central American migrants were drawn to new, and often increasingly dangerous, methods of transportation (Jonas & Rodríguez, 2014). Riding atop freight trains, for example, became another option. Train travel results in injuries and death for many migrants, as they attempt to jump on and off trains at governmental checkpoints. As more secluded roads and routes become used, these routes become vulnerable to surveillance and extortion from organized crime and drug networks. Unauthorized migrants travelling through Mexico are vulnerable to kidnapping and exploitation by smugglers (coyotes) and organized crime rings, in addition to the injuries, detention, and death on the dangerous journey north. In 2010, 72 migrants were killed in Tamaulipas (a third or more were Honduran) when they refused to cooperate with criminal activities of the Zetas drug ring (Jonas, 2013). Then in March 2013, criminal gangs on the Mexico side of the Texas-Mexico border kidnapped 102 Honduran migrants, although they were subsequently released (Reichman, 2013).

In 2011, under political pressure from the U.S. and the human rights community, the Mexican government passed a new migration law that attempts to protect migrants' rights regardless of their legal status (Gonzales-Murphy & Koslowski, 2011). The law also calls for the creation of a new governmental entity tasked with investigating crimes against migrants and protecting migrants' human rights. However, the law's

implementation and impact on migrants' security has yet to be fully witnessed or documented (Reichman, 2013).

Amnesty International's 2013 Annual Report calls attention to human rights violations faced by migrants travelling through Mexico. In particular, the report calls out government officials as responsible for colluding with criminal gang networks in the kidnapping, killing, and abuse of migrants. Amnesty International calls for a database of missing migrants and identification of the remains of deceased migrants' bodies left in Mexico. Those calling attention to migrant rights are also at increased risk of threats, physical harm and detention (Padre Solalinde, May 2013).

General Risk of Violence against Migrating Women

Migrants' experience of the transit period can be tremendously risky and painful. Particularly due to undocumented status, migrants are vulnerable to a wide range of violence - verbal and physical abuse, exclusion, robbery, extortion, assault, torture, human trafficking and smuggling, kidnapping, rape, and mass rape and homicide - often at the hands of municipal, state, and federal authorities in Mexico and the border regions to the north and to the south (Infante, Idrovo, Sánchez-Domínguez, Vinhas, & González-Vázquez, 2012; INCIDE Social, 2012). Women interviewed at migrant shelters in Arizona describe having experienced violence before and during their migration, and more than 70% reported having had an experience with violence before or after migrating to the U.S. (Conrad, 2013). Human rights activists and experts report that vulnerabilities to danger along the migrant routes in Mexico are particularly gendered (Jonas, 2013).

When examining the violence that may be experienced during migration, it is useful to consider the physical spaces occupied by migrating women. Craig Martin (2011) introduces the notion of “desperate passengers.” Migrants may experience desperation related to forced migration, economic migration, or other types of migration. They are denied choice in when to move, how to move, and the mobility networks that are available to them. The routes of a desperate passenger may be dangerous and involve the underside of trucks or the tops of trains, and these methods are not uncommon among Central American migrants travelling up through Mexico towards the U.S. Furthermore, criminal gangs often have relationships with train drivers and others who facilitate the exploitation of and violence against women. For example, Amnesty International reports an example of a train stopping in order for a criminal gang to board the train and abduct 12 women in 2008 (2010). Given that this desperation may sometimes be related to escaping past violence, the circumstances of the passage itself, types of transportation and vulnerable spaces, may hinder migrants’ abilities to protect themselves from the risks of further violence during migration journeys.

Formal reports or complaints of discrimination or violence against female migrants in Mexico are rare due to fear of retaliation by perpetrators (Human Rights Council, 2008). The Human Rights Council (2008) also reported that while migrant women are fleeing domestic and sexual violence and/or experience violence along the way, there are few counseling services and little or no medical treatment for them in Mexican detention centers.

Rape and sexual violence

Rape and sexual violence are unfortunately a reality, in terms of the types of danger, risk, and fears faced by migrating women (Vogt, 2012). Literature is clear on the vulnerabilities that exist during flight from war zones, for example, or disintegration of social structures (Hynes & Cardozo, 2000). While the region of Central America and Mexico may not be currently considered as “war-torn,” this research argues that there are several parallels in terms of the general violence, political instability, and regional criminal network activity at play.

Falcón (2001) argues that rape is an outcome of the recent militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and that sexual assault along the border, particularly by government officials including U.S. border patrol officers, occurs and goes unreported and unaddressed. Given increased border enforcement and surveillance, it could be argued that more dangerous, lengthy, and isolated or remote border-crossing paths may also leave female migrants more vulnerable to sexual violence perpetrated by coyotes or fellow migrants. Women migrating through Mexico are also targets of human traffickers who exploit women in the commercial sex industry or other types of forced labor.

Amnesty International (2010) estimates that as many as 60% of migrant women are raped during the journey north through Mexico and that sexual violence is used as a tool to terrorize and control Central American migrant women travelling through Mexico to the U.S, and as a price of passage. Sexual violence also comes in the form of sexual humiliation, or being forced to strip naked to be searched for money or contraband (Vogt,

2012). Women and girl migrants are at heightened risk of sexual violence perpetrated by traffickers, corrupt officials, other migrants, and criminal gangs (Amnesty International, 2012; Vogt, 2012). Migrant women are deterred from reporting these crimes due to their desire to continue the journey and lack of complaint process, particularly when they lack documentation or immigration status in Mexico. Rape and threat of rape are also used in abductions when gang members demand ransom from family back in the country of origin.

Not only is there growing concern and evidence about the risks of sexual violence for migrating women, but some evidence also suggests that women themselves have awareness and take preventative action. Reports by Amnesty International (2011) and in the popular media, most notably in an El País article written by Carlos Salinas (2011), reveal that Central American migrants heavily anticipate rape during migration, such that the use of Depo-Provera has become commonly used in preventing rape-related pregnancy. Amnesty International also contends that people smugglers often require migrants to take an injectable contraceptive. The degree to which the awareness of risk of rape influences women's migration decision-making remains unexplored in academic literature.

Sociologist Argan Aragón, who has made the journey and interviewed Central American migrants, reports that migrant women may use their sexuality as a strategy to avoid violence (Salinas, 2011). Aragón explains that “el sexo se vuelve una estrategia para ellas.” [Sex becomes a strategy for them.] Migrants may use sex as a strategy to

prevent assaults, to avoid paying bribes to immigration authorities or police, or in exchange for rides with truckers from border to border.

Human trafficking

The U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report (2012) reveals that women from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are trafficked to Mexico and the U.S., and Guatemalan and Honduran women are also trafficked to El Salvador (U.S. Department of State, 2012). These cases remain un-quantified. Research focused on migrating women and children who experienced commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking in Mexico indicates that those who are trafficked in this region are primarily from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador (Casillas, 2006). Migrants in transit to the U.S., fleeing for economic reasons and/or family problems, often get trapped or stuck in Mexico, having run out of money or been exploited financially. At this time, they are vulnerable to being trafficked.

Violence against Migrant Women in the U.S.

In addition to considerations of violence as a potential impetus for migration and the risk of violence during migration, we must consider the degree to which Central American migrant women settled in the U.S. are vulnerable to experiencing violence after in the post-migration phase. This section covers the scope of violence against migrant women, the nature of such violence, the impact of legal status, and help seeking among migrant survivors.

Scope of Violence against Migrant Women in the U.S.

While research specific to the recent waves of Central American women migrating to the U.S. is limited, scholars agree that many women face further violence and exploitation once resettled in the U.S. (Argüelles & Rivero, 2004; González-López, 2007; Upegui-Hernández, 2012; Wagner, 2009). Some women report an escalation or initiation of violence and abuse by their partners after migrating to the U.S. (Erez, Adelman, and Gregory, 2009; Kiwanuka, 2008). Interestingly, while crossing borders may be an avenue of escape from domestic violence in the home country, it may pose further vulnerability to such violence (Salcido & Adelman, 2004).

Estimating the prevalence of domestic violence among migrant populations in the U.S. is difficult, as language and social isolation both present barriers to participating in research projects. In addition, migrants are underrepresented in crime statistics, due to low rates of formal reports to law enforcement entities. Reporting rates by migrant survivors of violence may be lower than those by other survivors, given migrant women's fears of deportation. It is generally considered, however, that the risks of abuse are potentially higher among undocumented migrants (Bhuyan, Shim, & Velagapudi, 2010).

A study of women living in the DC metropolitan area found that Latina migrants experience a wide range of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse (Hass, Dutton, & Orloff, 2000). More than 49% of participants reported physical abuse, 11.4% sexual abuse, 60% psychological abuse related to dominance and isolation, and 40.7% verbal and emotional abuse. These rates appear higher than global estimates of gender-based violence and physical and psychological abuse rates in the U.S. (Basile et al, 2011;

Ellsberg, 2006). Migrant women are also at increased risk of domestic violence homicide (Campbell, 2013).

Nature of Violence against Migrant Women

Many argue that aspects of the specific position of migrant women (language proficiency, social isolation, acculturation, gender and economic inequality, access to employment, legal status, lack of knowledge of laws and services, and framework of home country) may exacerbate both the perpetrator's use of violence and women's experience of violence and abuse (Alcalde, 2006; Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005; Crandall, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton, 2005; Hass et al, 2000; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Vidales, 2010).

Shifting gender relations may also impact violence after migration. While many have argued that migration can break down traditional gender inequalities and offer new equalities, Cathy McIlwaine (2010) reminds us that multiple and opposing possibilities exist. She outlines Pessar's typology of the three potential outcomes of migration. First, migration can challenge and encourage people to renegotiate gender ideologies and practices. Second, migration may result in wider acceptance of counter-hegemonic pre-migration gender regimes. Finally, migration can recreate or intensify pre-migration gender norms. McIlwaine offers examples of the ways hegemonic norms are either sustained or challenged during migration. For example, migration may allow for the confrontation of dominant masculinities of a sending community by more egalitarian gender regimes in a receiving community. On the other hand, men may feel powerless and newly oppressed after migrating and respond with defensive entrenchment of

hegemonic norms. Similarly women may report greater equality after migration, particularly in home and related to domestic divisions of labor. On the other hand, they may also cite further cemented inequalities within the home or increased violence given a partner's resentment or loss of power.

Based on interviews with Mexican migrant women living in Atlanta and their family members in Mexico, Jennifer Hirsch (1999) found that migration-related shifts in gender relations provided some protection from violence. She describes generational changes in marital ideas and practices and contends that marriages built on *confianza* (rather than *respeto*, pre-migration) entailed more joint decision-making, shared tasks, heterosociality (or a blurring of the lines between private and public spheres), social equality among partners, and the importance of sexual and emotional intimacy.

In her doctoral research, Mariela Ayala (2000) proposes that level of acculturation impacts the ways in which Latina women experience domestic violence. Findings suggest a negative relationship between acculturation and attitudes toward domestic violence, and a positive relationship between educational attainment and acculturation. Ayala concludes that the more education a Latina migrant woman has, the more acculturated she will be. Furthermore, Ayala proposes that the more acculturated a Latina migrant is, the less tolerant she will be towards domestic violence.

As a feminist psychologist interested in building on the literature base around gender and development, Débora Upegui-Hernández (2012) looks at the intersection of violence against women and responsibilities to send remittances. She tackles the added burden on women to support development through remittances, when migrating women,

particularly undocumented migrant women, are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Erez and Adelman (2009) also found that the economic marginalization of migrant survivors of abuse, combined with the continued responsibility for sending remittances home, contributed to batterers' justification for abuse.

Legal immigration status

With the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment and nativism, Latino/a migrants are portrayed as national security threats and have thus been constructed as “illegal” (Gonzales, 2014; Jonas & Rodriguez, 2014). Illegality impacts all facets of migrant women's lives, and contributes to vulnerability in many realms (Soerens, 2015). In fact, Soerens argues that women's “experiences as undocumented migrants is qualitatively different from the subjective experience of victimized women who enjoy a legal relationship with the State” (p. 72).

Perpetrators of violence often take advantage of undocumented migrants' immigration status and constructed “illegality” as a mechanism of maintaining power and control. Abusers may use threats about reporting her to immigration officials, which causes legitimate fears of deportation, separation from children, and loss of financial support. This is a powerful and effective tactic used to control and isolate victims (Erez, Adelman, and Gregory, 2009; Hass et al, 2000; Kiwanuka, 2008; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Those who are not documented may experience legal dependence on batterers, lack of legal knowledge, and lack of familiarity with or access to social service or criminal justice systems (albeit systems that possess limited migrant-related cultural and linguistic competencies) (Erez et al, 2009). The abusers of undocumented migrants often

exploit the victims' immigration status, leaving the victim afraid to seek services or report the abuse to law enforcement and making them fearful of assisting with the investigation and prosecution of these crimes. Hass et al argue, "undocumented battered migrant women face the untenable position of having to choose between risk of deportation and that of ongoing escalating abuse" (2000, p. 105).

Interestingly, Jennifer Hirsh (1999) describes the legal climate in the U.S. around domestic violence and police intervention as preventing violence in the U.S. Given the fear of involving authorities and being deported, the author suggests that some men may refrain from violence to protect themselves from deportation. This is contrary to other research findings described above, which suggests that men may use fear of deportation as a control mechanism or that it may play a role in migrant women's decisions not to seek help from law enforcement.

Women may have little awareness of criminal justice interventions or legal remedies available to battered migrant women and women who have experienced other forms of violence (Hass et al, 2000; Levine & Peffer, 2012; Salcido & Adelman, 2004; Sokoloff & Pearce, 2011; Vidales, 2010). Furthermore, some maintain that in addition to lack of awareness, the existing remedies continue to be insufficient. Levine and Peffer (2012) argue that the number of available U visas⁴ each year (10,000) is insufficient. They estimate that by 2015, there may be as many as 100,000 undocumented female victims of domestic violence living in the U.S.

⁴ U visas provides immigration relief to individuals who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse as a result of having been a victim of a qualifying criminal activity, including sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking (USCIS, 2013).

An interesting, and largely unexplored, area of research is the possible vulnerability to violence faced by women detained in the federal immigration detention system. In 2007 and 2010, allegations surfaced of sexual assault perpetrated by guards against female detainees at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center outside Austin, Texas (Gamboa, 2010; Ruland, 2007). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) requested government documents related to sexual abuse in migrant detention centers via the Freedom of Information Act and found almost 200 allegations of abuse since 2007 (ACLU, 2011). New allegations of sexual abuse arose during late 2014 and early 2015, as new immigrant family detention facilities were constructed in New Mexico and Texas.

Help-seeking and access to services

Help seeking is yet another consideration for migrants who experience violence after migrating and settling in a new country. Migrant women have limited access to and may be less likely to seek mainstream social services or criminal justice strategies in the U.S. that respond to survivors of abuse and violence (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Wagner, 2009; Warrier & Rose, 2009). Those who experience gender-based violence may not report this violence or seek services for a variety of reasons. Barriers to help seeking and access to services may include language, lack of awareness or information, fear of immigration consequences, gender role expectations and shame or silence, and discrimination (Acevedo, 2000; Bauer, Rodriguez, Quirog, and Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000). In fact, migrant women may be subject to structural barriers that inhibit their ability to access safety, support, and empowerment (Warrier & Rose, 2009).

Simply by virtue of being newcomers to the community and undocumented, language barriers and lack of knowledge and awareness limit the ability for survivors to access healthcare, support services or criminal justice avenues of support or assistance (Acevedo, 2000; Bauer, Rodriguez, Quirog, and Flores-Ortiz, 2000). Drawing from national survey data, West, Kantor, & Jasinski (1998), found that Latina participants were less likely to utilize both formal and informal resources compared to Anglo participants and that language barriers presented significant barriers to help seeking.

Fear of deportation and/or fear of law enforcement consequences also negatively impact help-seeking among migrant survivors, particularly those without legal status in the U.S In exploring how women balance fears of deportation and fears of continued violence, Denise Mowder (2010) looked at the relationship between fear of deportation and reporting or seeking help, in addition to exposure to continued violence. Data did *not* support the notion that deportation worries were the driving factor keeping victims from help-seeking activities. Rather, help-seeking strategies of battered women are complicated by a myriad of life problems with immigration status being just one of those. Interestingly, Mowder found that silence about emotional abuse, in particular, was common and was not related to fears of deportation. However, while undocumented women often remain silent about their emotional abuse, not revealing it to either social networks or formal help or law enforcement, they may be more likely to tell someone as the violence escalates and becomes physical (Mowder, 2010).

Some argue that gender role expectations and *familismo* may also influence migrant women's help-seeking behaviors (Acevedo, 2000; Bauer, Rodriguez, Quirog, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Crandall et al, 2005; Fuchsel & Hysjulien, 2013). Pressures to uphold traditional gender roles and *familismo* were related to the value of maintaining silence and keeping the family intact as a priority (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quirog, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000). Battered migrant women report that domestic violence is a private problem in their country of origin and may be considered normal or expected: this generally results in silence on the issue (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quirog, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Crandall et al, 2005). Crandall et al (2005) also argue that the cultural importance of women's roles as mothers may serve as a barrier to help seeking. Acevedo (2000), however, found that the welfare of children served as both a deterrent and a motivating factor for women's decision-making about seeking help.

Racial discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment may also hinder migrant women's help seeking and access to services (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quirog, and Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Crandall et al, 2005; Erez & Adelman 2009). Erez and Adelman (2009) argue that battered migrant women face racist anti-immigrant public sentiment that exacerbates their desire to keep violence private in order to transmit an untarnished and positive image of the migrant community. Other research suggests that fear of public violence in the new environment may contribute to staying in an abusive relationship, as a safer option than experiencing other public violence or crime (Kiwauka, 2008). Interestingly, Kiwanuka states that, "women's narratives in this case therefore clearly

indicated that they would rather tolerate violence of any kind from their partners than expose themselves to unknown dangers associated with public violence that could be worse for them” (2008, p. 78).

While migrant survivors of abuse may not generally access or seek assistance from law enforcement or social services, some authors describe alternative routes for help. Sokoloff and Pearce (2011), for example, found that women prefer informal sources of support in situation of abuse, even though they continue to strongly support intervention exerted by the criminal justice system. Women may also utilize other strategies of resistance, protection, or transformation (Argüelles & Rivero, 1993). These include dressing in men's clothing and adopting masculine mannerisms (particularly for those participants who identify as lesbian), in addition to self-defense such as carrying a gun. Other strategies include becoming disengaged from traditional networks of support (that may reinforce silence around violence), and seeking support from religious and spiritual leaders.

Transnational Motherhood

Given that Central American women who migrate to the United States are often mothers experiencing a separation from their children, it is useful to include a basic overview of related literature. The body of literature exploring transnational families is dynamic and growing. In general this scholarship suggests that mothering from afar, in the context of migration, is a prime example of the ways that the transnational self spreads across both social and physical space (Soerens, 2015). Transnational mothers, in

particular, struggle with the basic question of “how to be socially and emotionally present while physically absent” (Carling, Menjívar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012, p. 203).

Michelle Moran-Taylor looks at the separation of children and parents resulting from parents’ migration from Guatemala to the United States. Using data from 35 Guatemalan research participants, Moran-Taylor (2008) focuses on child-rearing practices and relationships between children and caregivers and between parents and caregivers. Parents’ decisions to migrate without children are often related to financial strategies, danger during migration, and the United States being perceived as an inappropriate environment for raising children. Parents’ migration may have positive impacts on children’s economic well-being. The separation, however, may also have negative consequences on children, their behavior, and their educational performance. It is important to remember that parent-child relationships are not fixed, and multiple variables shape the experiences and outcomes of families separated by migration (Zentgraf & Stoltz Chinchilla, 2012). The impact on children left behind, for example, is highly variable and may be influenced by factors such as children’s age and developmental stage, communication between children and migrating parents, remittances, and the health and well-being of children (Yeoh & Lam, 2007).

What may be considered a temporary separation from children may become lengthy or even permanent, and women are often unprepared for the length of separation and the toll it takes on parent-child relationships (Bernard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2008). Menjívar (2012) argues that U.S. immigration law exacerbates long and indefinite

separations and that “the effects of immigrants’ legal uncertainty on parent-child relations in the context of transnational parenting is heavily pronounced” (p. 302).

Women recognize the role of caretakers (primarily their children’s maternal grandmothers) as critical in supporting their migration to the United States (Moran-Taylor, 2008). While some argue that leaving children behind is traumatic to the children and contributes to family disintegration, others contend that parent substitutes are capable of parenting children in a healthy way (Zentgraf & Stolz Chincilla, 2012). It’s important to recognize that family separation does not necessarily change the structure of care, as many families already use extended kinships in care for children. Nonetheless, families also experience disagreements about discipline and treatment of children between migrating mothers and caregivers back home (Bernard et al, 2008). Conflict may also be generated around the amount of and intention for remittances. While remittances are often intended to go towards schooling and promoting children’s health, wellbeing, and education, many families do not know how the remittances are ultimately used.

Transnational motherhood must also be recognized as a gendered experience (Carling, Menjivar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012; Dreby, 2006; Parreñas, 2005). Transnational motherhood involves the provision of financial support, communication, in addition to the expectation to continue providing emotional care for children (Parreñas, 2005). Parreñas (2005) asserts that women contest traditionally normative masculine roles by becoming the “breadwinner,” while simultaneously retaining the traditionally feminine role of “homemaker.” Many migrant mothers feel shame, guilt, and hopelessness about

losing the importance and centrality of family and their roles as mothers and felt that in migrating, they were breaking cultural norm and depriving their children of something that could not be replaced (Bernard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2008). This stigma of having abandoned maternal responsibilities may come from within women but is also generated externally, in that migrating mothers are often targets of criticism for having left children behind (Zentgraf & Stolz Chincilla, 2012).

Synthesis

In general, we can learn about the ways in which migration and violence against women are intertwined through the work of human rights activists and scholars from a variety of academic disciplines. Human rights reports are beginning to document a wide variety of abuses against migrants travelling through Mexico, from Central America to the U.S. The academic literature provides multiple ways to think about decision-making and reasons for and patterns of migration, offering deep coverage of gender and migration. The topics of help-seeking, access to services, types of coercion experienced by battered migrants, and transnational motherhood are also well covered in the literature.

However, existing studies lack depth in coverage of the ways in which Central American women's experiences of violence impact migration decision-making and the strategies women adopt when confronted with violence during and after migration. The research base has also not adequately explored the role of transnational motherhood in the face of violence. This dissertation seeks to address these gaps in the knowledge base

by exploring the ways that women from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras describe and cope with violence in the context of migration.

In building the case for expanded conceptualizations and interconnections between violence and migration, it is useful to consider the current state of the knowledge base alongside recent policy responses to migrant women who experience violence. Chapter 3 outlines major national and international policies that seek to respond to the pre-migration, peri-migration, and post-migration violence.

Chapter 3: Multi-Level Policy Responses to Violence against Women

Building from the preceding description of the context of the Northern Triangle and summary of relevant literature, this chapter will focus on international and domestic policy responses to violence against women. This chapter describes: country-specific policies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; international human rights instruments addressing violence against women; responses to human rights violations against migrating women; and United States policies related to violence against migrant women.

Country-Specific Policies

El Salvador

Since 2008, the landscape around domestic violence in El Salvador has possibly improved, even though violence against women remains a major social problem. According to government authorities with the Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer (ISDEMU, Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women), reports have increased, services to victims have expanded, and public trust in the government's response has improved (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2009).

The UN Special Rapporteur conducted a special mission to El Salvador in 2004 and concluded that domestic violence remains severely underreported due to societal pressures, fear of reprisal, fear of publicity and stigmatization, discriminatory practices by authorities, and low confidence in the justice system (UN, 2004). During a more recent mission in 2011 (UN, 2011), the special rapporteur reported “the failure of authorities to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for gender-based

violence contributed to an environment of impunity that resulted in little confidence in the justice system; impunity for crimes, socioeconomic disparities and the machista culture fostered a generalized state of violence, subjecting women to a continuum of multiple violent acts, including murder, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment and commercial sexual exploitation” (UN, 2011, p. 1).

Subsequent to the 2011 mission, El Salvador established a specialized police force to target violence against women, UNIMUJER, in December of 2011 (UN, 2013). The unit offers specialized assistance and designated space for reporting acts of violence against women, legal advice and information, and follow-up and support for cases filed. This entity has since expanded and has included the training of over 100 police officers.

El Salvador passed the Ley Especial Integral para una Vida Libre de Violencia para las Mujeres (Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence against Women) in January 2012 (Lakhani, 2013). Lakhani (2013) also reports that while implementation of the new law has been slow, it represents a radical movement towards reducing stigma faced by victims, identifying crimes against women as human rights violations, and holding perpetrators accountable. Lakhani ultimately argues that even though violence in El Salvador is “blamed on street gangs and drug traffickers, the most risky place for girls and women is still at home.”

Guatemala

In 2000, the Coordinadora Nacional para la Prevención de la Violencia Intrafamiliar y Contra las Mujeres (CONAPREVI, National Coordinator for the Prevention of Intrafamily Violence and Violence against Women) was established to prevent, punish

and eradicate violence against women. More recently in 2008, Guatemala passed the Law against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence against Women, although it has not been well implemented (Villarreal, 2013; United States Department of State, 2012). This statute addresses femicide and violence against women more broadly, including psychological and economic violence among punishable crimes (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2012). Nonetheless, domestic violence continues to be seen as a private matter and impunity rates remain high (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2012). Given lack of housing and shelter options and insufficient income, it remains very difficult for Guatemalan women experiencing abuse to escape by relocating within Guatemala (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2012; U.S. Department of State, 2013).

In terms of the criminal justice response to sexual assault, the U.S. Department of State (2012) reports that Guatemalan police have limited training on investigations of sexual assault and assistance to victims, and impunity for perpetrators rests at 98%. Furthermore, the underreporting of sexual assault remains a challenge. In 2007, the non-governmental group Doctors without Borders established a clinic in Guatemala specifically for women who have been sexually assaulted (UN, 2011). Guatemala has also developed a Special Prosecutor's Office unit on sex crimes, crimes against women and trafficking in persons, in addition to a 24-hour court that offers services to women who have experienced sexual assault, exploitation, and human trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

Honduras

Honduran law criminalizes rape (including spousal rape), domestic violence, and femicide (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2010; U.S. Department of State, 2013). However, violence against women remains a pervasive and underreported crime, and the existing laws are minimally enforced (United States Department of State, 2013). The U.S. Department of State's country report (2013) states that in addition to three insufficiently funded government-operated shelters, there are three NGO-operated shelters in Honduras. With assistance from the UNDP, the country also established two reporting centers – Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula – for reporting a crime, seeking medical and psychological attention and other services.

Policy Responses of the United Nations

While the more recent uproar around human trafficking and femicide has produced considerable response and action, the international response to the broader topic of violence against women in Central America and across the world gained momentum decades ago. The United Nations Decade for Women, from 1975 to 1985, sparked discussions about women's rights in the international community (UN, 2006). Initial discussions focused on violence against women as it impacts the family and were initiated in 1976 at the NGO Tribunal in Mexico City and the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels. Discussions continued and expanded in 1985 during the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi. The 1990's brought significant momentum with the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, when activists demanded the inclusion of the experiences of women in international human

rights law and that violence against women be recognized as a human rights violation. Later in 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted by the General Assembly. Another outcome of the Vienna conference was the creation by the Human Rights Council of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Special rapporteurs have subsequently been dispatched on missions to El Salvador and Guatemala, with a focus on the rights of women and violence against women (UN, 2006; UN, 2011). The first Special Rapporteur noted that the global violence against women's movement has been "perhaps the greatest success story of international mobilization around a specific human rights issue, leading to the articulation of international norms and standards and the formulation of international programmes and policies" (Coomaraswamy, 2005, p.2).

Also during the 1990's, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women worked to incorporate violence against women into the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), although the U.S. has not ratified CEDAW (UN, 2013). The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 also highlighted violence against women in its Platform for Action.

The international community has also recognized the need for regional-specific efforts. As a result of the 1985 3rd World Conference on Women of the UN in Nairobi, the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM) was established (CLADEM, 2013).

Policy Responses to Migration-Related Human Rights Violations

Beginning in 1997, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR) has appointed Special Rapporteurs on Migrant Workers and Their Families to document and make recommendations regarding the rights of migrant workers. Special missions have focused on Guatemala and Mexico in recent years (2003).

Substantial attention has been given to the rights of migrants in the context of their risk of being trafficked or exploited during migration. In 2000, the UN adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, sometimes referred to as the Palermo Protocol. The UNODC serves as guardian of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto, assisting States in their efforts to implement the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (UNODC, 2013).

Some argue that the militarization of border areas, both on US-Mexico border areas and Mexico-Guatemala areas, has contributed to danger and violence against migrants traveling from Central America to the U.S. (Reen, 2010). Undocumented refugees found in Mexico are routinely deported back to Guatemala. Several law enforcement agencies are present in the valley of Texas, for example, including the FBI, ICE, U.S. border patrol, DEA, Texas highway patrol, National Guard Reservists, city and county police (Reen, 2010).

U.S. Policy Responses to Violence against Migrant Women

In terms of federal policy in the U.S., the Violence against Women Act (VAWA) is a crucial piece of legislation. While it does not impact the response to intimate partner violence in the northern triangle directly, it is most assuredly related to survivors of violence who migrate to the U.S. from the northern triangle and other countries. Originally crafted by Senator Joe Biden and passed in 1994, VAWA was subsequently reauthorized in 2000, 2005, and 2013. Historically, VAWA has initiated influential provisions, including: strengthened federal penalties for repeat sex offenders; “rape shield law” preventing the use of survivors’ sexual history during prosecution; recognition of protection orders across all jurisdictions; funding for the training of law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges; funding to establish the National Domestic Violence Hotline; and legal relief for battered migrants (U.S. Office on Violence against Women, 2009).

Complementing VAWA, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) was passed in 2000 to address emerging international and national recognition of the trafficking of persons for labor or sex. In tandem with the Palermo Protocol, the TVPA defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transporting, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, slavery, or forced commercial sex acts” (TVPA, section 103[8]). The law also aims to prevent trafficking in persons, to protect those who have been trafficked, and to prosecute traffickers (U.S. Health and Human Services, 2013).

A variety of legal remedies are available to undocumented victims of violence and abuse. These include U visas, T visas, VAWA self-petition, battered spouse waiver, cancellation of removal, asylum, and continued presence. The original VAWA of 1994 and its 2000 reauthorization, paired with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, made important strides in creating legal immigration avenues that protect and support women experiencing violence. Table 1 lists and describes the various avenues of legal immigration remedy for migrant women who have experienced intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or human trafficking.

A prime example is the U visa, which provides immigration relief to individuals who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse as a result of having been a victim of a qualifying criminal activity, including sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking (USCIS, 2013). The number of available U visas is capped each year at 10,000, and scholars and advocates argue that this is insufficient given the number of undocumented victims of violence and abuse (Levine & Peffer, 2012). Levine and Peffer (2012) estimate that in 2008, there were more than 37,000 undocumented female victims of IPV in the U.S. and that by 2015, there may be as many as 100,000.

Virtually all legal immigration relief strategies involve women engaging formally with large systems such as the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Given that undocumented women experiencing abuse are unlikely to seek help from formal systems, these remedies often remain out of reach for women without legal documentation (Raj and Silverman, 2002; Mowder, 2010; Hass, Dutton, & Orloff, 2000; Salcido & Adelman, 2004).

Table 1. Immigration Relief for Migrant Women⁵

Immigration Relief	Description	Date Established
U Visa	Victim cooperating with the investigation/prosecution of a crime may receive work authorization, temporary (4 years) immigration status, and an opportunity to apply for permanent residency after 3 years. The individual must have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse as a result of having been a victim of a qualifying criminal activity. The individual must have information concerning that criminal activity and must have been helpful, is being helpful, or is likely to be helpful in the investigation or prosecution of the crime. USCIS may grant no more than 10,000 U visas in any given fiscal year.	Battered Immigrant Women Protection Act of 2000
T Visa	Applicant must be a victim of trafficking, as defined by law, and be in the U.S. due to trafficking. Applicant must comply with any reasonable request from a law enforcement agency for assistance in the investigation or prosecution of human trafficking (unless under the age of 18 or unable to cooperate due to physical or psychological trauma). Applicant must demonstrate that she/he would suffer extreme hardship if removed from the U.S. Benefits include work authorization, temporary (4 years) immigration status, and the opportunity to apply for permanent residency after 3 years.	TVPA 2000
VAWA Self-petition	Available to an abused spouse of a USC *or LPR**; The applicant must have lived with the abuser during the marriage and prove her or his good moral character. Benefits include work authorization; chance to apply for permanent residency, and the opportunity to apply for citizenship after 5 years.	VAWA 1994

⁵ American Gateways, 2013; National Latino Network, 2013; National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2013; National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, 2012; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2013; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013

Table continues from previous page

Battered Spouse Waiver	The spousal waiver provides immigration relief for: those married to USC *or LPR**abusers; those whose marriage to the abuser was terminated by death or a divorce (related to the abuse) within the 2 years prior to filing; those whose spouse lost or renounced citizenship or permanent resident status within the 2 years prior to filing due to an incident of domestic violence; and those who believed they were legally married to an abusive USC* or LPR** spouse but the marriage was not legitimate solely because of the bigamy of the abusive spouse. The abuse must have happened in the U.S. or abroad while the spouse was employed by the U.S. government or a member of the U.S. uniformed services. The marriage must have been entered in good faith, not solely for immigration benefits.	Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1990
Cancellation of Removal	This relief is available for those in removal proceedings (also referred to as deportation proceedings) before an immigration judge, who have been abused by a USC* or LPR** spouse.	VAWA 1994
Asylum	Asylum may be granted for migrants who have suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and/or political opinion. Asylum applications have been granted in domestic violence situations. For example, the applicant applies as having suffered persecution as a member of the social group of victims of domestic abuse in Honduras. Asylees are eligible to apply for a green card one year after being granted asylum.	Refugee Act of 1980
Continued Presence	Temporary immigration status provided to individuals identified by law enforcement as victims of human trafficking. This status allows victims of human trafficking to remain in the U.S. temporarily during the ongoing investigation into the human trafficking-related crimes committed against them. Continued Presence is initially granted for one year and may be renewed in one-year increments.	TVPA 2000

*USC = U.S. Citizen

**LPR = Legal Permanent Resident

***Conditional permanent residence = LPR status is gained through a marriage to a USC or LPR, and the marriage is less than two years old when residence is obtained

After many months of delay and uncertainty, the 2013 reauthorization of VAWA was signed into law on March 7, 2013. Interestingly, the TVPA was added as a late amendment to VAWA, ensuring its reauthorization as well. While many heralded its

passage as a success, it was not without controversy (Ball, 2013). The major areas of contention over reauthorization included support for services for undocumented migrants, support services for LGBT individuals, and jurisdiction issues involving sex crimes on Native American tribal lands (Weisman, 2013).

Despite advocacy and lobbying efforts by groups such as the National Network to End Violence Against Women, the National Latino Network, and the League of United Latin American Citizens, the 2013 reauthorization of VAWA did not include new immigration relief strategies or increase the number of U visas (National Latino Network, 2013; National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2013; National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, 2012). Rather, it maintained provisions from previous legislation and made minor changes in several areas. Key revisions or additions included the following:

- Stalking added to the list of previous crimes (domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, sexual exploitation, and trafficking) covered by the U visa
- Protections added for U visa applicants and their derivatives who turn 21 while their application is pending or granted.
- Reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 as an amendment by Senator Leahy.
- Extension of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) to cover all migrant detention facilities and adopt standards for the detection, prevention, reduction, and punishment of rape and sexual assault in federal facilities.

- Amendment of the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA) by requiring disclosures of additional violent history information by U.S. clients of IMBs and by U.S. citizen petitioners during the fiancé (e)/spouse visa application process.
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) required to submit annual reports to Congress on the number of T visa, U Visa, and continued presence applications submitted, in addition to the outcomes, processing times and actions taken to reduce processing times.

Asylum Claims Based on Domestic Violence

Asylum claims based on domestic violence provide an interesting dynamic in immigration policy responses to violence against women, as illustrated by the case of Rodi Alvarado. Rodi Alvarado applied for asylum after fleeing Guatemala in 1995 to escape the sexual and physical violence of her husband (Reimann, 2008). Unsuccessful in finding help or assistance in Guatemala, she fled to the U.S. in search of protection and assistance. She originally was granted asylum by an immigration judge but then the government appealed to the Bureau of Immigration Appeals (BIA). The BIA overturned the decision. The appeal did not argue whether or not she had suffered abuse and violence. In fact, the court found that she had demonstrated a well-founded fear of persecution and that Guatemala was unable or unwilling to protect her from her husband. However, they also found that her harm did not fit the categories of persecution outlined in the statute. Alvarado was deported back to Guatemala, although in December 2009, she was ultimately granted asylum after the Department of Homeland Security issued a

brief on the matter of L-R- to the BIA. The brief allowed for women fleeing domestic violence to be considered for asylum based on their membership in a particular social group (Blake, 2010). Nonetheless, asylum claims based on domestic violence remain a sensitive area of asylum law (Reimann, 2008).

Conclusion

This summary of policy responses at the national and international levels is intended to give a broad context of policies impacting the options available to Central American survivors of violence in their home countries and in migrating to the U.S. Much more extensive policy analyses are possible, albeit beyond the scope of this paper. In seeking a better understanding of the violence-migration nexus, this research aims to offer insight that advocates and policymakers may utilize in enhancing and refining existing and pending policy responses.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Frameworks

While a comprehensive recognition of existing literature and policy responses is necessary in order to build and apply new research inquiries, these must be framed within broader theoretical understandings of the phenomena under exploration. This research is informed by a handful of theoretical frameworks relevant to the ways in which gender, violence, and migration intersect. The theories and concepts that form a basis for understanding and for designing the research methodology include Chicana feminism, intersectionality, and transnational migration theory. It is my hope that these frameworks will provide both an underpinning and a research road map regarding the complex natures of migrant women's multiple identities in relation to both violence and migration (chicana feminism and intersectionality), as well as their experiences with violence that span both time and space (transnational migration theory).

Theories Seeking to Explain Violence against Women

Before delving into Chicana feminism, intersectionality, and theories of transnational migration, it is useful to outline a range of theories addressing violence against women. Dozens of theoretical frameworks that aim to understand and explain related elements of violence against women exist (Jasinski, 2001). These range from family violence theory, which places family structure and the use of violence as a conflict resolution strategy as a cause of violence, to an evolutionary perspective, which contends that violence against women is related to natural selection and that rape is an extreme strategy of reproduction. Social control theory, on the other hand, argues that deviant behavior happens in the absence of social control, and that violence and abuse are high

when the rewards of perpetrating violence exceed the cost. Feminist theory, in general, suggests that violence against women is a result of the broad system of patriarchy and male dominance over women and that power, control and domination are at the root of both domestic violence and sexual assault (Jasinski, 2001).

Lori Heise argues that theories that attempt to explain violence against women have traditionally focused on either individual level factors or broader social structural factors. She suggests the adoption of an ecological framework that considers co-occurring factors and causality at multiple levels (Heise, 1998). As opposed to relying on a single factor explanation, Heise recommends attention to a more complex interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural contexts. She notes that empirical evidence related to individual characteristics and factors brought to a situation or relationships have focused on the witnessing of violence as a child. Witnessing violence between parents or caregivers as a child is considered a predictor of future victimization, and witnessing abuse against a mother during childhood is associated with perpetrating abuse as an adult. Witnessing abuse is thought to both teach or model violent behavior and also create trauma that could later result in aggression. Micro-level indicators involving the immediate context of abuse include family and/or relationship structures that maintain male dominance in the family (particularly in economic and decision-making authority), women's economic dependence on a partner, and alcohol as a situational factor increasing the likelihood of the incidence and severity of violence. Exosystem factors (institutions and social structures) that contribute to violence against women include low socioeconomic status, unemployment, and social isolation (as both cause and

consequence of violence). Macrosystem factors (general views and attitudes of culture at large) that are central to violence against women include male domination and patriarchy, rigid gender roles, hypermasculinity, and a general cultural approval of violence as a means to control women.

Chicana Feminism

Chicana feminism, considered part of third wave feminism, offers a theoretical framework useful in considering women's experiences with violence. Before being further developed as a theoretical framework, Chicana feminism was a grassroots, working class political movement. Chicana feminism grew out of the political movements of the 1960s and was developed by Chicana women active in the civil rights movement, black power movements, and the broader Chicano movement that emphasized Mexican-American identity, pride, and consciousness (Hurtado, 1998). Growing out of the sexism experienced by women in the Chicano civil rights movement and simultaneous race and class bias experienced in the predominantly white feminist movement, Chicana feminism represents the struggle for broad rights and also gender equality within the Chicana/o community and is committed to political action and social change (Moya, 2001; Hurtado, 1998).

Córdova argues that Chicana feminism is about giving voice to opposition, in a "move away from silence" (1998, p. 394). As a response to conquest and working against colonialism, Chicana feminists reclaim space and self through creative writing, poetry, oral history, and other methods. Chicana feminism highlights survival and agency, rather than defeat or victimization (Hurtado, 1998). Chicana feminists also emphasize loyalty to

mothers and their shared condition as women, recognizing mother's fortitude and resilience on behalf of families.

Chicana feminism is concerned with the experience of collision of disparate identities and experiences. One of the main writers in the field, Cherríe Moraga, explained that Chicana feminism is not about the split itself, or choosing one over the other, or of shifting between – rather, it is about making sense of and synthesizing the disparate aspects of social identities – into non-fragmented, whole (albeit not homogenous) beings (Moya, 2001). Moraga eloquently stated, “I am a woman with a foot in both worlds, and I refuse the split” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 34).

Two important concepts developed by Chicana feminism include *la facultad* and *nepantla*. Both concepts were introduced by Gloria Anzaldúa, a founding mother of Chicana feminism, as part of the mestiza (or mixed-race) consciousness (Moya, 2001; Gonzalez, 2013). Anzaldúa describes the ways in which the mestiza consciousness works out the synthesis of colliding cultures or opposing frameworks. By doing so, Chicanas develop *la facultad* (an ability), which suggests a survival skill developed by the marginalized that allows individuals to adjust quickly to changing or threatening circumstances. While its origins are in pain and trauma, *la facultad* is indeed a transformative state. Hurtado defines *la facultad* as the “ability to hold multiple social perspectives while simultaneously maintaining a core center, around which revolve concrete material oppressions” (1998, p. 150).

Anzaldúa's concept of *nepantla* is similar and refers to a sense of in-betweenness and ambiguity. She discussed Mexican-American women, in particular, as existing in this

space of *nepantla* and refers to them as *nepantleras* (Anzaldúa, 2003). *Nepantleras* are the “supreme border crossers,” and in addition to navigating and managing the multiple identities, spaces and realities, are able to construct new meanings and new identities.

Intersectionality

The concept of *nepantla* is also evident is the more commonly discussed notion of intersectionality, which recognizes that race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class co-exist to shape social identity, behavior, opportunities, and access to rights. Introduced by critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw in the 1990’s, intersectionality refers to the ways in which multiple forms of oppression are interrelated (Crenshaw, 1991). Social constructions of age, gender and race, for example, do not act independently of one another in how they inform identity, discrimination, and social inequality. Intersectionality refers to the ways in which social phenomena such as race, class, and gender “mutually construct one another” and represents a more complex way of looking at binary elements of oppression, such as men/women or black/white (Collins, 1998, p.63). Intersectionality recognizes unjust power relations of oppressed groups, while adding the complexity of multiple identities and multiple oppressions intersecting.

With regard to Central American migrant women, gender, ethnicity (identifying with an indigenous community, for example), race, documentation status, and nativity may all combine to create unique experiences of oppression. In terms of domestic violence, it is not gender alone that may impact a woman’s experience of violence. Rather, many factors are at play in how women may experience or respond to violence. These include but are not limited to race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nativity,

immigration status, and age (Crenshaw, 1991). Rachel Pain calls for research that explores the “multiple contexts of violence in women’s lives if we are to challenge violences of whiteness, class, colonialism, and heteronormativity alongside violence in the home” (2015, p. 8).

When it comes to Central American women’s vulnerability to violence during migration, we must also consider intersections of gender with race, class, and nationality. It is important to entertain the possibility that indigenous Central American women and/or Central American women of color and/or of lower socioeconomic status may disproportionately experience violence during migration, in comparison to Mexican migrants or non-indigenous migrants headed north.

Emerging theoretical discussions are also exploring the potential intersections between various manifestations of violence. Central American migrant women travelling through Mexico, for example, express the notion those present-day experiences of violence are understood as continuations of the political violence and instability (Vogt, 2012). Gloria González-López (2007) also describes the complex relationships between violence, gender, and migration. She notes that studying sexual violence experienced by Mexican immigrant women in the U.S. unmasks “the mechanisms of power and control connecting sexuality, gender, and class relations that begin to unfold these women’s pre- and post-migration experiences” (González-López, 2007, p. 241).

Javier Auyero and Agustín Burbano de Lara (2012) explore the interrelatedness of various forms of violence in their work with youth in Argentina. They investigate the

ways in which youth are continuously exposed to a chain of violence – community violence, police violence, witnessing domestic violence in the home, and sexual violence. The notion of a chain of violence describes “episodes in which criminal, police, domestic, and sexual violence intersect and interact, making it hard to tease out which one comes first and which second, which one causes what, which one translates into the other” (Auyero & Burbano de Lara, 2012, p. 9). We are left with the question of how elements of structural violence (such as poverty, hunger, and social exclusion) do or do not impact the experiences of intimate and domestic violence for women, in particular.

These collisions between types of violence experienced, in combination with intersections of multiple social identities, are reminiscent of Chicana feminism’s notions of *la facultad* and the mestiza consciousness. We can imagine that these identities transform the ways in which women experience migration and make decisions about migration, in the face of experienced or anticipated violence.

Migration Theories

Transnational migration theory attempts to dismantle antiquated ideas about unidirectional migration experiences. Individuals and families do not always have simple migration journeys of leaving a home country and permanently resettling in a second location. Furthermore, the term transnational implies the complex and flexible sense of belonging, identity, and responsibility that many individuals and families feel. Economic responsibilities, parenting roles, and communication often continue to exist across boundaries after an individual has migrated (Furman, Negi, Schatz, Jones, 2008). Linkages between and across time and space are complex. Given new perspectives on

transnationalism, we now account for the unsettled, fluid, changing notions of place and identity (McDowell, 1999). Transnationalism implies that “immigrants live their lives across borders and maintain their ties to home, even when their countries of origin and settlement are geographically distant” (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. ix). Movement results in changes for all involved, not simply the migrant herself.

Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) describe the ways in which transnational migrants simultaneously occupy and act within multiple spaces. Transnational migrants maintain:

a variety of ties to their home countries while they became incorporated into the countries where they settled. Migration has never been a one-way process of assimilation into a melting pot or a multicultural salad bowl but one in which migrants, to varying degrees, are simultaneously embedded in the multiple sites and layers of the transnational social fields in which they live. More and more aspects of social life take place across borders, even as the political and cultural salience of nation-state boundaries remain clear. (p. 130)

Migration theories are influenced by many disciplines, teased out by a variety of methodological approaches, and offer multiple solutions to inequalities or conflict that may result from migration. These theories have typically been concerned with motivations for and patterns of migration and studies of integration or incorporation into receiving communities. More recently, thanks in large part to the influence of transnational theory, inquiries seek to understand how migration impacts both sending and receiving communities (Castles & Miller, 2009).

Several economic theories initially dominated discussions of migration. Neoclassical theory relates to geographic differences in supply and demand for labor (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, & Taylor, 1993) and incorporates push-

pull theories emphasizing the movement of people from rural to urban areas, for example (Castles & Miller, 2009). Rational choice theory describes the agency of individual actors, who weigh the costs and benefits (often but not always economic) of staying where they are versus migrating (Haug, 2008). Massey et al (1993) argue that economic theories cannot explain all of migration, which is a dynamic, complex and interconnected web of economic, social, political, and cultural factors. In an attempt to address these complexities, transnational theory states that what were once face-to face relationships and networks can be extended, due to globalization, across great distances, recognizing that transnationalism is impacted by gender, age, and other factors (Castles & Miller, 2009). Transnationalism allows us to understand “multiple and differentiated forms of belonging” (Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 45), as opposed to other notions of belonging. Given transnational perspectives, we now understand existence to be less fixed and permanent, and more mobile. Movement results in changes for all involved, not simply the migrant herself.

Transnationalist scholars have contributed to the conversation by arguing for the dismantling of dualistic thinking of here versus there, pre-migration versus post-migration identity, or of host versus sending country. Rather there is changing meaning and nuance in the in-between (reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s concept of *nepantla*). McDowell (1999) ultimately asserts that migration is about power and that it can both reaffirm or endorse traditional gender relations and provide opportunities for the transformation of those relations.

Decision-Making in Migration

Migration theories, including transnational theory, have also been used to explain the process of decision-making around migration. While little scholarship has focused on this decision-making in the context of violence, these theoretical underpinnings can help us begin to conceptualize the ways in which experienced violence or anticipated violence inform migration choices made by Central American women. This research contributes by building on these theoretical frameworks to specifically examine migration decision-making in the context of violence.

While the topic of decision-making in migration has been dominated by economic and rational choice theories, others argue for broader conceptualizations (Halfacree, 2004; Richmond, 1988). Halfacree (2004) notes that research must also consider the multiple currents that inform the decision-making process and the notion that migrants may have multiple reasons for migration. Halfacree states that, “when the non-economic is recognized more fully, cultures of migration emerge as much muddier and more complex” (2004, p. 243). Given this complexity, Halfacree argues for research that probes beyond a single reason for migrating, to include discussions of secondary or additional reasons. All the while, he does not argue for throwing out the possibility of economic motivation, rather “whilst there is no getting away from the central role that economic considerations play within migration, over-focus on this detracts from the full picture in all but the most limited of cases” (Halfacree, 2004, p. 246).

In contrast to the human capital approach to migration behavior, or the individual cost-benefit analysis described by the economic theories, Sell and DeJong (1978) began

arguing for a new theoretical explanation several decades ago. They propose a motivational approach to migration decision-making, which includes four factors: 1) availability – the cognitive or physical possibility of the migration choice, 2) motive – the reasons or goals for migrating, 3) expectancy – expectation that goals will be achieved by migration, and 4) incentives – the commonly referred-to ‘push and pull factors’ that serve as incentives or disincentives to migration. DeJong (2000) and Haug (2004) later began to argue for inclusion of other aspects of migration decision-making and weighing move-stay alternatives. These include values, perceived family migration norms, gender roles, residential satisfactions, migrant networks, and direct behavioral constraints and facilitators. Migration may also be seen as a family strategy and may explain remittances, diversification of risks, and family separation.

Furthermore, Castles and Miller describe an additive or cumulative causation in that “each act of migration alters the social context within which subsequent migration decisions are made, typically in ways that make additional movement more likely” (2009, p. 29). While this notion seems simplistic, it reveals the complex nuances associated with migration and may help contextualize women’s decisions to flee violence at home in search of safety for themselves, for example. This move changes family dynamics and impacts future movement in the subsequent migration of children in order to reunite the family in a receiving country. The ripple effect, of course, is transnational in nature and continues on other family members in both sending and receiving communities.

Unfortunately, the topic of violence against women is relatively new in the theorizing about migration decision-making. Violence against women scholars have

looked at women's decision-making, albeit generally without attention to migration. Davies, Lyon, & Monti-Catania (1998) assert that battered women's risk analysis and safety planning are connected and that women are viewed as active decision-makers, weighing options that are far more complex than simply stay versus leave. Women engage in a wide variety of informal and formal help-seeking and balance hope and fear in the decision-making process. While we must recognize that economic considerations can play a big role in decision-making, it remains a fluid process and changes over time and in relation to other circumstances (such as the violence itself, others' response, and financial situations).

Forced versus Voluntary Migration

It is useful to consider differences in language around migration and the prominent narratives of forced migration versus voluntary migration. Nawyn et al affirm, "the migration literature more broadly tends to treat migration emerging from violence, or forced migration, as a separate process from the forms of so-called voluntary migration" (2009, p. 190). However, the differences between forced and voluntary migration exist along a continuum, and choices and agency are also part of forced migration (Nawyn et al., 2009). The authors argue, "scholars should not assume a dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration and instead examine migrants' process of decision-making (however limited it might be at times) in response to gendered violence" (Nawyn et al, 2009, p. 195).

The work of Nawyn et al reflect a broader argument that the complexity of migration cannot be covered by one theory alone, particularly in understanding the

spectrum of forced versus voluntary migration (Snyder, 2012). Snyder describes the frequent blend of both push and pull factors that impact individual's decisions to migrate. She notes that the "current categorizations [refugee, migrant, asylum-seeker] are inadequate, as almost no movement is entirely voluntary and motivated solely by pull factors or wholly forced and affected only by push factors" (Snyder, 2012, p. 59). Rather, she describes the need for scholarship around a continuum or spectrum that recognizes the full complexity of force, choice and agency. She proposes that policy and practice are in need of new categories that recognize the "complex and overlapping categories" (Snyder, 2012, p. 67) of forced and voluntary migrants.

Richmond (1993) also argues against the traditional, yet illusory, dichotomy of forced versus voluntary migration and proposes a continuum from proactive to reactive migration. Rather, "all human behavior is constrained and enabled," with differing degrees of freedom of choice (Richmond, 1993, p. 17). All migration decisions include elements of choice (even though they may be constrained, including more structural constraints for reactive migrants), and multiple factors are involved in those choices. Richmond proposes that "decisions regarding migration are more appropriately designated proactive or reactive, according to the degree of autonomy exhibited by actors involved" (1993, p. 20). It could be argued that, given the pattern of power and control in an abusive relationship and the use of economic dependence as a coercive tactic, decisions to migrate based on fleeing abuse is both proactive (preventing lethality and/or strategy to build economic independence) and reactive (response to the violence).

Grounding Research Methodologies in Feminist and Transnational Theories

Methodological approaches that focus on the combined influences of gender and migration are fairly new. Nonetheless, this body of work brings lively debate about what methodological approaches are deemed appropriate, relevant, ethical, and trustworthy, in addition to which methods are consistent with a feminist perspective.

Feminist methodologies ideally open the space for more, not fewer, perspectives on knowledge and knowing. In reflecting on her work as a non-local woman researching violence in El Salvador, Mo Hume sums up the role of feminism in undertaking research related to violence, “researching violence and gender is akin to doing a puzzle that can never be complete, given the diversity of definitions and understandings that exist. The exercise of researching violence from a feminist perspective, however, invariably provides us with more elements for understanding this complex and destructive social phenomenon” (2007, p. 155).

First, though, we must ask: what constitutes a feminist methodology and what elements may be considered central to feminist methodologies? In the current conceptualization of multiple feminisms and numerous methodologies associated with feminisms, it is no simple task to definitively describe feminist methodologies (Moss, 2002). Nonetheless, commonalities exist in efforts to recognize and even manipulate power inequalities, in attempting reflexivity on the part of the researchers, the interconnection of praxis and theory, and in the expansion of both the topics meriting research and the methods used. In general, feminist researchers strive to address gender, power, knowledge and context in the content and topic of research while simultaneously

thinking through parallels in the nuts and bolts of the process of designing and conducting research (Moss, 2002).

Feminist methodological approaches attempt to place the “researched” at the center of the question, the design, and the discussion. The subjects are the experts or the knowers, and this collaborative effort can be understood as a way to dismantle unequal power relations between researcher and subject (McDowell, 1992; Pratt, 2010). Using a feminist lens provides participants with a voice and sense of agency and acknowledges and addresses the contexts, identities, and experiences salient to participants (e.g., migration, generational status, language, race/ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality) (Carrillo, 2010). Lawson, for example, argues for qualitative methods that place migrants at the center of inquiries about the gendered nature of identity, mobility and development, allowing for what she terms “complex migrant subjectivities” (2000, p. 174).

Experienced researchers on the topic of sexual assault, Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco (2000) consider the value of feminist standpoint research, for example, in engaging participants in reflecting on the ways their race, gender, class, and social orientation shape their experiences in the social world. Campbell and Wasco also assert that a feminist approach to research helps capture women's lived experiences in a way that legitimizes them as a source of knowledge, minimizes the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and her participants to facilitate trust and disclosure, and recognizes and reflects upon the emotionality of women's lives.

While feminist methodologies may attempt to redistribute power, it is problematic to consider power static, a fixed dimension, once redistributed or dismantled. Kihato

(2010a) discusses the fluid nature of power between researcher and subject, stating that power and agency shift from participant to researcher at different points in the research process. As a way to monitor and regulate the use of power in research, feminist research values reflexivity, striving for self-awareness and recognition of ways in which the researcher influences and is influenced by the research process. Reflexivity also promotes a way to reveal and address power inequalities between researcher and researched, or researcher and subject.

Some methods can be both empowering and disempowering, and researchers will likely find it difficult and frustrating to achieve an elusive equality (Kihato, 2010a). In any research effort, interview, or shared decision-making, there is potential for gendered and/or racialized power inequalities. Feminist researchers must be cognizant of the potential for chosen methods to reassert these inequalities, which is in contradiction to the intended approach.

Moss introduces another commonality across feminist methodologies – the tension in holding the balance of theory and praxis, of academia and activism. Participatory approaches, in particular, are grounded in the aim for change and engagement with solution (Pain & Francis, 2003). Related to this interconnection between theory and practice is the idea that methodological approach and theoretical framework must work in partnership. The two cannot be divided and still make sense or have value.

This chapter has offered grounding in a selected variety of theories that seek to explain violence against women and migration. In the spirit of supporting a partnership

between theory and methodological approach, Chapter 5 builds on these theoretical perspectives to describe the methodological considerations and decisions employed in this research.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

With feminist and migration theories and an overview of literature and policy responses as the backdrop, this chapter describes the purpose and design of this research. This description begins with an overview of constructivist grounded theory and the role of the researcher and reflexivity in the study. The chapter also includes descriptions of the data sources, participant recruitment strategies, and data collection and analysis procedures. It also outlines efforts to enhance rigor, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations of the study.

Purpose

This dissertation research aims to expand understanding of the violence-migration nexus by exploring how women's experiences of domestic and sexual violence impact the process of migration and decision-making related to migration. Grounded in feminist and transnational theories, this study used a constructivist grounded theory method to explore the following broad research questions:

1. What is the process of migration for Central American female survivors of violence?
2. What is the nature of the violence experienced by Central American migrants?
3. How does the context of experienced or anticipated violence impact decision-making processes for Central American migrant women?

In broadly looking at the process of migration and the nature of violence, the research also seeks to understand how women identify, define, weigh, and cope with the risks of migration-related gender violence (such as sexual violence and human trafficking). Finally, this research aimed to reveal the ways in which motherhood impacts the process of migration in the face of violence.

Methodological Approach

Qualitative research methods are powerful tools in exploring these questions. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for studies that seek to describe complex social phenomena and strive for explanations of and theories around these phenomena. These approaches are also useful in eliciting experiences and perspectives of marginalized or vulnerable populations.

Qualitative designs can reflect the theoretical perspectives described in Chapter 4 and also help explore recent migration phenomena, such as the feminization of and rising context of violence surrounding Central America-US migration. Dunn (2010), in particular, calls for a grounding of transnationalism by employing qualitative methods, setting the migrant as the central unit of analysis, and looking at the everyday experiences of migrants, in an effort to keep the field from leaning too heavily on concerns of movement alone.

Constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory, in particular, provides a useful structure with which to approach the research questions at hand. In general, grounded theory attempts to explain social processes and to discover theory

about a social phenomenon through qualitative data analysis. Grounded theory seeks to develop explanations of actions, interactions, or processes by grounding those explanations in data from those who have experienced the processes under inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Given the research questions at hand, that seek to explain the process of migration and the interactions between migration and violence, a grounded theory approach is appropriate. Constructivist grounded theory, in particular, aims to explain processes or hierarchies of power that may be hidden or masked (Creswell, 2007). Charmaz (2006) describes the approach as an effort to learn “how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and, often, hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships” (p. 130).

Constructivist grounded theory differs from the traditional grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss, which aligned more closely with objectivism. In the constructivist model, researcher and participant engage in mutual construction of meaning rather than the “discovery” of an objective reality or truth. Constructivists view “both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of research and participants and the researcher’s relationship with participants” (Charmaz, 2002, p. 677). In other words, data, knowledge and understanding are co-created, or mutual constructions that emerge from “our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). In essence, researcher and participant are partners in the research endeavor, complementing feminist values of shared power, mutuality, and reciprocity. In this way, a constructivist approach to grounded theory supports a feminist orientation to these research questions.

Role of researcher & reflexivity. Upholding the values of feminism, this research aimed to create a nonhierarchical, non-manipulative relationship between researcher and participant (Berg, 2004). As a way to monitor and regulate the use of power in research, feminist research values reflexivity, striving for self-awareness and recognition of ways in which the researcher influences and is influenced by the research process (Hume, 2007; Gringeri, Wahab, Anderson-Nathe, 2010). These represent methodological commitments to develop and maintain practices of self-reflection throughout the research process. These elements are also consistent with constructivist grounded theory.

Given my direct practice experience in this field and the epistemological approach, the focus on researcher-as-instrument is crucial. Grounded theory methods involve the co-construction of data by both researcher and participant and value strategies to enhance researcher reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006). Following each interview, I wrote memos to document my subjective impressions of encounters with participants in order to support this reflexive practice.

Reflexivity also promotes a way to reveal and address my own positionality and power inequalities between researcher and participant. The positions of both the research participants and the researcher must remain visible in this research. As I come from a multi-faceted position of privilege and am neither a migrant nor a survivor of gender-based violence, my role served as a bridge between academia and practice. It was my hope that this bridge served as an avenue for the voices of survivors of violence to be heard and to influence community response, policy, and future research.

Given the content of interviews with migrant survivors of violence, I also recognized and drew upon my professional background as a licensed social worker. This placed me in a mixed role of approaching, interacting with, and responding to the pain experienced by participants. Recognition of the emotional experiences of both researcher and participants is valuable, and emotional labor is part of feminist research (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Hume, 2007; Mehrotra, 2015). In this sense, using deep and intellectually vulnerable connections to the research and placing oneself in the “epistemologies of the wound” can become a method of knowledge production (González-López, 2010).

Note on blended approach. This effort to engage closely and emotionally with the research and research participants invoked a phenomenological spirit to this research, resulting in the incorporation of a blended methodological approach. The process and the data reflected a phenomenological interest in the lived experience of Central American migrant women and an effort to remain close to the raw data (Creswell, 2007). Given the shifting dynamics of the regional context and recent migration trends of Central American women, this pursuit of depth of understanding was appropriate. The study nonetheless followed constructivist grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis, which also aimed to build towards abstraction in exploring social actions, interactions, and processes.

Sources of Data

This research identified migrant women themselves as central to the research questions and as sources of data consistent with a constructivist grounded theory approach. Migrant women were invited to participate in research through in-depth, in-

person interviews. The study utilized purposive sampling to identify women who had recently migrated to the U.S. from the Northern Triangle of Central America.

Inclusion Criteria. Inclusion criteria include 1) age 18 and over; 2) migrated to the U.S. within the last fifteen years; and 3) from country of origin Guatemala, Honduras, or El Salvador. Given the regional similarities across the Northern Triangle and the exploratory nature of this research, I did not target a specific number of participants from the three specific countries. Consistent with constant comparative analysis, the sampling process was iterative and ongoing as the study moved continually between data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

Participant Recruitment. Purposive sampling and adaptive sampling techniques for hard-to-reach populations guided recruitment strategies (Campbell, Sefl, Wasco, & Ahrens, 2004; Martsof, Courey, Chapman, Draucker, & Mims, 2006; Martsof, Ross, & Rusk, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Participants were recruited from among four non-governmental organizations that provide shelter, social services and/or legal immigration services to the migrant community in two large metropolitan areas of Texas. All participants were current or former clients of (or residents at) one of the four organizations. I drew on professional networks developed during my direct practice and previous research in this field to engage these organizations as partners in recruiting participants. Staff in each organization presented the research opportunity to eligible clients and asked if they were interested. Staff shared contact information for those who were interested in participating with the researcher.

This research maintained awareness of potential barriers related to the general anti-immigrant sentiment at play in the U.S. today and the resulting fear and distrust that are often part of undocumented migrants' experiences. In an effort to build rapport and develop trust, I reminded potential participants that I was not interested in their legal immigration status and that I was not mandated to report immigration status to any governmental or other entity (Baumann, et al, 2011). Critical to participants feeling safe, recruitment and data collection strategies also included the following strategies: relying on leaders to introduce researchers to potential participants; letting participants decide where to hold interviews; asking participants to identify their preferred language; and repeatedly discussing confidentiality and reporting procedures.

Description of participants. Table 2 describes selected characteristics of research participants, including participants' country of origin, age, length of time in the U.S., and number and location of children.

Table 2. Selected Characteristics of Participants.

Country of origin	El Salvador	6
	Guatemala	5
	Honduras	8
Age	Range	25-53
	Average	35
Length of time in U.S.	Range	2 months – 15 years
	Average	5.4 years
Children	Range of number of children	1-7
	Average number of children	3.26
	Average number of children in US	2.2
	Average number of children in home country	.89

Data Collection Procedures

As an important element of feminist research, this approach situated migrant women at the core of the research process during interviews, as experts in identifying and developing a framework to better understand gender violence during migration. This project utilized in-depth, in-person interviews as the primary data collection strategy. This study used an evolving and iterative approach, allowing the interviewer to adapt questions and probes based on specific encounters and on the concurrent data collection and analysis strategies of grounded theory.

Interviews. Interviews were scheduled at a time and location of participants' choosing and included the researcher's office, participants' homes, and service providers' offices. All interviews were conducted in Spanish by the researcher (whose proficiency in Spanish was derived from considerable study of the Spanish language, having lived in Spanish-speaking countries, and direct social work practice with Spanish-speaking clients).

The study used a semi-structured interview guide developed specifically for this study (See Appendix A). The interview was closely tied to the research questions and queried participants about motivations to migrate to the U.S. and perceptions of risk of domestic violence and exploitation prior to and during migration. Interviews lasted between one and two hours.

Interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed into written Spanish. Decisions around the linguistic treatment of these data are described later. Subsequent data analysis procedures used the raw interview transcript data in Spanish. I made the decision to work directly with the raw data in its original linguistic form, in order to remain close to the source language. I came to this decision based on guidance from several experienced qualitative researchers doing research in Spanish and through consulting the literature (Guest & MacQueen, 2008).

The semi-structured interview guides designed for this study aimed to elicit rich, detailed, and nuanced data from participants. Basically, the interviews were directed conversation, and participants were asked to describe, reflect upon, and interpret the

phenomenon under inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). For this reason, interview guides provided broad, open-ended questions in hopes of welcoming deep conversation, and more directed probes to focus more deeply on significant stories or statements as they occurred. Based on in-person interactions with participants, initial data collection, and the constant comparative method, the guides were modified as needed during the course of the study.

At the conclusion of interviews, all participants were given the opportunity to opt into or out of a second interview at a time and location of their choosing. All participants agreed to a potential second interview. However, with the exception of two participants who I interviewed on two occasions, I conducted one interview with each migrant woman participant. While I initially anticipated needing two or more interviews per participant in order to build rapport with participants and elicit richer data, I determined that the data were sufficiently rich with single interviews. This reconsideration is consistent with the iterative and evolving nature of participant recruitment and data gathering within grounded theory.

Compensation. Compensation (\$25 cash) was provided to every migrant woman participant at the beginning of the interview. I made clear that participants could still suspend or stop their interview at any time, regardless of the compensation provided. All participants were given the compensation for their time and effort that they contributed, no matter how short. The participant involved in a follow-up interview was provided similar compensation during the second meeting.

Informed Consent. All participants gave informed verbal consent and were provided with written documents that included study details and consent information in both Spanish and English. Written consent was waived by The University of Texas at Austin's Institutional Review Board, given the sensitive nature of participants' immigration status. Identifying information was not collected from migrant women, except for information needed for the logistical purposes of scheduling interviews. Any contact information used to schedule interviews was kept in secure storage and separate from interview data.

Participant Distress. Interviews often elicited painful memories of past abuse or violence. At any point during the interview if there was discomfort to the participant, the participant was free to stop the interview. While participants were emotional at times, no interviews were interrupted or stopped due to distress on the part of the participant.

At the conclusion of the interview, as a trained and licensed social worker, I talked with participants about possible referrals for support for any distress experienced during the interview and/or for support related to unmet needs revealed during the interview. Given the recruitment method, all participants were in close contact with a social worker, victim advocate, or other professional who could address resulting concerns. This occurred with two participants, and with their consent, I contacted service providers for follow-up services related to unmet needs.

Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory does not employ one single analysis stage. Rather, data were analyzed using a constant comparative method of data analysis, an ongoing process during data collection, in order to reveal emerging categories and frameworks (Charmaz, 2006). The process of analysis included three main phases of coding - open coding, focused coding, and axial coding – in addition to memo-writing throughout.

Open Coding. Analysis began early in the data collection process with initial, or open, coding of full interview transcriptions. This process involved categorizing and summarizing the data, giving the data “analytic handles to develop abstract ideas for interpreting each segment of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 45). During initial coding, line-by-line coding was used to categorize actions and processes. This process remained very close to the data itself, was grounded in it, and provided a way to compare data with other data (within interviews and across interviews). Initial coding also shaped future data collection, as it revealed gaps and provided direction for further exploration. I used process coding, or action coding, also referred to as gerund-ing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2013).

Focused Coding. The next phase of coding, focused or selective coding, involved synthesizing initial codes based on fit, frequency, or significance (Charmaz, 2006). This phase of coding served to determine which codes were useful as analytic categories. During this second cycle of coding, I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to organize and code the data.

Axial Coding. The third phase of coding seeks to describe major categories identified during initial phases of coding. This phase is also useful in reassembling data that had been fractured, in a sense, by earlier coding (Saldaña, 2013). Axial coding intends to describe links between categories in order to describe the contexts, conditions, interactions, and consequences that form a theory of action (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2013).

Memo-Writing. Throughout data collection and analysis, I used memo writing to explicitly “link data gathering, data analysis and report writing” (Charmaz, 2006, p.687). Memo writing was used as a strategy to explore and to define the connections among data, codes, and categories (Saldaña, 2013). It provided a technique to continue to move between the data and the emerging analysis and to capture fleeting ideas and impressions. This process was critical to analysis and was used to move from coding to the conceptual level, by raising focused codes to conceptual, or analytic, categories. Memo-writing also provided an opportunity to consider main process elements of context, conditions, interaction, and consequences (Saldaña, 2013). Coding and memo writing were often accompanied by visual diagramming exercises, as a method of interpreting the way categories of data were connected and to build a broader conceptual framework.

As analysis progressed, an iterative approach allowed me to follow leads from initial coding. Based on emerging data, I recruited additional participants to fill gaps or elaborate on categories or concepts. Data collection shifted direction and ultimately concluded as thematic categories became saturated, or well explored in the data. As data became saturated, or interviews achieved thematic exhaustion or theoretical sufficiency,

further data collection no longer provided new or additional categories or theoretical insights (Charmaz, 2006).

Data Sources Used in Analysis. Table 3 describes the data used in the analysis phases of this study. These data include digital interview recordings, interview transcripts from those interviews, and the field notes and memos developed throughout data collection and analysis.

Table 3. Description of Data Sources.

Interview Audio	Average minutes	68.9 minutes
	Total minutes	1,447 minutes
Interview Transcripts	Average page length	18.2 pages
	Total number of pages	383 pages
Field Notes & Memos	Total number of pages	95 pages

Rigor

This study employed five strategies to improve rigor and trustworthiness of the research. These included reflexive practice, maintaining an audit trail, peer debriefing, thick description, and prolonged engagement (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006; Padgett, 1998). Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I maintained an audit trail in order to serve as a reflexivity journal, to record memos, and to document field observations, methodological decision-making and processes, and analysis decisions (Rogers & Cowles, 1993). I held regular peer debriefing meetings with experienced qualitative researchers familiar with grounded theory and violence against

women. I selected one of the peer-debriefing colleagues, a bilingual Spanish-English social work research with a background in violence against women, specifically as a cultural broker, given her cultural and linguistic connections to the data at hand. She reviewed full transcripts of four participants and consulted with me on emerging themes and theory construction. This process was confirmatory, in terms of how I was interpreting the data – both in terms of language and in the analysis of those data. Peer debriefing sessions also elicited new perspectives and expanded my emerging interpretations.

While one or two interviews with participants cannot be considered prolonged engagement, I did have prolonged engagement with the topic and with other women in similar contexts who were not research participants. During the course of the research, I was simultaneously involved in pro bono expert witness work with migrant women seeking protection through asylum and other immigration relief. Furthermore, I volunteered one day a week in a migrant women's shelter, and had frequent interaction with those working in the field of immigration and violence against women. While only the research participant data were used for the purposes of analysis and writing, this study was ultimately more generally informed by these multiple interactions with Central American migrant women. The prolonged engagement with the context and non-participant women served to triangulate findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in researching violence against women and migration were an important factor examined during the course of this research (Baumann, Domenech Rodríguez, & Parra-Cardona, 2011; Brunovskis & Surtee, 2010; Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). These concerns are particularly relevant in research with undocumented communities and in research on violence against women. I abided by protocols to ensure the confidentiality, safety and wellbeing of participants (due to experience of trauma and violence and undocumented status) (Campbell, Sefl, Wasco, & Ahrens, 2004; Ellsberg & Heise 2002). This dissertation research also complied with guidelines of The University of Texas at Austin's Institutional Review Board and received approval by this body (See Appendix B).

In arguing for the continuation of research in the area of violence against women, Ellsberg and Heise state that the "risks are potentially large, but so too are the risks of ignorance, silence, and inaction" (2002, p. 1603). This research also followed the World Health Organization's ethical and safety recommendations for domestic violence research (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002):

- The safety of respondents and the research team is paramount, and should infuse all project decisions.
- Protecting confidentiality is essential to ensure both women's safety and data quality.

- All research team members should be carefully selected and receive specialized training and ongoing support.
- The study design must include a number of actions aimed at reducing any possible distress caused to the participants by the research.
- Fieldworkers should be trained to refer women requesting assistance to available sources of support. Where few resources exist, it may be necessary for the study to create short-term support mechanisms.
- Researchers and donors have an ethical obligation to help ensure that their findings are properly interpreted and used to advance policy and intervention development.

Limitations

This research is narrow in its scope, and I have identified five main limitations: inherent dangers of essentializing migrant women; utilizing only data sources from the post-migration perspective; limited inquiry across the life span; limited inquiry about men's experiences; and potential bias related to prior engagement with legal systems.

Any research that focused on migrant women and on mothers runs a risk of essentializing migrant women. Recognition of the heterogeneity of migrating women and migrants in general is critical, and Chandra Mohanty (2003) warns against the "initial assumption of women as a homogenous group or category ("the oppressed"), a familiar assumption in Western radical and liberal feminisms" (p. 39). Particularly when working with survivors of sexual violence, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014) reminds us that sexual

violence may not define what it means to be a refugee. Furthermore, not all migrant women share the same identities in terms of their gender identities, roles as mothers, race/ethnic/indigenous identities, or class, for example. This study explored the process of migration in the context of violence for a narrow community of migrants. It did not, for example, explore the experiences of men or of women who do not identify as heteronormative. It also did not explore the ways that racial, ethnic and indigenous identities play roles in this process. Having interviewed women from humble backgrounds did not allow for exploration of the ways in which women with greater financial resources may have responded to violence and/or avoided dangerous migration routes, and/or found safety in “legal” immigration pathways.

A second methodological limitation involves having only included women who had already migrated. This study did not include women who chose not to migrate, nor women who had returned or been deported and were currently living in Northern Triangle. Thus, this study lacks what Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) suggest which is to make inquiries into the “intersection of those who have migrated and those who have stayed in place” (p. 1012). Consequently, this study was not able to explore the numerous ways that women organize and join together in collective resistance to violence in their home countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

While this study looks at a period of time in women’s experiences with violence and migration, it does not include the entire life span, nor the historical remnants of violence associated with genocide or civil wars, for example, or historical traumas related

to the colonial period. While several women referenced early childhood sexual abuse, for example, this this research did not fully analyze those experiences or their relationships to migration. Gathering women's narratives from a snapshot in time also does not allow for a longitudinal or intergenerational perspective on migration.

This research focuses on domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking, and does not cover all types of violence against women, nor violence experienced by men and boys. Furthermore, in only including women participants, this research cannot explain the experience of or meaning-making by those who perpetrate these acts of violence.

Finally, I must note that the women interviewed for this study had sometimes already told pieces of their stories to others. Often, those were individuals who had specific boxes these stories needed to fit in. So while not all participants were engaged with an immigration attorney, for example, many were. Their engagement with the legal immigration systems may have influenced how they thought about, talked about, and co-constructed their experiences of both violence and with migration.

Chapter 6: The Process of Migration

Findings of this research are presented in the following three separate chapters. First, Chapter 6 gives thick description of the process of migration that emerged from, and is grounded in, rich data collected through in-depth interviews with women who have migrated to the United States from the Northern Triangle of Central America. This provides a contextual foundation for Chapter 7, which offers a deeper level of analysis of the nature of violence, decision-making, strategies for survival, and transnational motherhood. Chapters 6 and 7 utilize a blended phenomenological approach that seeks to remain close to the raw data in exploring the lived experience of the migration process and of the violence experienced by Central American migrant women. This foundation paves the way for Chapter 8, which begins to outline a provisional theory around the violence-migration nexus, in an effort to build a knowledge base that can inform policy, practice, and advocacy.

Before describing the main thematic elements associated with the process of migration, the chapter begins with a general account of the storylines provided by study participants. This section serves to lay the foundation and the tone for subsequent explanation of the process of migration to the United States for Central American women facing constrained choices related to violence and economic instability.

A. Grounding in the Narrative

While informed by previous research, direct social work practice, and scholarly literature, the findings of this research draw exclusively from in-depth interviews with

women who have migrated to the United States from the Northern Triangle of Central America. Participants gave rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences leaving their home countries and travelling to the United States, sharing both painful and hopeful moments of their lives in transition. These rich narratives form the foundation of the thematic findings and theory building described in this chapter. Brief narrative sketches for each participant are included in Appendix C.

In laying the groundwork for cross-case analysis of the process of migration and its nexus with violence, I will first describe the common elements of participants' migration narratives. Hortensia's story is a useful starting point in laying a foundation for the storyline. While not all participants' migration experiences are identical, Hortensia's story encapsulates many of the common elements and patterns of migration. A brief sketch of Hortensia's experience begins to give a sense of the complexity and multiplicity of violence that some migrant women experience. While we often tend to think of migration as a linear process from one singular point of departure to a singular destination point, her experiences tell a different story. Likewise, while we are so often apt to categorize violence against women in distinct and unrelated categories – sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, and femicide – this example also begins to unravel and/or collapse those tidy categories.

Hortensia

Hortensia⁶ is a 35-year-old mother from Guatemala. She lives in the United States with two of her children. I met Hortensia for an interview on a sunny weekend afternoon on campus at the university. She elected to meet at my office and was dropped off at the front entrance to the School of Social Work by her husband. Hortensia described her current life as stable and hopeful, and in the quiet setting of privileged academia, it could have been convenient to imagine that this had always been the case. However, as she began to talk about why she left Guatemala and what happened to her during her journey to Texas, it became palpably clear that her experiences before, during, and following migration to the United States were filled with violence and struggle. The title of this dissertation, in fact, is a direct quote from Hortensia - “Salía de uno ye me metí en otro.” In other words, in leaving or fleeing one set of violent circumstances, Hortensia found herself in yet another. Her migration story can appear like a series of attempts to escape danger only to land in another dangerous situation.

Hortensia came from a humble background in Guatemala. She met her first husband when she was 13 years old. She had two children with him and they lived happily for eleven years. Unfortunately, he passed away and Hortensia was left “desalojada,” or displaced. As a single mother in Guatemala, she found limited work opportunities and had difficulty making ends meet and providing for her children.

⁶ Pseudonyms are used to protect research participants' identities.

In time, Hortensia became involved with another man. Things were fine early in this second relationship, and Hortensia had two more children. However, the relationship shifted, and her partner began beating her frequently and severely. Isolated from family and friends and with inadequate legal or social support, Hortensia felt she had nowhere to turn for help or protection in Guatemala. With fear for her life and a strong desire to provide her children with a better future and a good education, Hortensia travelled to the United States with a friend. She left her children back home in Guatemala, with the intention of bringing them to the United States soon after getting settled.

Hortensia and her friend spent two months walking and running, eventually arriving in Houston in a house where many other migrants were being held. Shortly after their arrival, police raided the house, and she was turned in to immigration. Hortensia and her friend were held in a dark, cold room for a couple days and ultimately detained in another facility for a month before being told they had to sign their deportation papers. She signed the papers in confusion about what was happening to her and recalled, “estaba cerrada ya mi mente” (“*my mind was already closed*”). At the urging of her friend, she told immigration officials that she was from Mexico. Immigration dropped them, along with others being deported, at the Rio Grande River. Without money or resources to find her way, she depended on another migrant to help her pay for transit back to Guatemala.

After arriving back home, she tried to find safety for herself and her four children by staying with her mother. However, economic conditions were tough as a single mother

of four, particularly given her efforts to stay away from her husband. Hortensia decided to travel to the United States a second time in order to provide for her children.

The trip was physically grueling and dangerous the second time as well. She travelled in a group guided by a *coyote*, on foot and by train. They went without food or sleep and hid in the mountains to avoid gunfire from the gangs that control the migration route and train travel. In order to cross the Rio Grande, they inflated trash bags and held one under each arm to stay afloat. The river swept away two migrants from the group, and one lost his life.

After crossing, the remaining travellers continued walking until they were picked up and taken to an apartment in San Antonio. Hortensia was robbed of her money and made to cook and clean in the apartment for other migrants shuttled in and out by the coyotes. During this time, Hortensia was raped and threatened by one of the coyotes. She also learned that gang members had murdered her oldest daughter on the street in Guatemala. Anguished and desperate, she was able to escape the apartment with the help of another woman. Hortensia found her way to Austin and met a woman who promised to help her. Instead, the woman exploited her in a neighborhood cantina. The woman dropped her off to work at the cantina each night and then picked her up again in the early hours of the morning, demanding Hortensia turn over any money she earned. Hortensia refused the cantina work, which included commercial sex, and lied to the woman each night, telling her she had lost any money she earned.

Waiting outside the cantina one night at a taco truck, refusing to engage in the work expected of her, she met two men who tried to pick her up, assuming she was a prostitute. When she repeatedly declined their requests, they offered to help. The woman she was staying with had been dropping her off for more than a week and was becoming frustrated that Hortensia was not bringing home money. Hortensia was nervous about the situation with the woman. Given the offer for help from strangers on the street, she wondered, “¿me arriesgo o no me arriesgo? Yo ni tenía para dónde agarrar” (*Do I risk it or not? I didn't have anything to hold on to*). Hortensia decided to take the risk and go with the two men, and with their help she began to find shelter, stable work, and to make friends. She received a T Visa, a type of immigration relief for trafficked persons, which ultimately makes her eligible for a work permit, later legal permanent residency (a “green card”) and eventually citizenship. Hortensia brought two of her children to live with her in the United States. Her oldest child wanted to remain in Guatemala.

Hortensia's story offers, in some ways, a helpful exemplar of the common elements of migrant women's experiences. It also sheds light on the research questions at hand. That is, the process of migration for survivors of violence begins to emerge, in addition to the nature of continuing violence and its influence on migration decision-making.

B. The Process of Migration

This section aims to describe the main thematic elements of the contemporary process of migration for women from the Northern Triangle migrating to the United States. The section will describe:

Pre-Migration

- Leaving the home country, including precipitating factors, conditions, and decision-making

Peri-Migration

- Travelling into and across Mexico
- Crossing borders
- Being detained or held hostage by individuals, criminal gang networks, and/or state actors

Post-Migration

- Settling in the United States

Return Migration

Women's experiences of migration, particularly in the context of violence, both transcend borders and are shaped by borders. It is convenient to consider borders as locations fixed both in time and in geography. To some extent this is accurate, and in the context of this research, the border between Guatemala and Mexico and the border

between Mexico and the U.S. are important. They both represent political boundaries that women migrating from Central America to the U.S. must cross. They also involve legal immigration hurdles as well as physical vulnerability and danger, particularly to women and to the undocumented. Furthermore, the context of women's lives before making the journey may impact the journey itself. Likewise, the experiences of women after crossing the last border into the U.S. are also influenced by the journey and the crossings.

It is important to remember that there are no simple or clean delineations when it comes to describing women's experiences with migration and any categories we may impose on those experiences. Regardless, it remains useful to describe the process of migration within a framework of political borders. Common elements of the process of migration are often categorized across three phases of migration – pre-migration, peri-migration, and post-migration. However, participants' descriptions of their migration processes coalesce around the following main stages, which I have described within the pre-, peri-, post- framework: Pre-Migration (leaving the home country); Peri-Migration (travelling into and across Mexico); Peri-Migration (crossing borders); Peri-Migration (being detained or held hostage); Post-Migration (settling in the United States); and Return Migration.

Pre-Migration: Leaving the Home Country

In discussion the pre-migration stage of deciding and preparing to leave the home country and migrate to the United States, research participants discussed three main areas. These include: 1) reasons for leaving, 2) expectations for migration, and 3) leave-taking activities.

Reasons for leaving. Women described several interconnected elements that spurred their decision to migrate. These include domestic violence, gang violence, and poverty. It is difficult to separate one from another. In fact, Alma, a 39-year-old Salvadoran mother, expressed all three motivations together:

Yo vine primeramente porque tenía problemas con mi esposo - la violencia doméstica con el padre de mis hijos. También por problemas con las maras, quienes piden dinero. Bueno esas fueron algunas de las razones por las cuales vine y también porque quiero darle una mejor vida a mis hijos. (Alma)

Firstly, I came because I had problems with my husband – The domestic violence with the father of my children. Also, there were problems with the maras, who asked for money. Well, those were some of the reasons I came and also because I want to give my children a better life. (Alma).

Domestic violence. Making the decision to migrate was often the product of long-standing violence happening in the home and a sense of reaching intolerance or not being able to withstand it. As Sandra said, she left because she could no longer endure it, or “porque ya no aguantaba” (“*Because I couldn’t take it anymore*”). For other women, the decision was made with a more sudden sense of urgency and desperation. Sandra also described the suddenness with which she made her decision to leave Honduras:

Yo no tenía pensado venirme para Estados Unidos, lo que sucedió es que el papa de los niños era muy celoso y un día yo venía de la tienda, él me tiro una olla de agua, me quemó todo el cuerpo, entonces yo desesperada agarre, no mucho, dos pantalones, dos camisas y me vine. Así nada más. (Gloria)

I hadn't thought about coming to the United States, what happened was that the father of my children was very jealous and one day I was coming back from the store and he threw a pot of water on me. He burned my entire body, so I desperately grabbed, not much, two pants, two shirts, and I came [to the US]. Like that, nothing else. (Gloria).

Reflecting a similar sense of urgency and desperation, Celia described how she had never anticipated migrating to the United States. Her decision was an act of survival born of despair and fear:

Nunca lo planifiqué, nunca pensé en llegar aquí. Fue simplemente la desesperación, de tener a una persona que me estaba hostigando a pesar de que yo ya me había dejado con él, y él me seguía, me seguía que casi me intentó matar, con una almohada casi me ahorca. (Celia)

I never planned it, I never thought about coming here. It was simply the desperation of having a person who was harassing me, although I had already left him. He would stalk me, follow me and he almost tried to kill me with a pillow, he almost choked me. (Celia)

As Celia's experience demonstrates, the motivation to escape from the violence is more than finding safety from physical beatings. In fact, women feared for their lives in a very literal way. They anticipated that their partners were going to kill them and were capable of it. In this way, migration was seen as a necessity, and remaining in the home country was seen as a risk to their lives. Isabel stated that, "lo hace por pura necesidad, porque se arriesga tu vida" ("You do it out of pure necessity, because you risk your life").

Thelma said she knew that if she stayed, she would lose her life, “si me quedo acá voy a perder mi vida” (“*If I stay here, I’m going to lose my life.*”). She described the intense fear of being killed by her partner:

Teníamos que venirnos porque el miedo, el miedo que te maten es muy fuerte. Era más fuerte. Era más fuerte el miedo porque el papá de mis hijos me iba mandar a matar. Sí, y yo cada día le doy gracias a Dios porque si yo me hubiera quedado en Honduras, ya no estuviera viva. (Thelma)

We had to come because the fear, the fear that they will kill you was very strong. It was more intense. It was more intense, the fear, because the father of my children was going to send me to get killed. Yes, and I give thanks to God everyday because if I had stayed in Honduras I wouldn’t be alive today.

The lack of escape avenues is an important component of the desperation and fear associated with severe domestic violence described by women. Women spoke of the ineffectiveness of their home countries’ criminal justice system and persistent impunity for those perpetrating violent crimes against women. According to Celia, “La justicia no existe en Honduras. La justicia no existe en ese país. La policía puede llegar un rato, lo sacan a él, solamente veinticuatro horas. Después de veinticuatro horas el hombre está libre.” (“*Justice doesn’t exist in Honduras. Justice doesn’t exist in that country. The police might come for a bit, take him away, only for twenty-four hours. After twenty-four hours the man is free*”). Isabel also described the situation in Honduras:

Allá en Honduras se vive una violencia. A las mujeres les golpean, les cortan la cara, lo que sea y el hombre sólo puede estar un día en la cárcel y ya está. Pueden caer muertas, y matan las mujeres y nadie hace nada. (Isabel)

Over there, in Honduras, one lives the violence. Women are beaten, their faces are cut, whatever it may be, and the man can only stay in jail one day and that’s it. They [the women] can fall dead and be killed, and no one does anything. (Isabel)

In addition to seeking immediate safety from intense violence, women also described a desire to protect their children from being exposed to violence, viewing migration as an opportunity to break the cycle of violence in their children's future. Isabel said, "No quería que mi historia se repitiera en mis hijos y por eso yo he sido bien luchadora." (*"I didn't want my story to repeat itself with my children, and because of that I have been a fighter"*). Sierra relayed a similar motivation in attempting to protect her children from experiencing similar violence she had experienced, "no quería que pasaran eso mismo." (*"I didn't want them to go through the same thing."*) María talked about wanting to protect her children from in terms of their right to live free of violence. "Dije, no, yo no puedo dejar que mis hijos vivan todo esto durante todo el tiempo, ellos tienen derecho a una nueva vida, a vivir un futuro sin violencia, sin problemas, sin amenazas de muerte." (*"I said, no, I cannot let my kids live like this forever. They have the right to a new life, to live a future without violence, without problems, without death threats."*).

Gang violence. Reasons for leaving related by women also included gang violence. For some women, this was described as contributing to the general atmosphere of violence in their home countries and to violence being inescapable. Belinda said that, "hay mucha violencia, mucha pandilla. Andan extorsionando, andan robando, andan matando. Y por quitarle a uno dos pesos." (*"There is a lot of violence, many gangs. They're extorting, robbing, killing, and all to take two pesos from someone."*). Women felt that they themselves were vulnerable to gang violence and were also concerned about their children's safety. In describing the fear instilled by gangs, Zara stated, "todos los

días matan. Allá no podemos - ni nosotros que somos de nuestro país – no podemos llegar ni a visitar, porque nos quieren matar por lo poco que llevamos.” (“*[The gangs] kill everyday. There, we can’t—not even us who are from our country—we can’t even go out visiting because they want to kill us for the little that we have.*”) Natalia, a small business owner in Guatemala, described a particularly distressing encounter with gang members who were extorting her and threatening her. On this day, she had taken her daughter to the doctor and had left her store in the hands of a neighbor woman and her other children:

Llegaron los mareros a pedir dinero. Yo no le había dejado mucho dinero a mi niño, y le sacaron un arma a mi hijo, y al otro pequeño, y le dijeron que si no daban cien quetzales que necesitaban que cerraran las persianas porque sino iban a empezar a disparar. En ese momento mi niño me llamó y le dije que sí tenían ahí que lo dieran y sino pues que cerraran. Pero cada día para mí fue creciendo más el miedo, porque alla conmigo tenía a mis dos niñas y mi niño, y ya no podía más. Pues, allá, mi negocio estaba muy bueno, pero no podía más por las amenazas, por lo cual yo decidí y me vine. (Natalia)

The “mareros” (gang members) came asking for money. I didn’t leave very much money for my child. They pulled out a gun on my son and the other little one and they told the children if they didn’t give them one hundred quetzals that they would have to shut the blinds because they would start shooting. At that moment my son called me and I told him to give them what he had and if he didn’t [have enough] to shut [the curtains]. But everyday, for me, the fear kept growing because there I had my two girls and my boy with me and we couldn’t take it anymore. Well, over there, my business was doing well but because of the threats I decided [to leave] and come [to the US]. (Natalia)

In wanting to protect their children, women expressed concern for the safety of their sons and their daughters left behind. Women worried about their sons being recruited or harmed by gang members. They were fearful that their daughters would become targets

of sexual violence. Natalia described an encounter between gang members and her ten-year-old daughter:

Entonces yo me sentí frustrada. Ya no hallaba que hacer, y con el tiempo que mi nena tenía ya diez años, once años, estaba bonita ya, y llegaban los mareros y le decían a ver párate queremos ver de qué tamaño estás. (Natalia)

So I felt frustrated. I didn't know what to do and when my daughter turned ten years old, then eleven, she was pretty and the mareros would come and would tell her to stand up because they wanted to see what size she was. (Natalia)

Sierra decided to bring her daughter with her to the United States with the explicit goal of protecting her from what she felt was inevitable rape. She said, “traje mi hija de Honduras para que no me la violaran, y vine a este país justamente para protegerla.” (*“I brought my daughter from Honduras so they wouldn't rape her, and I came to this country precisely to protect her.”*)

For some women, pervasive gang violence in their communities was intricately tied to experiences with domestic violence and their fears of being killed by their intimate partners. In fact, some men used the existence and fear of gangs as a mechanism to threaten and control their partners. Anita relates how she could find nowhere to go where she felt safe and was in a constant state of fear for herself and her children. This became her impetus for migrating:

Cada vez que me veía era para pegarme. Si me veía así en la calle ahí me agarraba. Yo decía: no, eso no es vida. Siempre me llegaba a amenazar con las pandillas, y me decían que me fuera. No podía vivir en un lugar. Tenía que andar para arriba y para abajo. No vivía tranquila. Por eso fue que decidí venirme para acá. Pues me dije yo, si me van a matar aquí, me voy a morir en el camino. Por lo menos me morí en el camino buscando el futuro para mis niñas y si me quedo acá y me van a matar no sé si voy a lograrlo. Me encomendé a dios y ya. (Anita)

Every time he would see me was to hit me. If he saw me in the street he would grab me right there. I would say: No, this is not a life. He would always come threatening me with the gangs, and they would say to leave. I couldn't live in one place, I was constantly moving. I couldn't live in peace. That's why I decided to come here [to the US]. I told myself, if they are going to kill me here El Salvador, I will die on the road. At least I would have died looking for a future for my girls but if I stay here, they would kill me and I don't think I could do it [give my girls a future]. I entrusted myself to God and that's it. (Anita)

General poverty and providing for children. While women described domestic violence and gang violence as primary reasons for leaving their home countries, they explained that a lack of financial resources and opportunities also played into their decisions to leave. Given participants' roles as mothers, the need for economic safety nets was particularly tied to their abilities to care for their children. Women related experiences of being without a home and without enough food to eat. Thelma said that “no teníamos nada que comer mis hijos y yo. Y tuvimos que venimos para acá.” (“*My kids and I had nothing to eat, and we had to come here [to the US].*”). Beatriz described her decision to leave as being based on the need to provide for her children:

Pues, realmente, la decisión de venir... nadie quiere venir. Cada quien ama su país, cada quien se siente bien en su país. Pero la pobreza es muy difícil, y aparte es mucho peor cuando alguien ya es madre de familia. Yo ya tenía mis dos hijas. Y lo que pasa es que a veces los trabajos en Honduras, a veces había mucho trabajo, pero había temporadas donde no había trabajo. Y a veces tienes que pagar tu renta y cosas así como el cuidado de los niños. Entonces tuve un tiempo en el cual no tenía ni la forma de pagar el apartamento. (Beatriz)

Well, really, the decision to come...no one wants to come. Everyone loves their country, everyone feels good in their country. But the poverty is difficult, even more so when one is the mother of a family. I already had my two daughters. And what happens is that the jobs in Honduras, sometimes there would be plenty of work but there would be seasons where there was nothing. And sometimes you have to pay your rent and other things like that, like the children's daycare. There were times when I didn't have a way of paying for the apartment. (Beatriz)

Matilda related the economic need to longer-term goals for her children, “me vine de mi país por la pobreza que se está viviendo allá. Vine a buscar un mejor futuro para mí y para mi familia.” (*“I came from my country because of the poverty that one lives over there. I came in search of a better future for myself and for my family.”*)

Poverty and economic need are not unrelated to the violence described above. Abusive partners and criminal gang networks used economic control as a component of enacting violence and maintaining power. Thus, women often found themselves in economic distress as a direct result of the violence they experienced.

Investigating coyotes, costs, & logistics. In rapid preparation for the trip, women described the logistics involved in finding a travel guide, sometimes called a “coyote” or “pollero” or “caminador” to help take them to the United States. Alma indicated that she hired a coyote to increase the likelihood that she would not be apprehended and deported back to El Salvador: “yo agarré un coyote para que me subiera más arriba porque si uno viene así sin coyote, uno apenas podría subir porque lo agarraría migración y lo enviarían de regreso.” (*“I got a coyote so that (he) could get me up north because if you come without a coyote you can barely get up and border patrol would get you and send you back.”*)

Women reported that finding a coyote was a quick and simple task. For example, Celia was able to find one immediately upon deciding to migrate, “conseguí el coyote así de inmediato.” (*“I got a coyote immediately, just like that.”*). The process of identifying the coyote often involved utilizing women’s existing social networks. In general, women

reported knowing someone personally who was a coyote or going through someone who recently used a coyote.

Encontré a un joven que me habia dicho dos meses antes que el traia personas para acá, me platicó y me dijo: por si algún día te quieres ir. No, le dije yo, ni loca me vuelvo a ir, le dije yo, ya no me voy. Entonces cuando yo estaba viviendo todo eso [las amenazas y la violencia], yo fui y lo busque. Porque sabia donde vivía y habiamos sido amigos de la infancia. Lo busque y le dije: ‘¿Cuanto me garantizas tu que mis hijos van a llegar bien? Yo lo hago por mis hijos, yo ya soy vieja a mi ya no me importa sufrir más, yo ya no quiero que mis hijos sufran. Y entonces, yo tome la decisión, vendí el terreno, y me vine. (María)

I found a young man who had told me two months before he brought people over here and he told me: in case one day you want to go. “No”, I told him, there’s no way I would go back, I told him, “I’m not leaving.” So, when I was living with all of that [the threats and the violence], I went looking for him. I knew where he lived because we had been childhood friends. I looked for him and said, “Can you guarantee my children will arrive safely?” I did it for my children, I’m old it doesn’t matter if I suffer, I don’t want my kids to suffer anymore. And then, I made the decision. I sold our land and I came. (María)

Included in the coyote hiring process was the negotiation of cost. María, for example, was quoted \$45,000 quetzales, which is equivalent to about \$5,800 in today’s U.S. dollar. She said, “le hablé a una persona- le llaman coyote- que si me podían traer, me dijo que sí, me trajo por la cantidad de 45,000 quetzales.” (“I called someone— they’re called coyotes— and asked if he could bring me. [The coyote] told me he could and brought me over for the amount of 45,000 quetzales.”). Gathering money to pay for the trip, and in particular to pay the coyote was another task. Some women had a little amount of money saved. Others asked for loans from the bank. Most women reported borrowing money from friends or family. Sandra had a small amount of savings but wanted to also get a bank loan:

Deseaba ver cómo reunir un poquito de dinero. Tenía algo ahorrado. Empecé a ver cómo recogía dinero, a prestar dinero en un banco y venirme. Pero no me los prestaron porque en el lugar que vivía era muy peligroso. Después de eso, con el dinero que tenía, mil quinientos. Me quería venir con más, por si acaso. Perpo con eso me vine. (Sandra)

I wanted to see how I could save a little bit of money. I already had some savings. I started to see how I could pick up some money, get a loan from a bank and come. But they didn't give me a loan because in the place where I lived it was too dangerous. After that, I did it with the money I had, one thousand five hundred. I wanted to come with more, just in case. But I came with that. (Sandra)

In the end, Sandra didn't have enough money to pay a coyote, so she decided to come on her own: "Tomé la decisión de viajar sola, por el dinero que no tenía. Yo no contaba con mucho dinero y los coyotes allá cobran seis mil, siete mil, nueve mil." (*"I decided to travel alone because of the money I didn't have. I didn't have much money and the coyotes over there charge six thousand, seven thousand, nine thousand."*).

Preparing to leave, saying goodbyes & receiving blessings. In discussing the leaving process, women talked about the initial stages of separation from their children and family members. Women had to arrange for someone to take care of their children for an undetermined amount of time – until they returned to their home country or until they amassed enough money to pay for their children's travel to the United States. Children were most often settled into the homes of women's mothers. Other arrangements included care by the children's paternal grandparents or neighborhood friends.

In Sierra's case, she already had a sister settled in the United States helped her pay for her trip. However, she only had enough money to cover Sierra's travel and one of

Sierra's two children. Sierra had to decide which child to take and which child to leave in Honduras. She weighed the risks for each child of staying in Honduras and ultimately decided to bring her daughter in order to protect her from sexual violence:

Les dije que yo tengo dos niños, pero yo no me quiero separar de ellos. "No, pues no te puedes venir con los niños". Dije: "Yo no me quiero ir sin ellos". De ahí me volvieron a hablar: "Bien, te vamos a dar una opción. Que te traigas uno de los dos". Fue cuando yo decidí que mejor me llevaba a Melinda. Porque me la pueden violar, o le puede pasar algo, porque allá miraba yo mucha delincuencia. Al lado de la casa yo vi cuando mataron a un muchacho a puños machetazos y yo me quedé esa vez como traumada. (Sierra)

I told them that I have two kids and that I didn't want to be separated from them. "No, you can't come with the children." I said, "I don't want to go without them." From there they kept talking to me, "Well, we will give you one option: you can bring one of the two." That's when I decided it would be best to take Melinda because she could have been raped or something else could have happened. I saw a lot of crime over there. Next to the house, I saw a boy get killed with a machete and I was traumatized. (Sierra)

Women also reported feeling the need to have their loved one's blessings in making the journey. This was related to needing the emotional support of loved ones in undertaking a dangerous trip. Clara described saying goodbye to her elderly grandmother in El Salvador:

Ya sabía a lo que me estaba exponiendo. Tenía una abuelita que era muy creyente, me dijo, llévate esta cosa que no te va a pasar nada en todo México. Tú vas a ver todas las cosas que van a caer, pero a ti no te va a pasar nada. Muy creyente. Tenía 100 años. Inteligente. Y me traje el amuleto que ella me había regalado. Y pues gracias a Dios no me pasó nada en México. (Clara)

I already knew what I was exposing myself to. I had a grandmother who was a strong believer, she told me, "Take this thing with you and nothing will happen to you in Mexico. You will see all the things that could happen but nothing will happen to you. Very strong believer. She was 100 years old. Intelligent. And I brought the amulet she had given me and, well, thanks to God nothing happened to me in Mexico. (Clara)

For María, taking leave from her mother in Guatemala included the need to request her mother's permission and receive her blessing. María had come to the U.S. without her children initially. She returned to Guatemala, hoping to remain there with her family. However, her life was again threatened, and she decided to make the journey with her children, so that they would be protected and would not be separated again. María's mother, however, was initially concerned that María was putting them in grave danger and that her grandchildren may not survive the trip:

Agarre una mochila y metí la ropa que pude de mis niños, y otra bolsa la llene con comida, con, de todo y me los traje. Y le dije a mi mamá, yo solo quiero su bendición es todo lo que le pido, y me dijo: No, estas loca, vas a ir a matar a tus hijos, eres una asesina. Le dije no, no lo voy a hacer, pues si así pasa prefiero que muramos todos, le dije yo que yo se que dejar sufrir aquí (llorando) Le dije, no me importa, lo único que me importa es tratar de hacer algo por ellos, que no un día me voy a arrepentir y dije lo pude hacer y no lo hice. Y quería escapar, de ese infierno. Y entonces me dijo está bien, te voy a bendecir. Nos bendijo, y nos venimos. (María)

I grabbed a backpack and filled it as much as I could with my children's clothes and another bag I filled with food and with everything and I brought it. And I told my mother, I just want your blessing, that's all I'm asking of you and she said, "No, you're crazy, you're going to get your children killed, you're a murderer." I said, "No, I'm not going to do that, and if that does happen I rather us all die. I told her that for me to stop suffering here (crying)... I said, "I don't care, the only thing that matters is that I try to do something for them, I don't want to one day regret being able to do something and not doing anything. I want to escape from that hell. And then she told me, "okay, I'll give you my blessing." She blessed us and we left. (María)

After taking leave from the home country, the long and arduous trip begins across borders into Mexico, through more than a thousand miles of Mexico, and then into the United States. Women described this stage of migration as including three important

elements: the transit through Mexico, crossing borders, and being detained and held hostage.

Peri-Migration: Transit through Mexico – Walking, Riding, Hiding, and Hurrying: On the Move through Mexico

As a transition from understanding the leave-taking from the home country, it is valuable to explore the ways women described their expectations of the next portion of the journey – the transit through Mexico. Women expressed concerns about the danger involved in the journey. Primarily women were worried about the possibility of being raped and the physical danger involved in travelling by train and bus. Many women had heard tell of others who had died during the journey.

Nonetheless, women reported that the travel through Mexico was much more difficult and harrowing than they had anticipated. Fleeing economic instability and threats from gangs in El Salvador, Clara said, “yo nunca me imaginé de lo que iba a pasar en el camino. Quizás estaba más terrible de lo que me estaba pasando en mi país.” (“*I never imagined what could have happened on the trip. Perhaps it was worse than what was happening in my country.*”). Natalia also explained that her hopes of safe travel were dashed. She stated that women travel unaware,

Sin saber que a veces uno no llega. Sin saber que, es nada más, un sueño. Hay sueños que se hacen realidad y hay sueños que nadamas son como, una pesadilla. Esa fue la trayectoria de allá para acá. (Natalia)

Without knowing that sometimes one doesn't make it. Without knowing that it's nothing more than a dream. There are dreams that come true and there are

dreams that are nothing more than a nightmare. That was the road to from there to here. (Natalia)

Given the desperation to leave the home country and find safety and security, many women described their desire to believe the stories told by coyotes. Coyotes described pleasant and convenient travel, but women understood later that they had been deceived. Karla felt tricked by the coyote, “No, yo no sabía. No te dicen que vas a sufrir todo eso. Te cobran y te traen, te traen engañado.” (“*No, I didn’t know. They don’t tell you you’re going to suffer all of that. They charge you and they bring you, bring you misled.*”). Natalia, for example, described what she was told about the trip and her desire to believe it:

le dicen a uno cosas muy bonitas cuando uno empieza el viaje, dicen “usted se va a ir en un autobús de primera, tú te vas a ir bien vestida, con zapatos altos, pintadita, para que no te baje migración. Tu te vas a ir en el primer asiento”, te dicen. Es una mentira, que nos dicen a nosotros. Y luego nos dicen “no, hay un viaje especial que es más caro, llegas más rápido, te vas a la par de la señora que te lleva”, le dicen a uno, “es una americana la que te lleva, haz de como que tu trabajas con ella y ella habla por tí, pasan bien el puente”, y es mentira. Y es el viaje más caro que le ponen a uno. Pero uno quiere llegar bien a este país, y uno no quiere sufrir mucho. (Natalia)

They tell you wonderful things when you begin the trip. They say, “you’re going to be traveling on a first-class bus, you’ll go well dressed with high heels, you’ll wear makeup so that border patrol doesn’t make you get off [the bus]. You’ll be seated in the first seat,” That’s what they tell you. It’s a lie they tell us. Then they tell us “no, there’s a special trip but that one is more expensive. You get there faster, you’re on par with the woman who takes you,” they tell you, “The one who takes you, and she’s an American. Pretend you work with her and let her do all the talking, you’ll get across the bridge easily.” And it’s a lie. And it’s the most expensive trip they charge you, but you want to get to this country safely and you don’t want to suffer too much. (Natalia)

Maria also compares what she was told to expect with what happened in reality:

Porque ellos siempre les avisan a las personas si quieren viajar. Le cuentan una historia que no es. Que no vamos a caminar, que no vamos a pasar hambre, vamos a pasar puros hoteles, vamos a cruzar la frontera sin ningún problema. Y eso no es así. Nos traen caminando por puras terracerías, veredas. En el camino ellos nos dicen, que si uno va a pasar, uno tiene que ser su mujer. Y si no, ellos nos pueden dejar abandonados por ahí. Porque cuando nos venimos, le tenemos que pagar más de la mitad del dinero a ellos. Al principio, y el resto se da en la frontera, y si no ellos nos dejan perdidos o nos entregan a los Zetas. (María)

Because they always tell the people who want to make the trip, they tell them a tale that's not true. You won't have to walk, you won't have to go hungry, you'll stay only at hotels, you'll cross the border without a problem. And it's nothing like that. They take us walking through dirt roads, paths. On the road they tell us if we want to pass we have to be their woman, and if we don't, they can leave us stranded over there. Because when we come, we have to give them more than half the money up front, and the rest of it at the border and if not they leave us lost or they give us over to the Zetas. (María)

Sometimes the coyote himself was not who he initially portrayed himself to be. In Beatriz's case, the coyote she hired in Honduras came with good references but changed during the trip and took advantage of travelers' vulnerability:

veníamos más personas. No era solo yo. El esposo de mi tía me lo recomendó como que era bueno. Y ellos demuestran ser muy buenas personas cuando están en nuestro país, pero cuando ya vienen en camino y saben que uno no puede hacer nada, ahí es cuando ellos cambian. Y ahí es cuando abusan de uno como a ellos se les da la gana. (Beatriz)

More people than just me came. My aunt's husband recommended him as a good [coyote]. They seem like good people when they are in our country, but when you're already on the road and they know you can't do anything, that's when they change. That's when they start to do whatever that want with you. (Beatriz)

Despite suffering during the trip, women talked about maintaining the silence and deception about these realities. Some women wanted to protect family members from worrying about them. Clara described lying to her family about the conditions during the trip, “Para mí era algo terrible, pero yo seguía. Me llamaba, me volvía a llamar. No, yo

estoy bien. ¿Estás comiendo bien? Sí. ¿Y cómo duermes? En una cama, en un colchón.’ Y yo durmiendo en el suelo.” (*“For me it was something terrible, but I kept at it. She called me, and called me again. No, I’m okay. “Are you eating?” “Yes”. “And how are you sleeping?” “In a bed, on a mattress.” And I was sleeping on the floor.”*) Others reported that even if they had wanted to tell family members the truth about the journey, the coyotes or gang members controlling the routes would not let them speak to their family, particularly in situations of extortion. María tells of not having the freedom to tell her family what really happened during her trip:

Entonces nuestra familia nunca sabe lo que pasamos durante el recorrido porque ellos nunca les cuentan. No nos dejan hablar para nada. Y si nos dejan hablar solo es un minuto para decir que estamos bien y que manden el dinero. No quiero que me pase nada, entonces la familia lo tiene que enviar. (María)

Our family doesn’t know what we go through on the trip because no one ever tells. They don’t let us speak at all. And if they do let us talk it’s only to talk for a minute to say that we are doing well and to send money. I don’t want anything to happen to me so the family has to send it. (María)

The elements. In terms of describing some of the suffering endured during the transit through Mexico, women talked about their fears of being in the remote wilderness and among wild animals, about being without adequate food, clean water, or bathing opportunities, and about exposure to harsh weather conditions. According to Clara, it was all of the above, “Nosotros íbamos con sed, con hambre, fríos, sucios. Todo.” (*“We were thirsty, hungry, cold, and dirty. Everything.”*)

The transit stage through Mexico and on the US-side of the border included travel through remote, isolated areas. These were areas with no houses and few signs of people.

Sandra described seeing nothing but trees and hills, with the exception of animal bones and discarded clothing. Walking was difficult in these areas, as cactus thorns and mosquitoes were constantly hurting women. Mothers were particularly concerned about protecting their own children and others travelling with the group, “nosotras las madres estábamos cuidandolos de los zancudos, de las cucarachas, de los animales.” (“*As mothers, we protected them from the mosquitoes, the cockroaches, the animals.*”). Alma described her experience being left in the wilderness:

Nos llevaban como para una montaña donde no se escuchaba nada. Era tan feo. Nos dejaron allí unas noches en la oscuridad. Así tirados en la calle. Solo se escuchaban animales aullando y así nos cargaban de un lado a otro. (Alma)

They took us towards a mountain where you wouldn't be able to hear anything. It was horrible. They left us there for a few nights in the dark. Like being left on the street. You could only hear animals howling and that's how they took us from place to place. (Alma)

Women also reported seeing snakes and alligators. Anita saw rattlesnakes, “hay culebras que usted nada más las ve y es que hacen ruido.” (“*there are snakes you just look at and they start making noise*”). This was especially frightening during the nighttime when it was dark, making it difficult to fall sleep on the ground with the knowledge that snakes were close by. Both Zara and Anita talked about using garlic as a snake repellent. Zara reported:

ahí cuando cruzamos el río fuimos tiradas, en la noche nos aventaron hasta el río pero no nos cruzaron nos tuvieron durmiendo ahí en el monte, ahí había culebras, nada más nos dieron ajo, mucho ajo, para que nos untáramos en los pies para que no nos picaran las serpientes. Ajo, eso fue muy rara. (Zara)

When we crossed the river they left us, at night they took us up to the river but they didn't cross us. They left us sleeping there on the ground. Snakes were there. They only gave us garlic, a lot of garlic, to spread over our feet so the snakes wouldn't bite us. Garlic, that was really weird. (Zara)

Women also frequently went long periods without food or clean water during this part of the trip. At times, the only water available was from cattle troughs or mud puddles and other standing water. Even though dirty water sometimes made women sick, they often had no choice but to drink it in order to not become dehydrated. Sierra brought powdered milk for her daughter, but there was often not good water to mix with the powder. Women also talked about going without food or keeping food stashed away so that children travelling with them could eat.

Sometimes women were given food by strangers or found canned food along the route:

Y en camino ya teníamos tres días sin comer. Empezamos a buscar latas de elote y chícharos y frijoles en el camino porque encuentras siempre. Siempre, porque la gente que trae las deja para que otro cuando venga las coma. Y dura la lata, de maíz, chícharos y frijoles. Y lo frijoles, casi no lo puedo pasar. Ni el maíz tampoco. Es algo que te queda enfermo el estómago y no te puedes. (Karla)

On the road, we had already gone three days without eating. We started looking for cans of corn, peas, and beans on the road because you could always find some. Always, because the people who come and bring food leave it so that others can eat. And you made the can of corn, peas, and beans last. And the beans, I can hardly eat them, or the corn. It makes you sick to your stomach and you can't keep it down. (Karla)

Anita described a particularly difficult time during her trip, when she spent about a week living in the trash heap near the border with Texas, around Reynosa. She and other migrants went to great lengths to find edible food, potable water, and places to sleep:

Ahí hay mucha gente, muchos niños y la gente busca ahí en la basura para comer las cosas podridas que hay y así, entonces quién la puede sostener en su panza puede, pues come pero quien no... yo no podía mantenerla, yo la regresaba, yo trataba de comerla, pero yo la regresaba para atrás, mi estomago no... Y hay personas que si, su estomago si se lo permitía, se retenia muy bien, porque podía comer, pero en mi caso yo no podía comer porque yo todo lo regresaba para atrás, y yo decía pues, y yo ya estaba como deshidratando sí, pues ahí, nos teníamos que a veces pues, yo tome mi pipi, así mis orines, pero si usted no toma agua no va a orinar no?, entonces no podía yo tomar ni de mis orines porque ya por ultimo yo ya no orinaba porque pasamos una semana y no nos daban nada, nada. Y nada más una señora que vivía así como que ella sabía que pasaba, como dejando, dejando como cubetas de agua en bolsa, y pues para todos no, ahí tenemos que agarrar nosotros, pero sea como en las noches que llegaba, ella nosotros pensábamos que era una señora porque nada más dejaba como su ropa ahí en la cerca y dejaba la cubeta ahí y se iba quizás no sé, y dejaba la cubeta ahí abandonada con agua. Y decíamos porque debe ser una señora porque luego nos encontrábamos así como ropa rasgada en la acera, porque ella por ponerla con cuidado quizás se rasgaba, pero pues el miedo también de ellos porque se veían como champitas nada más, no eran casas, son champas, donde vive gente muy pobre, y pues a lo mejor como estaba amenazada por las pandillas pues sigue viviendo ahí o pues no tienen otro lugar donde ir. Y tiene que seguir allí y uno duerme en el suelo así, encima de la basura, si puedes y te va bien encuentras un carton bueno ahí en la basura y luego te lo pones ahí y ya. Pero te quedas durmiendo ahí. (Anita)

There are a lot of people, a lot of children and the people look through the trash to eat the rotten things that are there and so, the people who could keep it down in their stomachs could, but how, but whoever can't... I couldn't keep it down, I would throw it back up. I would to eat it but I would throw it back up, my stomach couldn't... And there were people, if their stomach permitted it, maintained themselves well, because they could eat, but in my case I couldn't eat because I would throw everything back up, and I would say well I was already dehydrated yes, well there, we had to sometimes... well, I drank my pee, just like that my urine, but if you didn't drink water you wouldn't urinate? Then I couldn't even drink my urine because at last I wasn't even urinating because one week passed and they didn't give us anything, nothing. And there was this woman who lived there, it seemed like she knew what happened, [she would] leave buckets of bagged water and well it wasn't enough for everyone. We each had to grab our own, but she would come by night, we thought she was a woman because she would leave her clothes on the fence and leave the bucket there

and then leave, I don't know, she would leave the bucket there with water. We would say it had to be a woman because later we found pieces of clothes in the fence because maybe when she tried to carefully leave it there she would scratch herself but also their fear because they looked like 'champitas' nothing more, they weren't houses, they're 'champas', where very poor people live and well maybe she had been threatened by the gangs since she kept living there or she didn't have another place to go. And you have to stay there you sleep on the ground, on top of the trash, and if you can and if you're lucky you find good cardboard in the trash and then you put it there and you're done. But you sleep there. (Anita)

Travelling in the rain was particularly difficult, and many women talked about waiting for the rain to pass and finding or making impromptu shelters out of deer blinds, tarps or backpacks, in an effort to stay dry. Clara described riding on top of the train while it rained, finding no shelter and little relief:

Lo serio fue cuando empezó a llover. A llover y nosotros arriba. Y el viento, se sentía que el agua se congelaba en la cara de nosotros. Nosotros tiembla y tiembla. Ahí teníamos que abrazarnos con gente que no conocían, yo me tuve que abrazar con alguien para calentarme. Yo estaba que tiembla y tiembla. Yo estaba temblando del miedo, del frío, eran un montón de sentimientos mezclados. (Clara)

It got serious when it started raining. Raining and we were on top, and the wind, it felt like the water was freezing on our faces. We were shivering and shivering. We would hug people we didn't know; I had to hug someone to warm myself. I was shaking and shaking. I was shaking from the fear, the cold, it was a mixture of emotions. (Clara)

Cold weather and extreme heat were other concerns expressed by women, particularly related to travelling with children and having no way to keep them warm or to provide any relief from sun and heat.

Another concern expressed by women related to travelling without the opportunity to bathe and stay clean and healthy. Often, women were covered in dirt from

having walked in muddy areas. Karla spoke of having her period during the trip and not having any supplies on hand:

Lo feo fue cuando, cuando me vino uno periodo menstrual, pues es mujer y... El primer dia sin nada, porque no te cargaban nada de eso. Así me daba pena. Éramos tres mujeres ahí y nos vino al mismo tiempo. (Karla)

It was ugly when...when I got my menstrual period, well being a woman is... The first day without anything, because [we] didn't carry any of that. I was embarrassed. We were three women there and we all got it at the same time. (Karla)

Zara also spoke about having her period, in combination with trying to recuperate from medical trouble back in El Salvador:

Ahí casi me morí. Porque allá en mi país me pusieron una inyección para planificar y esa inyección era para tres meses, y desde que me la pusieron yo quedé con hemorragia. Y no se me quitaba, iba al doctor y del medicamento que me dieron para eso, quedé padeciendo del cólon. Yo estuve todo ese año en tratamiento, y cuando yo salí de El Salvador, yo salí con la menstruación. Pero ya después en el camino de tanto maltrato, sufrimiento, aguantábamos hambre, dormíamos en el monte, ya no tenía yo toallas sanitarias para ponerme. Yo me ponía cualquier cosa que encontraba en el camino. Después ya no quedaba manchando yo de mi parte, sino que de atrás y me decían a mí que era el cólon, porque yo sangraba de la parte de atrás, no era mi menstruación. Y así llegué yo aquí y cuando llegué me operaron, porque ya casi me moría. Y el papá de mi hija me tiró a la calle, porque él dijo que mujeres enfermas no las quería aquí con él. Y toda la familia de él me dieron la espalda. (Zara)

I almost died there. Because over there, in my country, they had given me a birth control injection and that injection was for 3 months and ever since then I would bleed and it just wouldn't stop. I went to the doctor who gave me medication for it, I ended up having colon problems. I was in treatment that entire year and when I left El Salvador I left with my period. But later on the road from so much mistreatment and suffering, the hunger we endured, sleeping on the ground, I no longer had sanitary napkins to put on. I would put on whatever I could find on the road. Later I was no longer staining from my part, but from behind and they would tell me that it was the colon because I was bleeding from behind, it wasn't my period. And that's how I got here, and when I got here they operated me because I was nearly dead. And the father of my daughter threw me out on the street because he said he didn't want sick women with him, and his entire family turned their backs to me. (Zara)

Going many days without bathing caused acute pain for Karla when she finally had an opportunity to bathe after arriving in a safe house in Houston:

Luego los lavé en el baño con agua, pero cuando me bañé la ropa, como la traía pegada, las costuras de la ropa no me la pude quitar. Me bañé con la misma ropa, porque no podía. Y después el pantalón una muchacha me ayudó a quitarmelo, las costuras del pantalón se me arrancó la piel. Las tenía pegadas a la piel, sangré mucho, y el muchacho me dijo “apúrate que ya nos tenemos que ir.” Y me puse así la ropa con el dolor. Subir otro pantalón se me pegó todo a la piel, mi cuerpo sentía como se me habían agarrado las manos y me había traído arrastrada porque de tanto caminar cuando el cuerpo estacionó en un lugar sentado tres días, se enfrió el cuerpo todo. No puede ni caminar. (Karla)

Later I washed them in the bathroom with water, but when I showered with my clothes on, I had the seams of my clothes stuck to me and I couldn't take them off. I showered with the same clothes, because I couldn't [take it off] and later the jeans, a girl helped me take them off. My skin came off with the seams of the jeans. I had them stuck to the skin, I bled a lot, and the man said to me, "hurry up, we have to leave." And I put the clothes back on even with the pain. The other jeans got stuck to my skin. My body felt as if they had taken me and dragged me from all the walking, and then staying still for three days, my body froze completely. I couldn't even walk. (Karla)

Travelling with a coyote. The relationship with the coyote played a big role in the experience of transit through Mexico, as many women relied heavily on the knowledge and guidance of the coyote for protection from the elements, and in avoiding immigration officials and gang members. These relationships were fraught with difficulty and distrust. Women talked about being left alone or left behind by coyotes. Matilda described feeling alone, despite having paid a coyote:

Lo único es que, como dicen, venía de coyote en el camino sin ver. Pienso que el coyote en el camino es uno mismo. No es alguien el que nos trae a uno, pues. Por ejemplo, si alguien lo guía, él viene escondiéndose por allá y lo deja a uno prácticamente solo. Uno se viene cuidando, uno solo. (Matilda)

The only thing was, how do you say, the coyote was blind on the road. I think that oneself is the coyote on the road. There isn't someone who brings you. For example,

if someone is guiding you, he starts hiding in places and leaves you practically alone. One comes taking care of oneself. (Matilda)

Hortensia and her group were left hiding in a mountain for three days before being picked up by a coyote. Celia was left behind by one coyote and her travelling companions in the dark, not knowing which way to go, “todos los que venían conmigo me dejaron a mí solita y en medio de la oscuridad.” (“*Everyone who was with me had left me all alone in the darkness.*”). She felt as though the trip was every man/woman for him/herself, “ahí se salva quien pueda, no hay nadie que le ayude ni nada.” (“*You can only save yourself, there is no one there to help you or anything.*”) She also described advocating on behalf of a fellow traveller who was being left behind:

Le dijo al Coyote: “No es justo lo que están haciendo, por que imagínate, si yo no estuviera, esa mujer queda ahí y caída hasta muerta y ni cuenta se dan ustedes. Porque ya el grupo ustedes ya bien allá y no es justo”. (Celia)

“He said to the coyote: “What you’re doing isn’t fair, because imagine, If I wasn’t here that woman would have been left there until she died and you would have never noticed. Because the your group was well over there and it’s just not fair.” Celia

Anita also related a similar experience, “nos llevó a dejarnos pérdidas a un lugar donde no había casas, nada de eso. Tiradas, tiradas. Ahí nos dejó tiradas pérdidas ahí, y nosotras no sabíamos para donde agarrar, porque no teníamos ni idea donde andábamos.” (“*He left us lost in a place without any houses, none of that. Stranded, stranded he left us there stranded and lost and we didn’t know where to go because we had no idea where we were.*”)

While many women hired one coyote, presumably for the duration of the trip, they were often accompanied by several guides or were passed from one coyote to

another along the way. In other words, while one coyote may be responsible for an initial portion of the trip, he may subsequently pass a group of migrants into the care of another coyote. Celia reported that her initial coyote was lost or gone, and her group was handed over to others, “El coyote se perdió. Ya nos entregó otro hermano a otra gente.” (*“The coyote got lost. So the other brother gave us to other people.”*)

Not all women had negative experiences with coyotes. Some women expressed trust in and gratitude for the coyote. For example, Celia reported that one of the coyotes she travelled with knew the road well, “gracias aquel muchacho ya sabía bien el camino.” (*“Thanks to that boy I already knew the way well.”*) She also mentioned that he managed everything, even how much money and marijuana they needed for bribes along the way, “el coyote manejo todo. El llevaba su mariguana y ya sabía el dinero que le iba a dar a ellos.” (*“The coyote took care of everything. He carried his marijuana and he already knew the money he was going to give them.”*) Likewise he told her of his dedication to getting her to the U.S., “mi misión no es dejarte aquí, mi misión es hacerte llegar allá.” (*“My mission is not to leave you here, my mission is to get you there.”*) Others travelled without a coyote and found directions and guidance from strangers along the way.

Modes of transit. The travel through Mexico and into the United States utilized a variety of methods of transportation. Women travelled by car, bus, train, and by foot. Most women used at least three or four of those modes of transit during their one or two months on the road to the U.S.

During the early stages of travel, many women reported taking a bus to depart their home country and enter into Guatemala or Mexico. Buses were easily accessible from El Salvador or Honduras to the border with Guatemala and through Guatemala to the border with Mexico. Some women took buses for small portions of the travel through Mexico. Hortensia, travelling with another woman and several men, talked about the coyote using her and the other woman to flag down a bus in Mexico.

El guía nos sacó, y dijo, “Ustedes dos mujeres van a ir a pedir a parar los autobuses.” Dijo, “porque a nosotros no nos paran.” Y sí, paró rapidito para nosotras. Cuando el bus abrió la puerta, salieron todos los hombres del monte, y se metieron al bus. (Hortensia)

The guide took us out and said, “You two women are going to go ask the buses to stop.” He said, “Because they don’t stop for us,” and yes it quickly stopped for us. When the bus opened the door all the men came out from the countryside and got on the bus. (Hortensia)

Train travel. Participants described their train travels on “la bestia” (*the beast*) with particularly vivid recall. Many women took multiple trains during their transit north through Mexico. Given the time spent on trains and the danger involved, train memories were a focal point of interviews. Hortensia recalled taking about 20 trains, “yo me subí como 20 trenes. Yo no anduve en bus, puro tren y caminando.” (“*I got on about 20 trains. I didn’t travel by bus, only trains and walking.*”) She also recalled spending days at a time atop the same train, “pasamos bastantes días en puro tren.” (“*We spent many days on just the train.*”) Clara remembered spending three days on a train:

Estuvimos tres días en el tren. Era un día, una noche. Era infinito. Yo decía, dios mío, ¿a qué hora nos vamos a bajar a comer, a hacer las necesidades que uno tiene que hacer? Yo decía, dios mío, como es esto. (Clara)

We spent three days on the train. It was one day, one night. It was infinite. I would say, "My God, when will we get off to eat, or do the necessary things one has to do?" I would say, "My God how is this possible?" (Clara)

Train travel also involved long spans of time waiting for the next train or a specific train to pass. Often, women described waiting in hiding until the train passed at nighttime and they could get on without being detected. Other times, women had to hurry and run to catch a train. Hortensia said, "Nos escondimos y cuando ya iba saliendo el tren, a correr y a tirarnos al tren otra vez." (*"We would hide and when the train was leaving we would run and throw ourselves on the train again."*) These times of hurrying often caused women to lose their identification documents or other belongings.

Experiences riding trains were filled with danger, fear, and close calls with death. In particular, women recalled a heightened sense of fear in getting on and off the trains. Women often had to get on or off trains while they were in motion, in order to avoid detection at train stops, where immigration checkpoints and other law enforcement were stationed. Karla explained the difficulty and the danger in getting on a moving train:

Yo nunca sabia como subirme a un tren porque el primer tren teníamos que agarrar corriendo el tren... El tren en ruta, y nosotros corriendo tras el tren. Y entonces alguien dijo "Viene el tren que va para Calado, sigamos, vamonos" Y todos los varones y así, porque el mismo grupo que viene, a veces los varones no te ayudan. Salen corriendo unos y hay mujeres que si son fuertes, que dicen yo no regreso, yo voy a seguir adelante. El primer tren que tuvimos que agarrar, yo no lo pude agarrar porque iba muy fuerte. La mano se me viró así, me doblé mi pie, me caí y el pie se me dobló. Y entonces mucha de la gente con que veníamos en el grupo dijo bajense todos, la gente no va porque dijo por esta nos vamos a detener. Y bien que va a la gente pero este muchacho consiguió a alguien que me salvara el pié. Y alguien dijo vamos a tratar de agarrar un tren que esté estacionado. Pero vamos que tener que caminar hasta allá, y me tenían que cargar porque no podía caminar por mi pie. (Karla)

I never knew how to get on a train because the first train we had to grab the train as it ran... The train on the tracks and us running behind it. And the someone said, "The train going to Calado is coming, let's follow it, come one," and everyone, all the men and just like that because sometimes even in the same group the men wouldn't help you. Some start running and there are women who are strong who say I'm not going back, I'm going to keep moving forward. The first train we had to catch, I wasn't able to grab on because it was going too hard. I had went like this, I bent my foot, I fell and my foot bent. And then a lot of the people in the group we were with said everyone get off. The people didn't go because they said for this one we will wait. And good to the people, but there was a young man who found someone to save my foot. And someone said let's try to get a train that's stopped. But we will have to walk all the way over there and they had to carry me because I couldn't walk due to my foot.
(Karla)

Karla went on to twist her other foot in a subsequent descent from a different train. Celia described feeling nervous when it was time to ride on or get off the train, because she became dizzy and was afraid of being pulled under the train. She begged the coyote to not make her keep riding trains. At one point, Celia, who was travelling with her 4-year-old son, was the last to get off a train and became paralyzed with fear:

El tren iba corriendo y ya nos tocaba allá por bajarnos antes que llegáramos a una meta donde iban a ver como a migraciones. Tenemos que bajar. Y yo era la última que quedaba allí bajaron al niño pero viera. Y yo vi que una amiga se bajó, la bajo pero ella cayo rodo bastante y cuando... Y me entro los miedos a mí porque yo era la última y el muchacho me decía suéltate, suéltate. Y no me quería soltar. Y ya estábamos ya para llegar así, para llegar allí. "Suéltate, suéltate, Celia, suéltate." Él me tuvo que jalar. Y me agarro del pelo porque el tren me estaba jalando por abajo. Porque yo solté un pie que yo no podía soltar allí, y el muchacho vino, me a logró alcanzarme así. Yo caí rodando. Rodando, rodando, rodando que hasta la cara llena como. Si todo el pelo quedo en la mano del muchacho. No fue tan fácil. Fue una pesadilla para mí hasta que por fin llegamos acá. Cuando llegamos acá fue otra pesadilla. El tren del deseo todavía no me quería. (Celia)

The train was running and it was almost our turn to get off before we got to the checkpoint where there was immigration police. We had to get off. And I was the last one left there, they took the boy off but you should see... I saw that a friend got off, she got off but she rolled a lot and when... And I got scared because I was the last one and the young man would say, "let go, let go," I didn't want to let go.

And we were almost there , “Let go, let go, Celia, let go,” He had to pull me off, he grabbed me by the hair because the train was pulling me from the bottom because I let go of one foot that I couldn’t let go of there and the young man came, he managed to catch up to me and I fell rolling, rolling, rolling, rolling until my face was full like... if all the hair stayed in the hands of the young man. It wasn’t so easy. It was a nightmare for me until we finally got over here. When we got over here it was another nightmare. The wish train still didn’t want me. (Celia)

Other dangers presented themselves in simply riding atop the train. Celia described being sleepy while riding the train and the risk of falling asleep and falling off the train:

Porque ya estamos aquí, es un riesgo, llegar aquí no es fácil. Pues para mí no fue fácil, porque ir a agarrada de ese tren a la orilla, para mí yo ya me miraba que ya me iba a morir. Sí, porque no era fácil. Porque yo solita y yo me agarraba así, yo sólo me imagino si estuviera mi hijo conmigo, me caigo yo o se cae mi hijo. Sí, porque cada vez, como que le hacía el tren. “Dios mío”, decía yo. En una de éstas, yo con un gran sueño, si me duermo aquí, yo tenía que conservarme la mente, yo misma me terapeaba ahí, porque si me duermo me caigo. Si me duermo un mal o un descuido que yo haga, me tira. Y si me tirara, porque yo estaba entre media, si me tira caigo en medio y ahí nomás me quedo. Yo sólo rogaba a Dios, y gracias a Dios que, pero corría ese tren, corría. Y yo ahí guindada, wow. (Celia)

Because we are already here, it’s a risk, getting here isn’t easy. Well, for me it wasn’t easy grabbing on to the edge of that train. I felt like I was about to die. Yes, because it wasn’t easy. Because I was all alone and that’s how I grabbed on, I [can’t even] imagine having my son with me, I could fall or he could fall. Yes because each time how the train would move. “My God,” I would say, on one of these, I was very sleepy, if I sleep here, I had to conserve my mind, I would give therapy to myself there because if I feel asleep I would fall. If I fall asleep and something bad happens or if I’m careless I fall. And if I fell off, because I was in the middle, if I fell I would fall and that’s where I [die]. I begged God, and thank God that, but that train could run, run. And I was there hanging. Wow. (Celia)

Those travelling with their children or in groups that included small children experienced additional challenges with train travel. Making sure children got on and off the trains safely and did not fall off moving trains were of concern to mothers and fellow

travelers. María described riding the train with her three small children and making sure they didn't fall off, since there were not good handholds and the train was travelling at high velocity. She described her fellow travelers, all men, helping her keep the children from falling off the top of the train, "ellos hicieron una rueda, nos metieron a nosotros en medio, y ellos nos agarraban, nos agarramos de su ropa, y mis niños venían en el medio, así nos pudieron ayudar." (*"They would make a circle, we were in the middle and they would grab us, we would grab onto their clothes, and my kids were in the middle, that's how they helped us."*) She also described her son's fear of the train and trying to help him feel safe while riding:

Mi niño pequeño estaba llorando, y se me prendió y lloraba y decía, no, y yo le decía: Mi hijo, es Tomás, es el tren, Tomás, de la caricatura. Le decía, es Tomás. Y hasta hoy en día todavía le llamábamos Tomás. Yo trataba la manera de ponérselo como que era una aventura. Como que era una aventura que estábamos viviendo, pero, solo yo sabía el miedo que había dentro de mí. (María)

My little boy would cry and grab onto me and cry and say no. I would say to him, "My boy, it's Thomas the engine, Thomas, the cartoon." I would say, "it's Thomas." Even to this day we still call it Thomas. I would try to make it an adventure. Like it was an adventure we were living, but only I knew the fear inside of me. (Maria)

Celia also described trying to keep her son safe while atop the train. The coyote helped her son get on, and then Celia boarded the train but ended up in an unstable and dangerous position between two cars. The train was jerking from side to side, and she had difficulty hanging on:

Yo miraba a mi niño que lo tenía el coyote. Pero el niño quiera ir a donde yo estaba. Y el niño va de llorar. Yo miraba que en mi hasta sacaba los piezas del tren haciendo fuerza con el coyote para el irse donde yo estoy. Y yo le gritaba a él, "Esperase, que ya voy." Y yo sola en el otro vagón, pero no era ni vagón sino que en el orilla del vagón. Y donde más meto, el otro tren que venía. El otro tren que venía. El que iba

allí me grito, “Muchacha, quitase de allí. Se va a caer de allí” me dice. Pero yo no podía hacer otra cosa porque el tren iba corriendo. Gracias a Dios mío de me fuerzo aquí porque yo no podía. Si me concentro en el niño me come el tren. Sí. Me caigo. Si me concentra en el niño, tuve que cerrarme los ojos porque el tren corría bastante. Iba dando empujones. En un empujón de eso casi me zafó. Gracias me asusto bien mal. Dito a mi fuerzo lo que yo pude. Y yo le rogaba Dios que lo parara. Sí. Yo le rogaba a Dios que lo parara porque ya no sabía. Y nos fuimos y gracias a Dios, uf, pero corrió como kilómetros. Hasta que llegó el momento ya de que paro. Pues baje el tren, y alcance donde estaba mi hijo. Y luego, a cambiamos del vagón y el volvió a seguir a roncar pero gracias le iba más o menos cómodo. (Celia)

I saw that the coyote had my boy. But the boy wanted to be where I was and the boy was crying. I saw that the boy was forcibly putting his feet outside the train so that he could go to where I was. I would yell at him, “Wait, I’m coming now.” I was alone on the other cart, but it wasn’t even a cart it was the outer edge of the cart. And where else do I put the other train that was coming. The other train that was coming. The one who was on that one yelled at me, “Lady, get off there. You’re going to fall off of there” he said to me. But I couldn’t do anything because the train was moving. Thanks God who gave me strength because I couldn’t anymore. If I concentrated on the boy the train eats me. Yes, I fall. Yes if I concentrate on the boy, I had to close my eyes because the train was moving a lot. It kept pushing me. In one of those harsh movements I nearly fell off. Thankfully I was badly scared. I used the effort that I could and I begged God to stop [the train]. Yes. I begged God to stop it because I didn’t know anymore. And we left and thank God, uf, but it ran kilometers until the moment came when it stopped. I got off the train and caught up to where my boy was. And then, when we switched carts he went back to snoring and he was more or less comfortable. (Celia)

Celia was also travelling with another woman who had two small children. In one terrifying experience, the other woman’s two children, ages two and nine, were put on a moving train before the rest of the group could get on. The train continued along with the two children and no adults. It was moving too fast for any of the adults to get on. They had to take a later train and spent a desperate night waiting to locate the children. In the end, they found them safe at a stop further down the line.

Travelling by foot. In addition to train travel, women spoke in detail about the amount of walking that was required during this stage of the journey. Women and their

fellow travelers were often required to walk long distances without stopping to rest, and their feet and bodies frequently became sore and injured. Karla described the impact of travelling by foot:

Mis zapatos ya se me habían reventado, ya no servían. Y mi ropa, venía con un pantalón jeans, y las costuras del pantalón ya las tenía pegadas a mi piel. Ya las tenía pegadas aquí. Ya no podía caminar. Un muchacho venía descalzo porque sus zapatos ya no dio, ya no servían. (Karla)

My shoes were already broken, they no longer worked. And my clothes, I came with a pair of jeans, and the seams of the jeans were already stuck to my skin. I already had them stuck here and I couldn't walk. A young man was barefoot because his shoes gave out, they no longer worked. (Karla)

Hortensia talked about getting tired and wanting to stop and be left behind, “Caminamos toda esa noche, y cruzamos ríos, nos mojábamos y caminando, y ya no aguantaba. Yo dije, “váyanse, y déjenme aquí tirada. Ya no aguanto.” No me dejaron, me ayudaron bastante y me trajeron.” (*“We walked the entire night, and crossed rivers, we got wet and walked and I couldn't stand it. I said, “go away, leave me here stranded, I can't take it anymore.” They didn't leave me, they helped me out a lot and brought me.”*) Travelling by foot with children also presented difficulties, and fellow travelers often shared the responsibility of carrying small children.

Karla also described some of the unfortunate conditions they encountered while on foot. For example, her group had to walk through a sewage canal:

Para pasar a Roma tuvimos que pasar en la noche, dos puentes. Pero los puentes eran oscuros. Pasaba agua de cloaca. Y tuvimos que caminar encima de todo eso, y luego el olor. Tenias que apurarte, estaba bien lejos, bien largo. Hay gente que quiere regresar pero no puedes regresar. Porque decían que en tal hora iba correr el agua. Y saber que vas caminando sobre el popo. Pero hasta llegar al otro lado del puente,

llegamos y se hizo de día. Llegamos de día. Nos quitamos los zapatos y miramos a los alrededores donde lavarnos los pies. Veníamos llenos de todo eso. (Karla)

To pass to Roma we had to pass by night two bridges. But the bridges were dark. Water from the sewage would pass and we had to walk through all of that and then the smell. You had to hurry, it was very far, very long, there were people who wanted to go back but you couldn't go back. Because they would say the water would run at a certain hour and you knew you would be walking through poop until you get to the other side of the bridge. We arrived and it was daylight. We arrived in the day. We took off our shoes and looked around to see where we could wash our feet. We were full of all of that. (Karla)

Other types of travel. In addition to trains and walking, some women used buses, cars, and boats during their transit through Mexico into the U.S. Travelling by car was a less common mode of transportation. However, once on the U.S. side of the border, several women reported being carried in cars to safe houses or drop houses in Houston or San Antonio. Karla, for example, described riding in the foot of the passenger side of a Toyota Corolla, along with 17 other migrants. Interestingly, one woman, Belinda, did not travel by train or by foot. Instead, she described a harrowing journey by boat from Guatemala, north alongside Mexico:

Treinta personas, por diez horas, sin comer. Venían no más sentadas en unos neumáticos con su ropa encima del neumático. La lancha venía casi a 100 millas por hora. Aquella lancha brincaba, unos brincos que pegaba abajo. Cuando nos bajamos, no nos podíamos ni levantar, de tanto tiempo sentado. Se paraba no más un rato la lancha para echar gasolina, en medio del mar. Y ahí con el olor de la gasolina y el movimiento del agua, muchos hombres venían vomitando. Hasta que llegamos. Llegando teníamos que bajarnos rápido y meternos al monte, para que no nos fueran a agarrar ahí. (Belinda)

30 people, for 10 hours, without eating. We were sitting in some tires with our clothes on top of the tire. The raft was coming at almost 100 miles per hour. The other raft jumped, jumps that hit at the bottom. When we got off, we couldn't even get up from sitting down for so long. The raft would stop for a little bit to get more gasoline in the middle of the sea. And there with the smell of the gasoline and the movement of the

water many men were vomiting until we arrived. Once we arrived we had to get off quickly and go into the countryside so they wouldn't get us there. (Belinda)

Watching over children. In addition to the ways women described keeping children safe and fed and protecting them from the elements and dangerous train travel, women discussed other ways that they watched over children during their transit through Mexico. Several women made the journey to the U.S. with small children. Thelma's son was six, Celia's was four, and Sierra's daughter was only three at the time of their journey.

Women expressed great fear of being separated from their children, and their children shared these fears. When Natalia's daughter worried that her mother walked too slowly to keep up, Natalia comforted her that they would stay together no matter what happened:

Cómo mi niña era pequeña yo le decía "no te separes de mí", que si te pasa algo malo, tu vienes conmigo. Yo voy contigo, y me decía "mami pero tienes que caminar y tu no caminas rápido". Y yo le decía "no importa, si nos vamos a quedar nos quedamos las dos". (Natalia)

Since my daughter was little I would tell her, "don't separate from me." If something bad happens to me, you come with me. "I'll go with you," she would tell me, "but Mom, you have to walk, and you don't walk fast." I would say to her, "It doesn't matter, if I stay, we will both stay." (Natalia)

In particular, women were afraid that their children would be kidnapped or raped by coyotes or others encountered during the journey. Thelma, for example, was tortured by the idea of someone taking her 5-year-old child, "Fue algo que me torturaba, me torturaba mucho. Decía yo, Dios mío que no me roben al niño, que no me roben al niño." (*"It was something that tortured me, tortured me very much. I would say, "My God please don't let them take my son, don't let them take my son."*) Interestingly, Thelma ultimately did have to separate from her son. They were staying in Mexico, waiting for family members

to send more money so that they could continue their travels north. The family gathered enough money to send for her son first, and she sent him forward, waiting an anxious week before hearing that he had arrived safely in Houston.

Women also reported caring for unaccompanied migrant children, those who were travelling alone, without a parent or relative. María, for example, described travelling with unaccompanied 8-year old twins and with girls who were pregnant. Women often took on the responsibility of caring for children travelling alone. Sierra talked about caring for her own daughter and two other children:

Aparte de mi niña, iban otros dos niños que no sé de quién eran. Yo creo que los mandaban a traer sus mamás. Yo los venía cuidando, porque el Coyote los dejaba ahí. Yo les decía que se vinieran conmigo, yo los cuidaba. Yo les decía que eran mis niños, para que no les hicieran nada. (Sierra)

Apart from my daughter, there were two other children, I didn't know whose they were. I think their mothers sent for them. I was taking care of them because the coyote would leave them behind. I would tell them to come with me and that I would take care of them. I would say that they were my children, so they wouldn't do anything to them. (Sierra)

Peri-Migration: Crossing Borders

The act of crossing the border was highlighted in women's descriptions of their travel to the United States. While women crossed more than one political border – including the border between Mexico and Guatemala and/or the southern borders of Guatemala – the primary discussion centered on crossing the Rio Grande into Texas. In general, women described the crossing as an emotionally and physically frightening and dangerous experience:

Pero cuando uno ya llega al río tiene que pagar otra vez. Te quitan todo tu dinero para poder pasar el río y ellos mismos lo pasan. Pero si una persona no lleva ese dinero, ahí va a morir. Ellos mismos lo matan. Entonces es algo muy cruel la pasada ahí. Y ya después que pasas el río, ¡Qué atención! La migración del otro lado que es de Estados Unidos. Y hay mucho peligro: los animales, las serpientes. Cuando yo ya había pasado el río, tan pronto lo hube cruzado mis pies comenzaron a sangrar. (Beatriz)

But when you get to the river you have to pay again. They take all your money to cross the river and they themselves pass it. But if someone doesn't take money, [he] will die there. They kill [him] themselves. So it's something really cruel, the passage there. And after you cross the river What attention! The immigration police on the other side are from the United States. And there is a lot of danger: the animals, the snakes. When I had passed the river, as soon as I had passed it my feet started bleeding.

First, women described arriving in towns near the border of Mexico and Texas, such as Reynosa, and waiting to be crossed with the aide and protection of a coyote or guide. While women were the ones physically crossing the river, they talked about the crossing as something that happened to them – that as opposed to crossing the border, they were crossed over the border. They described the borders as controlled by multiple factions, and crossing required permission or assistance from a third party. Sometimes smugglers waited to find the right time to cross in order to avoid detection by immigration officials. Clara's group tried three times to cross, “No podíamos pasar, porque el río estaba demasiado fuerte, porque andaba migración al otro lado, y porque la balsa donde nos metieron se rompió, tuvimos que volver a dejar las tiras ahí y esperar. Tres intentos.” (“*We couldn't cross [the river] because [the current] was too strong [and] because border patrol was on the other side, and because the raft they put us on broke, we had to return to leave the pieces there and wait. Three tries.*”)

The process of waiting near the border, however, seemed to be more closely related to the common practice of extorting women during this vulnerable stage of migration. After getting all the way across Mexico and so close to the U.S., the coyotes and criminal gang networks working in the border areas worked together to take advantage and require women to pay in exchange for being crossed. Beatriz was charged 3,000 pesos, “Es mucho dinero. 3,000 pesos Mexicanos para que los Zeta nos dejen pasar esa área.” (*“It’s a lot of money, three thousand Mexican pesos so the Zetas would let us pass through the area.”*)

After waiting three days at the border, Clara asked the coyote to cross her that night, “me dijo, pero me tienes que pagar tanto, esta noche. Así que dile a tu familia que te mande dinero.” (*“He told me, “but you have to pay me this much tonight, so go and tell your family to send me the money.”*) She had managed to keep some money hidden in the waistline of her pants and paid outright. Despite having paid, Clara was left at the river, “Me dejó tirada a medio río, con dos chinitas. Me habían puesto niños para que los cuidara también ahí en el río. Me dejaron ahí con los dos niños.” (*“[The coyote] left me stranded in the middle of the river with two Asian women. They also left me two children to take care of in the river. They left me in the river with the two children.”*) After waiting all night to be crossed, Clara returned to town and encountered men who identified as being with the Gulf cartel. They agreed to cross her the following night.

Sandra described an exception to this experience. She found a man with a boat, who offered to cross her without charging her or demanding that she give him anything in exchange:

El del bote me dijo: “Lo voy a hacer por tu hija, porque veo que es bien contenta y amable”. Porque estuvo jugando con los niños de uno de ellos y me dijo: “Lo voy a hacer. Ven, súbete pues, te voy a ayudar”. Y no me anduvo diciendo: “Mire, me tiene que dar.” Gracias a Dios, no. (Sandra)

The one with the boat said to me, “I am going to do it for your daughter, because I see that she is really happy and kind.” Because he was playing with the children and one of them told me, “I’m going to do it. Come, get on, I’m going to help you.” And he wasn’t telling me, “Look, you have to give me...” Thank God, no. (Sandra)

The river itself presented the next challenge for women at this stage, as it is dangerous to cross when it is flowing quickly. Hortensia described the coyote giving her inflated trash bags to carry under each arm in order to stay afloat in the swollen river. Despite these precautions, she described people in her group being carried away by the river:

Pero a una muchacha y un muchacho, se le llevo el rio. La muchacha que venía conmigo, se la llevo el rio. Como era de noche, no, apareció solo ella. Ya después, cuando nosotros estábamos al otro lado del rio, apareció. La fueron a buscar y estaba con vida ella. Pero el otro señor, sí, se murió. Se lo arrastró y se murió. (Hortensia)

But there was a girl and guy who were taken by the river. The girl was with me and the river took her. It was nighttime and she didn’t come up. Later, when we were on the other side of the river, we found her. They had gone looking for her and she was still alive, but the other man, yes, he was dead. The current took him and he died. (Hortensia)

Clara talked about hearing others falling and shouting for help, “unas se caían, gritaban, querían auxilio.” (“some women would fall, yell, they wanted help.”) She herself was left alone in the river and faced an intense fear of drowning:

Yo iba llorando cruzando el río. El río es grandísimo. Y a medio camino yo iba del río que iba llorando, me dijo, “¿puedes nadar?” Y le dije, “un poco. ¿Por qué?” Me dijo “Yo aquí te voy a dejar a mediación del río.” Y le dije, “señor, no me puede dejar aquí.” Me dijo, “toma, esta es tu ropa, y aquí es la que llevas en tu bolsa, y mira como haces. Pero tú aquí, yo ya no puedo hacer nada más. Sólo hasta la mediación del río.” Y empecé a llorar, “no me puede dejar aquí,” le dije. Estaba muy profunda el agua. Me dijo, “yo no puedo hacer nada por ti aquí., porque ya está migración.” Entonces yo empecé a llorar y me quedé paralizada en el agua. Y esa agua estaba pero como hielo. Cuando él me soltó, porque me llevaba del brazo, cuando él me soltó, yo no alcancé a sentir nada abajo. Yo no sentía nada. Hasta que yo me sumergí para ver si yo alcanzaba tierra, y yo no alcanzaba tierra. Entonces empecé a nadar, y yo veía que toda la gente estaba llorando atrás, no querían pasar. Porque habían visto que me habían dejado, y otra gente que se la corría el agua, que iban las señoras, las de más edad, el agua se les llevaba para abajo. Y yo me quedé sumergida pero flotando. Como yo podía nadar, flotaba en el mismo puesto, pero el agua, la corriente, se las estaba llevando a ellas para allá. Yo dije, Dios mío, yo tengo que nadar y ver cómo hago para salir. Floté, nadé, empecé a agarrar unas barras de bambú, como unas barritas. Empecé a agarrarme de ahí, me herí todas las manos porque eran así como... Me herí. (Clara)

I was crying when I crossed the river. The river is huge. And halfway through I was in the river and I was crying, he said to me, “can you swim?” and I said, “a little, why?” He told me, “I’m going to leave you here in the middle of the river.” I said, “Sir, you can’t leave me here.” He said, “take your clothes and here is what you’re carrying in your bag and see how you get it done [yourself]. I can’t do anything more. Only until the middle of the river.” I started to cry, “you can’t leave me here,” I said. The water was very deep. He said, “I can’t do anything for you now, because of immigration.” I started to cry and I became paralyzed in the water. And that water was like ice. When he let me go, I couldn’t feel anything beneath me. I couldn’t feel anything. Until I submerged to see if I could reach the ground, and I didn’t reach the ground. So I started to swim, and I saw that everyone was crying behind me, they didn’t want to cross. Because they saw they had left me and that the water was taking other people, the women, the older ones, the water was taking them underneath. I stayed submerged, but floating. Because I could swim, I could float in the same place, but the water, the current, was taking them over there. I said, My God, I have to swim and find a way to get out of here. I floated, swam, I started grabbing some bamboo sticks, like little sticks. I started grabbing onto them. I hurt my hands because they were like... I hurt myself. (Clara)

Thelma also described a general sense of chaos and panic when she crossed the river:

Me pasaron, un señor me dijo, mira, alístate, te van a pasar del otro lado del río. Me pasaron, pero casi pierdo mi vida en el río. Cuando me acuerdo, es bien fuerte para mí. Porque es que casi muero ahí en la orilla del río. Y subí así, y vi una patrulla que decía PATROL, de las de migración, pero yo no las conocía, y yo, como me tocó subir así, casi me desmayaba porque era un muchacho el que me pasó. Entonces me decía, “Corra, corra,” y yo no podía correr, no podía correr. Él me decía, pero yo no entendía nada de lo que estaba pasando. Yo, más que todo, lo que quería era salvarme. Tenía que caminar. “Corra, corra,” me decía. Y mi corazón ya no me daba. Mi corazón ya no me daba porque era así, para arriba. pero tuve que, me mojé toda porque en la orilla, casi me voy en el agua. Y entonces, me paré abrí una botella con agua, la abrí y tomé. Y después me senté, ahí en un lugar, para que mi pecho, se calmara. (Thelma)

They crossed me, a man said, “Look, get ready, they’re going to pass you to the other side of the river.” They crossed me, but I almost lost my life in the river. When I remember, it’s very [difficult] for me because I nearly died there on the edge of the river. I came up like this, and I saw a patrol [car] that said PATROL, from the immigration, but I did not know them, and I, because I came up like this, I nearly fainted because it was a man who crossed me. So he said to me, “Run, run,” and I couldn’t run, no I couldn’t run. He was talking to me, but I didn’t understand anything that was happening. I, more than anything, wanted to save myself. I had to walk. “Run, run,” he would say and my heart couldn’t anymore. My heart couldn’t because it was like this, going up, but I had to. I got wet all over because on the edge I nearly fell into the water. And so, I got up, opened a bottle with water, I opened it and I drank. And then I sat down somewhere, so my chest would calm down. (Thelma)

To add to this the panic and fear of drowning, Celia reported that the coyotes stole their belongings amidst this chaos of crossing. She and her son discovered that the coyotes had taken advantage of the setting to rob her and her fellow travelers of their identification documents and any money or jewelry they carried.

Peri-Migration: Being Detained and Held Hostage

During the process of migration north, women described being held hostage or detained in various ways throughout the journey. Several women were held multiple times on either side of the border between Guatemala and Mexico, near the border between Mexico and Texas, and/or in their destination cities of Austin or Houston. Many also described being held in immigration detention facilities. These represent the various ways women's mobility and freedom are restricted and controlled during migration.

Clara, for example, described being held in a house soon after crossing from Guatemala into Mexico. The group of men and women she was travelling with had arrived tired and thirsty to a small town. Some men offered them water to drink, and they stopped to rest for a bit. When they were ready to continue on, the men stopped them, threatening them with knives and guns. They locked the women up in one room and began to beat the men outside. Clara was able to escape through a high window, injuring her legs on the way down, but the kidnappers attacked her. A fellow traveler distracted them, and she ran away.

The more prominent experiences described by women involved being held near the Mexico-Texas border prior to crossing. María described being closed up in a house for three days, waiting for the path to be clear for crossing. Others described being held by the criminal networks and drug cartels who control the immediate border area, particularly in Reynosa. These gangs take advantage of migrants during this vulnerable time. Clara talked about her experiences being held hostage prior to crossing into Texas.

Yo creo que eran de las mismas personas que trafican con seres humanos, porque tienen las conexiones y todo eso. Todos tatuados y me empezó a dar miedo. Dije, Dios mío, que va a pasar? Y ahí pasamos tres días. Aguantando hambre. Ellos decían, “no hagan bulla.” Nosotros teníamos que estar callados. A algunos les ponían bolsa en la boca para que no hicieran bulla. Cuando estaban drogados era peor. Yo pasé tres días ahí. En el último día yo vi que ellos agarraban a las mujeres que ellos querían, si les gustaban, si esta mujer la quiero, no la voy a pasar ahora. La voy a pasar entre tres días. Y no pasan tres días, si no que ocho días, quince días, o meses. (Clara)

I think it was the same people who traffic humans, because they had the connections and all of that. They were all tattooed and I started getting scared. I said, my God, “what’s going to happen to me?” And we spent three days there. Enduring hunger. They said, “don’t make noise.” We had to be quiet. They put bags on some people’s mouths so they wouldn’t make noise. When they were on drugs it was worse. I spent three days there. On the last day I saw they grabbed the women that they wanted, if they liked them, “yes I want this woman, I’m not going to cross her [to the other side] today. I’ll pass her within three days.” And it’s not three days, it’s eight days, fifteen days, or months. (Clara)

Women travelling with children were not immune these experiences of captivity.

María told of being held with her children during the summer in a crowded, abandoned house and begging her captors to periodically place the house’s one fan near her youngest child.

This process of being locked up with others was more often related to being held hostage for the purpose of extortion. In other words, the criminal networks threatened to hurt women or to not let them pass, extorting them in the process. After being locked up in houses, often abandoned properties, the gangs demanded money in order for women to be allowed to leave and to be helped to cross the border. Often, women were caught off guard, because they felt they had already paid a sufficient amount to the original coyote, to cover the entire trip to the U.S. Isabel talked about how the original cost multiplies

with these subsequent demands for money, “Te dicen cuando te vienes, cuando te agarran los coyotes, que te va a costar cinco mil dólares. Pero esos cinco mil dólares se vuelven tres veces más, cuatro veces más caro.” (*“They say when you come, when the coyotes get you, that it is going to cost you five thousand dollars, but those five thousand turn into three times that much, four times more expensive.”*) Many spent several days or weeks and had to ask their family members to send money before being released. Natalia recalled being held for 20 days trying to get enough money together to be let go, “Hable con mi hijo aquí. El no tenía mucho dinero. Le dije ‘habla con tu tío para que tu tío te ayude’ Habló él y le ayudó mi hermano y así fue que llegó el dinero.” (*“I spoke with my son here. He didn’t have a lot of money. I said, ‘talk to your uncle so that he can help you.’ He called and my brother helped him and that’s how the money arrived.”*) Alma described this process and the conditions and fears she endured while she waited for her release:

Estuvimos allí por mucho tiempo y no nos movían. Nosotros queríamos cruzar. Comenzaron a amenazarnos. El señor nos dio un teléfono y nos lo dejó allí para que le habláramos a los familiares porque ellos querían más dinero. Nos amenazaron que no podíamos salir, que estábamos rodeados de sicarios y que debíamos hablar a nuestros familiares porque querían que les mandaran más dinero. Nos dejaron en esa casa donde no había acceso a nada. No había cama. Solo parecía una casa por fuera y estaba cubierta pero por dentro no tenía nada. Dentro no había camas ni sillas, nada. El piso era puro polvo. No podíamos salir y si salíamos dijeron que nos iban a matar y todo eso. Nosotros teníamos gran miedo. (Alma)

We were there for a long time and they didn’t move us. We wanted to cross. They started to threaten us. The man gave us a telephone and left it there for us so we could call family members because they wanted more money. They threatened us that we couldn’t leave, that we were surrounded by hit men and that we had to call our family because they wanted them to send more money. They left us in that

house where we didn't have access to anything. There was no bed. It only looked like a house from the outside and it was covered, but on the inside it didn't have anything. Inside there weren't any beds or chairs, nothing. The floor was purely dirt. We couldn't go out. And if we did leave they said they would kill and all of that. We had great fear. (Alma)

Being held hostage and extorted also occurred on the US-side of the border, for example in drop houses or safe houses near the border in McAllen or in larger urban centers such as San Antonio, or Houston. Karla, for example, arrived in a drop house to find another 80 people inside. She described the way the hostage-takers demanded one price for being allowed to leave, only to raise the price later:

Cuando la gente quiere rescatar a su familia y le han dicho un precio. Cuando ya estábamos dijeron otro precio. Pidieron más dinero do que lo que habían tenido y cuando pidieron más dinero. Mi ex esposo dijo, "no tengo dinero, usted ya me habian dicho un precio" Eso fue un viernes, y no me soltaron hasta lunes. (Karla)

When people want to rescue their family, they have been told one price. When we were already there they said another price. They asked for more money than what they had asked for before. When they asked for more my ex-husband said to him, "I don't have money, you had told me a price." that was Friday, and they didn't let me go until Monday. (Karla)

After family members agreed to pay the price, Karla was taken to another location so that her captors could exchange her for the money:

El muchacho me sacó agarrada de la mano con otros dos muchachos. Me subió a una van, pero la van no tenía asientos, nos acostaran en la van. Y dijo, "vamos a ir, porque ahí vas para tu familiar." Y luego dió dos o tres vueltas, y dice aquí no hay nadie, si no, los matamos." Y a la segunda vuelta nos sentaron, y ya me dijo cual destes. Y dijo, "ese que está ahí." Y el otro muchacho también dijo "ese es mi hermano." Entregaron el dinero, y luego dieran la vuelta otra vez para contar el dinero, si estaba cabal. Y luego volvieron a regresar otra vez y ya nos entregaron. (Karla)

The young man took me out and grabbed me by the hand with two other men. He put me in a van, but the van didn't have seats. They laid us down in the van. And said, "We are going to take you to your family." Then he did two or three turns, and said, "There is no one here, if not we will kill you." And on the second turn he said to me, "which one of these is it?" And I said, "that one that is there." And the other man said "that's my brother." They handed over the money, and then made another block to count the money, it was all there. And then they came back and let us go. (Karla)

Women felt great fear of the danger that awaited them if they did not produce the money. Isabel described her experience being held near the border:

La gente que no daba dinero, la mandaban de regreso para México y la mataban. Se las entregaban a los Zetas o a los otros carteles, esa gente ya no la volvías a encontrar. A los familiares ya les habían sacado todo el dinero que podían y ya no los vuelves a encontrar. No te los mandan, ni nada y tú no puedes hablar con tu familia sola. La gente está ahí en frente. "Y les vas a decir solo esto, esto y esto", y ya te cortan. Sólo para que les digas que necesitan enviar el dinero, "y diles que estás bien y ya está". Te exigen que les des los nombres de tus familiares aquí, la ciudad donde viven y si es posible, la dirección completa y toda la información. Dicen: "Nosotros tenemos contacto en todos los Estados Unidos. Uno solo llama o mandan texto, 'búscame a esta persona.'" Eso es la cosa más horrible, y a veces uno lo hace por pura necesidad, porque se arriesga tu vida. (Isabel)

The people who didn't give money, they would send them back to Mexico and kill them. They would hand them over to the Zetas or the other cartels. You would never find those people again. They had already taken all the money they could from those families and you would never find them again. They don't send them, or anything and you can't talk to your family by yourself, the people are right there in front [of you]. And you are going to tell them only this, this, and this, and they cut you off. Only so you can tell them they need to send the money, "tell them you're fine and that's it." They demand you give the names of your family members here, the city where they live and if it's possible the complete address and all the information. They say, "We have contacts in the all the U.S. One only has to make a call or send a text, 'find me this person.'" That's the most horrible thing, and sometimes people do it out of pure necessity because you risk your life. (Isabel)

Some women found ways to escape captivity, without paying the prices of extortion. Isabel was able to argue her case and convince one hostage-taker that she had no way to pay the price, and after one month of captivity he agreed to let her go. Alma was held hostage in a house where a fellow hostage was hiding a mobile phone. They used it to call for help, and Mexican authorities came and let them out. In Natalia's case, the house where she was detained was raided by Mexican soldiers who were investigating drug trafficking. The soldiers released all the hostages, and Natalia remember everyone scattering to find safety.

Hostage-takers used isolated and remote locations, covered windows, and locked doors as a way to protect migrants from being discovered and apprehended by immigration officials. However, these strategies also served to control migrants, to extort money from them, and to take advantage of them in other ways. It was during this time of being detained that women experienced and/or witnessed sexual violence. Isabel, for example, felt helpless in the face of this imminent danger, “lo violan a uno y uno no puede decir nada. ¿Con quién se va a quejar? Está cerrada toda la casa. Sólo abren para meter personas, sólo con llave. Toda la gente en un cuartito encerrados.” (*“They rape you and you can't say anything. To whom are you going to complain? The entire house is locked. They only open to put people in, only with a key. All the people in a little room locked up.”*)

Elements of forced labor are woven throughout women's experiences of being held hostage. Several were forced to cook and clean for other hostages while they waited

for money to ensure their release. Others were trapped into human trafficking situations once in the U.S. and were held specifically for the purpose of sex and/or labor. Gilberta, for example, was held by a man in Austin, “Me encierra y pasan tres días, pasan cuatro días. Me dijo “yo no quiero dinero, yo quiero que tú seas mi mujer.” (*He locks me up and three days pass, four days pass. He says to me, “I don’t want money, I want you to be my woman.”*) Hortensia was held in a drop house in San Antonio and made to cook and clean for the groups of migrants smuggled in and out of the house. She was also forced to work as a housecleaner in other homes and release all her pay to her captors. Belinda was exploited in a Houston cantina that was part of a larger human trafficking ring ultimately raided and broken up by U.S. officials. She described a situation of debt bondage and being made to work for no pay while also being charged for food and shelter:

Trabajaba de martes a domingo. Nunca recibí paga, sino que nada más me daban unos tickets que yo se los tenía que dar al que nos trajo. Me apuntaban comida, renta, todo, todo me apuntaban. Llegar ahí y tener que acostumbrarse a tener que tomar o hacer cosas que nunca habíamos estado acostumbradas a hacer, fue bien difícil. (Belinda)

I worked Tuesday to Sunday. I never received payment. They only gave me some tickets that I had to give to the one that brought us. They would write down food, rent, everything, they would write everything down. Arriving and having to get used to take or do things that we have never been accustomed to doing was really difficult. (Belinda)

Some women experienced singular scenarios of being held hostage. However, others were held multiple times throughout their processes of migration. Isabel, for example, travelled smoothly north from Honduras until she arrived in Guatemala. There

began a series of captivity, extortion, rape, exploitation for sex and labor. She described this serial captivity that spanned three countries:

Pues, todo estuvo bien hasta que llegué a Guatemala. En Guatemala me dijeron alguien, en el autobús donde yo venía, que fuera donde una persona. Fui donde esa persona, y esa persona me tuvo secuestrada ahí en Tecún Umán. Yo no sé cómo estuve 5 días ahí encerrada. Sí me daban de comer, pero sólo una vez al día y en un descuido yo me salí de ahí, de esa casa donde estaba y me vine. Pedí ayuda a alguien más, a un señor y él me dijo: “Yo te llevo, te cruzo hasta Chiapas.” Ya no recuerdo bien porque fue algo muy triste, la verdad. Porque la persona que me ayudó me violó. Me violó en el camino, muchas veces y luego me dijo: “Vas a buscar a otra persona ahí en Chiapas”, y esa persona me llevó a otro, como un rancho, donde me explotaban sexualmente también y me ponían a que cocinara para toda la gente que trabajaba ahí y ahí estuve hasta que logré hablar con mi Hermana. Y entonces me pidieron mucho dinero, y mi hermana lo mandó directamente a ellos y no me soltaban, hasta que otro muchacho llegó ahí a esa casa y me dice: “Yo te puedo ayudar”. Pero igual fue violación tras violación, hasta que me pasaron acá al otro lado del río. Llegué ahí a Mission, a otra casa, de unos coyotes, igual. Igual me violaron, ahí tenían muchas drogas, tenían armas. Cuando llegué había una gente que tenía ya dos meses y otros tenían tres meses, y estaban extorsionando a las personas y no los entregaban. Entonces yo le dije que yo no podía más, que yo no tenía más dinero, yo no podía pedirle a nadie más, sólo era mi hermana la que me estaba ayudando. Entonces ellos se compadecieron, dijeron: “Tú eres buena persona y con todo lo que está pasando aquí”, y a la siguiente semana me dejaron ir porque yo ya tenía un mes. Yo cocinaba, limpiaba, ayudaba con todos y aparte los que eran los guías, ellos lo violan a uno. Y uno no puede decir nada, ¿con quién se va a quejar? Está cerrada toda la casa, sólo abren cuando van a entrar ellos o van a meter personas. Sólo abren esa puerta ellos, sólo con llave. Y ellos compran todo y tienen ahí, y toda la gente en un cuartito encerrados. Las mujeres las tienen a un lado, y los hombres, cuando querían a una mujer la iban a sacar del cuarto. Y para mí eso fue bien frustrante, porque yo me vine con la idea de que mis hijos tenían que estudiar y hacer cualquier cosa, salir adelante. Pero nunca se me pasó por la mente que me iban a pasar tantas cosas, nunca había sufrido todo eso. (Isabel)

Well, everything was fine until I got to Guatemala. In Guatemala someone in the bus told me I was to find some person. I went to that person, and that person kidnapped me there in Tecún Umán. I don't know how I was there five days locked up. They would give me [food] to eat, but only once a day. In one slip-up I got out of there, that house where I was at, and I left. I asked for help to someone else and he said to me, "I'll take you, I'll take you until Chiapas." I don't

remember exactly because it was something very sad, honestly. Because the people who helped me, raped me. He raped me on the road, many times and then he said to me: "Your going to looked for another person in Chiapas," and that person took me to another, like a ranch, where they also sexually exploited me and they would make me cook for everyone who worked there and I was there until I was able to speak with my sister. And then they asked me for a lot of money, and my sister sent it directly to them and they didn't let me go until another man got to the house and said, "I can help you." But it was the same, rape after rape, until they passed me here, to the other side of the river. I arrived there at Misson, another house, of some coyotes. Same [thing]. They raped me too. They had a lot of drugs and weapons. When I arrived there were some people who had been there two months others three months and they were blackmailing people and they weren't letting us go. So I said I couldn't do it anymore, I don't have any more money, I couldn't ask anyone else. It was only my sister who was helping me. So they took pity and said, " You're a good person and with everything that is happening here." And the following week they let me go because I had already been there a month. I cooked, cleaned, helped with everyone and apart from the ones who were the guides, they rape you. And you can't say anything. Who are you going to complain to? The entire house is locked, they only open it when they are coming in or to put more people inside. They're the only ones who open the door, only with a key. They buy everything and have everything there, all the people in one room locked up. They have the women on one side, and the men, when they want a woman they get her out of the room. And to me that was really frustrating, because I came with the idea that my children had to study and do anything else, get ahead. But never did it cross my mind that so many things would happen to me, I had never suffered all of that. (Isabel)

Peri-Migration: Immigration Apprehension, Detention & Deportation

In addition to being detained at the hands of coyotes, traffickers, and criminal gang networks, women migrating from Central America talked about what it was like to be apprehended and detained by immigration officials once they landed on U.S soil.

Women's initial experiences with and reactions to being apprehended by border patrol were somewhat varied – ranging from relief to be delivered from further insecurity and violence to extreme and well-grounded fear.

A few women described the initial moments of being apprehended by immigration officials as a moment of relief in finding some degree of safety from danger and violence. Anita, in particular, spoke at great length about wanting to be apprehended by migration after crossing, in order to escape the suffering and violence she had repeatedly experienced during her travels up through Mexico and the continued violence she anticipated ahead. In fact, at one point she told herself, “yo me voy a entregar a inmigracion porque yo ya no aguanto estar aquí ya llevo demasiado.” (*I'm going to turn myself in to immigration because I can't stand being here. I've had too much.*) She begged her guides to let her cross and hoped the helicopters circling overhead would find her group, but instead the guides beat her until she joined them in hiding. Anita was eventually apprehended by immigration and was grateful:

“Yo daba gracias a dios que inmigración me hubiera agarrado mientras que otras personas, a pesar de ir todas violadas, todas sucias, todas golpeadas, todas maltratadas, no querían que inmigración las agarrara. Ellas querían seguir. Yo ya no aguantaba. Yo ya no quería seguir. No aguantaba. Me dolía mi vientre. Me dolía todo mi cuerpo, de la cintura para abajo. Yo decía yo prefiero que me agarren. Yo le pedía a dios que me agarren, pero en cambio mis otras señoras ellas querían seguir a pesar de como fueron de su físico, como fueron todas maltratadas, ellas no querían ser agarradas. Pero ahí digo yo, sí, es bueno llegar acá así sin que me agarren, pero también digo yo tanto aguantar así no es bueno, para mí no fue, yo no vi esa opción así, mi opción era que me agarraran pues ya que, acá a seguir así que me estuviera haciendo cosas feas y así fue como yo llegue ahí. (Anita)

I gave thanks to God that immigration apprehended me while other people, in spite of all being raped, all dirty, all beat up, all mistreated, didn't want immigration to get

them. They wanted to keep going. I couldn't stand it anymore. I didn't want to go on. I could not put up with it. My belly hurt. My entire body hurt from the waist down. I said I would rather them get me. I asked God that they would get me, but on the other hand my other ladies wanted to keep on going despite how they were physically. They were all mistreated, they didn't want to get caught. Over there I would say it is good to get here without being caught, but I would also say enduring so much is not good, for me it wasn't. I didn't see that option like that. My option was to get caught, what could be worse? For me to keep doing ugly things? And that's how I got here. (Anita)

Thelma also expressed a sense of safety during her time in detention. While she described the negative conditions of detention, she also reflected on feeling secure from her husband's death threats:

A pesar de todo eso, estaba encerrada, pero yo me sentía, como más segura, pues. Sabía que no era tan fácil que los hombres que mandó el papá de mis hijos a matarme. Ya no me iban a atrapar ellos. En ese aspecto yo me sentía segura. Estaba encerrada, pero me sentía segura. (Thelma)

In spite of everything, I was locked up, but I felt a little safer. I knew it was not so easy for the men that the father of my children sent to kill me. They weren't going to trap me. In that aspect I felt safe. I was locked up but I felt safe. (Thelma)

Most women, however, reported feeling fear, panic, and despair upon apprehension by immigration. Lorena described the chaos she saw after she was apprehended and waiting in a patrol car,

Cuando me subieron al carro yo solo me quede viendo y ellos andaba un helicóptero y todo así, andaba un helicóptero y yo solo me quede viendo allá la luz grandota, y se miraba toda la gente corriendo y llegaron en caballo, con perros, en jeeps, un monton de carros que yo no sé de donde salieron. (Lorena)

When they put me in the car I kept staring and they were on a helicopter and everything like that, they were on a helicopter and I just stayed staring at the big light, and you could see all the people running and they arrived by horse, with dogs, in jeeps, a lot of cars that I didn't know where they came from. (Lorena)

Thelma was afraid of immigration authorities, “El miedo me tenía atrapada. Yo ni podía hablar. Yo les tenía miedo a los de migración.” (*“I was trapped in fear. I couldn’t speak. I was afraid of immigration.”*) Celia was overcome by panic and humiliation, because border patrol caught her emerging from the river while she was still naked. María was also afraid and felt trapped when border patrol focused their lights on her and her children. She cried as she described the setting and her reaction:

Aparecen unas luces bien grandes que nos enfocaron directamente y nosotros empezamos a temblar. Empezamos a temblar. Ya no sabíamos que hacer si correr, ahí nos quedamos, bueno no podíamos hacer nada por los niños porque vimos alrededor habían muchos árboles llenos de espina. No había escapatoria, nada. Eran dos cuatrimotos. Y se bajaron cuatro hombres, bien altos, rubios. Y nos dijeron, ‘no se asusten, somos de migración.’ Fue el peor miedo que sentí. (llorando) Demasiado no me podía contener. No podía parar de llorar. Y decía, aquí solo Dios decide por mí porque no hay otra cosa más que decidir. (María)

Large lights appeared and they shined directly at us, and we started to shake. We started to shake. We didn’t know what to do, to run? We stayed there. Well, we couldn’t do anything for the children because we saw there were many trees around us full of thorns. There was no escape, nothing. There were two four-wheelers, and four men got off, very tall, blond. And they said to us, “Don’t be scared we’re from immigration.” It was the worst fear I have felt. (crying) It was so much I couldn’t contain myself. I couldn’t stop crying. I said, “Only God decides for me here because there isn’t anything more to say. (Maria)

Many of the women’s fears during the initial encounter with border patrol and later in detention were related to their fears of being deported back to the violence or death threats they had escaped. Thelma described this vividly, “considerate que están con orden de deportación. Fue un golpe súper fuerte porque yo tenía mucho miedo. Mucho miedo. Yo me vine para salvar mi vida. Si me mandan para Honduras otra vez, voy a perder mi vida.” (*“Consider having an order for deportation. It was a super hard hit because I was*

really scared. Really scared. I came to save my life. If they send me to Honduras again, I'm going to lose my life.")

Furthermore, women were concerned that they would not have an opportunity to adequately explain their motivations for migrating and what may happen to them if they were deported. They thought immigration officials would not listen to them or would not believe them. María described this concern, “migración no me iba a entender. No iba a saber el motivo. No todos nos venimos por el mismo motivo.” (*“Immigration wasn’t going to understand me. They wouldn’t know my motives. We don’t all come with the same purpose.”*) Anita described her commitment to telling immigration the truth and providing as much information as possible, including information about police reports and witnesses back in El Salvador. After doing her part, she said it was up to them and to God if they believed her or not. Clara, on the other hand, related a different experience after being caught by border patrol. Her suffering was recognized and validated by the officials she encountered:

Cuando yo llegué, él de migración me agarró y me dijo, bienvenida a la tierra americana. Y le dije, “¿ya estoy en Estados Unidos?” Y me dijo, “sí.” Y le dije, “¿pero cómo?” Dijo, “te pases el río y ya estás aquí en Estados Unidos.” Cuando me dijo bienvenida, yo dije gracias a Dios, yo ya no voy a sufrir. Y le dije, “señor, ¿cuándo me mandan para acá?” Me dijo, “es todo un proceso que vamos a hacer. Tú no vas a salir ahora ni mañana.” Le dije, “¿cuándo?” “Depende de tu país donde vives. El que iba manejando, me preguntó, “¿cuánto tiempo tienes de haber salido?” Le dije “como tres meses.” Me dijo, “guau. ¿Y has sufrido?” Le dije, “muchísimo.” Entonces me dijo “¿por qué te viniste?” Le dije, “bueno, me despidieron de mi trabajo. Económicamente estábamos mal, ya nos empezaron a poner entre las maras. Está terrible,” pero le dije que yo nunca me imaginé de lo que iba a pasar en el camino. Quizás estaba más terrible de lo que me estaba pasando en mi país. Me dijo, “yo lo siento, yo sé que la gente de Centroamérica es la que más sufre.” (Clara)

When I arrived, the man from immigration grabbed me and said, "Welcome to America." And I said, "I'm in the U.S. already?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "But, how?" He said, "you crossed the river and now you are here in the United States." When he welcomed me, I gave thanks to God, I am not going to suffer anymore. And I said, "Sir, when will you send me along?" He said, "It's all a process we have to do. You're not going to get out today or tomorrow." I said, "When?" "It depends on which country you are from." The driver asked me, "How long have you been out?" I said, "About three months." He said, "Wow, and have you suffered?" I said, "A great deal." Then he said, "Why did you come?" I said, "Well, they fired me from work. Economically we were bad off, and they started putting us in with the maras. It was horrible." But I said to him that I never imagined what would happen on the road. Maybe it was more terrible than what was happening to me in my country. He said to me, "I'm sorry. I know the people from Central America suffer the most." (Clara)

Following the initial apprehension by border patrol, women were generally brought into a temporary detention facility for three or four days. Some were released after this period, and others were transferred to a longer-term detention facility where they remained for up to nine months. The temporary facilities were often referred to by women as "hieleras" or ice-boxes, because the temperature was kept very cold. Celia described the hielera, "Estaba bien helada hacia mucho frio. Me muero de una hipotermia ahí." ("I was freezing. It was really cold. I could have died of hypothermia there.") Anita was told that the temperature was kept low in order to clean the women of any viruses they may be carrying. Hortensia, on the other hand, interpreted the hielera as a punishment for having come to the U.S. She said she was put in a cold dark room, "frío como si fuera de hielo, como si está congelando a uno. Y no los atiendan, no los dicen nada, ni les dan para que uno se tapan ni nada, es como un castigo." ("Cold like ice, like

it was freezing you. And they don't attend to you, they don't say anything, or give you anything so you can cover yourself, it's like a punishment.”)

Regardless of the reason for the low temperature, women suffered in the cold. Thelma described her attempts to stay warm in the hielera, “habíamos como 4 mujeres ahí. Y tuvimos que pegarnos, así todas las mujeres con otra. Así como duermen los cerditos uno sobre otro.” (“*There were four women there. And we had to glue ourselves together, like this all the women with another. Just like piglets sleep one on top of the other.*”) For Anita, the cold temperature exacerbated the pain she already felt:

A mi eso me afectó, porque como yo andaba toda adolorida, a mi me ardía mucho, mucho con el frío. A mi me ardía mucho mis raspones y las rodillas y mucho mis partes. Y andaba la ropa era muy delgada. En esa parte yo sufría eso fue mi único sufrimiento ahí en inmigración que el cuarto estaba muy frío a mi me ardía mucho. (Anita)

That affected me, because I was in pain everywhere, it was burning me a lot, a lot with the cold. My scrapes were burning and my knees and a lot of my parts. And the clothes were very thin. At that point I suffered, that was my only suffering there in immigration the room was very cold and it hurt me a lot. (Anita)

Children, in particular suffered in the hieleras. Sandra described that the immigration officials took and threw out everything they carried with them, including her seven-year-old daughter's sweater. She felt lucky that her daughter was wearing two t-shirts, the second going unnoticed by immigration. In addition to the extreme cold of the hieleras, food was another primary concern. Celia was worried for her son, “sólo le da una tortillita á la gente. Me desesperé más por el niño porque el niño no estaba comiendo bien

allí. Solo llevaba maíz, unas cositas así que el niño ni que la comía.” (*“They only give one tortilla to the people. I was infuriated more for the boy because the boy was not eating well there. They only had corn, little things like that that the boy didn’t eat.”*)

Sleep was also difficult under these circumstances, as described by Lorena,

Uno tiene sueño pero no se duerme. Y el cuarto es totalmente cerrado, no hay ventanas. No tiene ni siquiera idea de qué hora es. No sientes que el tiempo pasa, sientes como... es bien feo, es muy desagradable porque miras y se mira oscuro en todos lados. Es feo. No sé cómo explicarlo pero estás en el cuarto encerrada y miras enfrente y nomás ves las computadoras y la luz. Y nomas eso, no se ve luz, día, anda. Es feo. Es frustrante. (Lorena)

You are sleepy but you don’t go to sleep. And the room is completely closed off, there are no windows. You have no idea what time it is. You can’t feel the time pass, you feel like... it’s really awful, it’s very unpleasant because you look and it’s darkness everywhere. It’s awful. I don’t know how to explain it but you are locked up in the room and you look towards the front and you can only see the computers and the light. And that’s it, you can’t see light, day, nothing. It’s awful. It’s frustrating. (Lorena)

Medical care seemed to be one area that women reported receiving basic care and attention to injuries from their travels. An extreme exception is Sandra, who had travelled to the U.S. in search of cancer treatment for her seven-year old daughter. She and her daughter were first detained in the hielera and then moved to the Karnes City facility. They were part of wave of women and children detained as families, beginning in the fall of 2014, which marked a return to the practice of family detention (a practice that litigation had previously ended in 2009). These families were initially denied bond as a group, and only through intensive media outcry were Sandra and her daughter released to proceed with their immigration claims from the community, where her daughter could receive treatment.

In describing the atmosphere of detention, women talked about feeling as if they were incarcerated in a prison or jail, rather than using words such as kidnapping or extortion (as they had encountered previously during their journeys). While women did not identify themselves as lawbreakers or criminals, these detentions carried a general sense of wrongdoing and a criminalization of their migration motivation. Hortensia stated, “es bien feo. Nunca había estado en una cárcel. Y por venirme para acá, estoy de presa.” (*“It’s really ugly. I had never been in a jail. And for coming over here, I am imprisoned.”*) Thelma described being treated as though she were an animal, “me llevaron amarrada de pies y manos como perrito. Así, como quien entrega una mascota a las personas encargadas de llevársela. Me llevaron en una van y, fue algo muy fuerte para mí en mi vida.” (*“They took me tied up by the feet and hands like a puppy. Like this, like how one hands over a pet to the people in charge of taking it. They took me in a van, and it was something very intense in my life.”*)

Furthermore, women reported feeling as though they had little power and limited information about what was to happen to them and whether or not they would be deported. In addition to lacking information about the process and rights, women reported feeling that they were not necessarily in a state of mind to cope well with the detention or deportation process. Hortensia remembered being told to sign her deportation papers, “me dijeron de que firmaron mi deportación, y yo lloraba. Como uno no sabe ni como... todo... no sabía yo nada. Estaba cerrada ya mi mente.” (*“They said to me they signed my*

deportation, and I cried. One doesn't even know how... everything... I didn't know anything. My mind was already closed.”)

Several women had indeed been deported and had later migrated again to the U.S. Others reported being released from detention. Clara was surprised to hear she was being let out, “me dijo, ‘vas a salir.’ Le dije, ‘¿pero para dónde?’ Me dijo, ‘para acá, para Estados Unidos.’ Le dije, ‘¿en serio?’” (“*He said to me, ‘you’re going to get out.’ I said, ‘But, to where?’ He said, ‘Here, to the U.S.’ I said, ‘Seriously?’*”) María also described being released and given an opportunity to argue her case in immigration court:

Chequearon todo mi record, y todo estaba limpio. Nunca tuve un problema aquí ni nada. Entonces, migración me dijo que me iban a dar una oportunidad que me iban a soltar aquí, que yo buscara una abogada para pelear mi caso, que pidiera asilo político y que buscara consejería, y que yo tenía que luchar, a ver hasta donde llegaba si lo podía lograr o no, y que cada año yo iba a ir a un chequeo en migración. Le dije que estaba bien, que yo iba a hacer todo lo que ellos me dijeran, que lo único que quería era que me dieran una oportunidad, yo solo pedía una oportunidad. Cuando llegue a la oficina donde me iban a hacer todo el papeleo ya para mandarme para acá, me dijo una señora: “bienvenida a américa,” me dijo “haga lo imposible para quedarse,” me dijo “inmigración no es mala, simplemente tiene un carácter fuerte porque hay muchas personas que nada más quieren pasar para acá y vienen, son asesinos, o portan droga, o diferentes casos.” (María)

“They looked over my record, and it was clean. I never had a problem here or anything. So immigration told me they would give me an opportunity, that they would let me go here, that I should look for a lawyer to fight my case, to ask for political asylum and to look for a counselor, and that I had to fight, to see where it would take me, if I could do it or not and each year I would have a check-in from immigration. I said that was okay, and I was going to do everything they told me to do, that the only thing I wanted was for them to give me an opportunity, I only asked for an opportunity. When I arrived to the office where they were going to do all the paperwork to send me over here, a lady told me: “Welcome to America,” she said, “do the impossible to stay,” she said, “immigration is not bad, they simply have a

tough character because there are a lot of people who simply want to cross over here and they come, the killers, or carry drugs, or different cases.” (Maria)

Post-Migration: Settling in the United States

In describing the process of migration, women also described their experiences getting settling and making a life in the United States. It is tempting to consider this period as being post-migration and being separate from the time and spatial contexts of migration. However, it is clear that both the leaving of the homeland and the complex processes of migrating are transnational experiences, in that they continue to impact the experience of settling in the U.S. and often also include episodes of return or circular migration.

In general, women carry a heavy burden during this time, compounded by the violence, poverty, and childhood trauma they experienced, the migration process itself, and then trying to keep children and household together on meager salary (if any) while also responding to the needs of family back home. They are pulled in multiple directions – trying to shift from instability to stability, from danger to safety – in a context of minimal or non-existent resources and support. This section will provide descriptions of four focal points described by women: adjusting immigration status, maintaining employment, navigating unmet needs, and finding emotional support and well-being.

While some women reported feeling a sense of safety from immediate harm, all women struggled to balance new and multiple demands. The painful awareness of this multi-faceted burden was difficult for some women to initially accept. Given high

expectations for life in the U.S. and a sense of relief that the risky mobile part of migration had come to an end, women described being surprised and alarmed to find that risks and suffering continued. Sierra said, “piensa uno que va a tener una vida mejor, pero le pasan muchas cosas a uno.” (*You think you’re going to have a better life, but so many things happen to you.*) Zara also experienced moments of regret after arriving at her destination and encountering continued interpersonal violence. At one point she told herself,

Yo decía: “Si voy a estar así de mal, mejor yo me hubiera quedado en mi país, porque mi país yo lo conozco”. Aquí yo estoy en un país que no es el mío, sin papeles, sin trabajar, sin apoyo de nadie. Yo no vengo a buscarme problemas ni a buscarle problemas a nadie, yo mejor me hubiera quedado en mi país, yo me quería regresar. (Zara)

I said, “If I’m going to be this bad off, I was better off staying in my country, because I know my country.” Here I’m in a country that is not my own, without papers, without work, without support from anyone. I did not come looking for problems or to find problems for others, I should have stayed in my country, I wanted to return. (Zara)

Clara described this period of adjustment and preparing herself for life in the US:

Yo quedé traumada psicológicamente. Pasé tres meses sin trabajar. Yo quería pasar solo durmiendo, llorando en la casa. Saber que mi hijo estaba lejos. Ya todo estaba perdido, ¿me entiende? Me hacía la misma pregunta, ¿valdrá la pena quedarme? Porque yo antes decía, ¿valdrá la pena seguir y llegar? Pero después ya estando aquí decía, ¿valdrá la pena llegar? Porque a mí me habían pintado un Estados Unidos que no era así. Porque yo iba a buscar a trabajo, y yo no encontraba. Porque no podía hablar inglés, porque no tenía papeles. Siempre me ponían eso. Le dije a mi hermana, “esto no es como yo pensé.” Yo pensé que yo sólo iba a venir a trabajar y a ganar una cantidad que yo pudiera pagar rápida, renta y pagar las cosas. (Clara)

I was psychologically traumatized. Three months passed without work. I spent the days only sleeping, crying at home. Knowing my son was far away. Everything

was lost. Do you understand? I would ask myself the same question. Is it worth it to stay? But before I would say, will it be worth it to keep going and arrive? But after, when I was already here I would say, will it be worth it getting here? Because they painted a United States that was not like this. Because I was going to look for work, and I could not find any. Because I could not speak English, because I didn't have papers. They would always put that on me. I told my sister, "this is not how I thought it was going to be." I thought I was just going to come and work and earn money quickly to pay rent and other things. (Clara)

Immigration status. Women's documentation and immigration status were varied. Some women were able to fairly easily gain status with a T visa given their experience with human trafficking. The T visa then opened access for women to gain a work permit and to subsequently apply for legal permanent residency and to bring children to the U.S. from their home countries. Others struggled through the immigration court system, searching for attorneys to take their cases, and gathering difficult-to-find evidence to bolster their claims. Regardless, women relied heavily on the services of low-cost immigration attorneys in order to gain status.

Still, several remained without legal documentation status at the time of the interview, leaving them without authorization to work in the U.S. These situations were plagued with difficulty getting information about possible immigration relief and confusion about rights and responsibilities with immigration court. Some women reported feeling confused about appearing in court and ultimately decided, in the absence of legal guidance from an attorney, to not attend their scheduled court dates, resulting in deportation orders. Celia made multiple attempts to find an attorney but had difficulty finding someone to take her case. When denied, she was confused if the denial of her

case was because they just didn't want to help her, or because she didn't have a good case.

Those with unresolved immigration cases listed various ways their status impacted their life. These included the ability to find stable and well-paid employment, the freedom to visit family in the home country and to bring children to the U.S., and the possibility of future deportation. Nonetheless, while the need for work authorization drove women's desire to gain legal immigration status, it did not always hinder them from maneuvering courageously in the world. Isabel, who remained undocumented at the time of the interview went to collect her children from an immigration detention center, after they had travelled to the U.S. as unaccompanied minors. The need to see her children overrode any fears she had of being apprehended and deported by officials at the detention center:

Me decía la gente: "Pero es con migración!" "No me importa" (risas) "Yo voy, yo quiero es que me entreguen mis hijos, y si me mandan pa' atrás, que me manden, pero ya los tengo", le dije. Yo me estaba muriendo porque estaban en México y sin saber de ellos. Pero yo dije: "Dios me va a guardar". Yo pongo siempre a mi Dios que me guarde, primero Dios que todo me va a salir bien, me los van a entregar y van a estar aquí y van a estar conmigo, y van a ir a la escuela. Me dijeron que habían como retenes, a veces había migración por esa calle, yendo para Corpus y dije yo: "No, pero yo tengo que ir, yo les voy a decir que yo me encontré mis hijos". (risas) "Y que si me pueden dar el ride llego más rápido. (risas) "Ay no, estás loca". "Estoy loca pero por mis hijos. No me pueden demandar y mis hijos se van a quedar ahí," decía yo. Yo creo que no, yo creo que tienen un corazón todavía esas personas. (Isabel)

The people would say to me, "But it's with immigration!" "I don't care." (laughter) "I'm going to, I want them to give me my kids, and if they send me back, let them send me, but at least I'll have them," I said. I was dying because they were in Mexico and I didn't know anything about them. But I said, "God is

going to protect me.” I always ask my God to protect me. Let it be God’s will that everything turns out good for me, they will give them to me and they’re going to be here and they will be with me and they will go to school. People told me there were checkpoints, and sometimes immigration was on that street going towards Corpus and I said, “No, but I have to go. I’m going to tell them I found my children.” (laughter) “And if they can give me a ride I can get there faster.” (laughter) “No, you’re crazy.” “I’m crazy but for my kids. They can’t sue me and leave my kids there,” I would say. I don’t think so, I think these people have hearts. (Isabel)

Sierra described the way her son worked around his status. He received a college scholarship to play American football, but had to decline it:

Como no tenía papeles, no le dieron nada. Estaba bien calificado, pero cuando le pidieron el seguro y los papeles, le dijeron que no, porque no era nacido acá. Y dicen que eso a él lo tumbó. Dice: “Pero al verla a usted, que usted se levanta, ¿usted cree que a mí también, no me da fuerzas?” Ahorita él está trabajando y se está pagando su estudio. (Sierra)

Because he didn’t have papers, they didn’t give him anything. He was well qualified, but when they asked for his social security and papers, they told him no, because he was not born here. They say that destroyed him. He says, “But looking at you, you get up, you think I don’t also have the strength?” Right now he is working and paying his studies. (Sierra)

Working hard. Women worked long, hard hours in various industries (primarily restaurants, hotels, housecleaning) in order to cover their bills and to provide for their children in the U.S. and/or in their home countries. Finding stable work with a living wage was a challenge reported by all women. Given low-wages, many women juggled more than one job at a time. Isabel, for example, worked one job from 6 pm to 7:30 am and then had to be at her second job at 8 am. While it was difficult, she continued:

Sentía que andaba caminando en el aire, pero yo daba rendimiento, yo seguía y seguía. A la hora del almuerzo me acostaba a dormir, me comía una ensalada o

algo, y ya. Me acostaba media hora a descansar. De ahí, otra vez con las pilas puestas y así fue mi vida, de un lado para otro. Me dicen: “Isabel, pero eso no es bonito”. “No, sí es bonito”, le digo yo. Hay que trabajar mucho. A veces lo que más me preocupa son los gastos del que está en Honduras, porque es muy caro. Con los niños aquí ahora, sí tengo menos gastos, pero igual a veces ellos necesitan ropa, zapatos y todo eso. Y con la renta, la comida... (Isabel)

I felt like I was walking on air, but I was still efficient. I kept going and going. At lunchtime I would lay down to sleep, I would eat a salad or something and that's it. I would lie down for half an hour to rest. From there, batteries charged again, and that was my life. From one place to the other. They said, “Isabel, but that's not nice.” “No, it is nice,” I would say. You have to work a lot. Sometimes what worries me the most are the expenses of the one who is in Honduras, because it's very expensive. With the kids here now, I do have fewer expenses, but it's still the same. They sometimes need clothes, shoes, and all of that. And with rent, food... (Isabel)

For some women, work served a purpose beyond that of meeting immediate financial needs and offered an avenue for emotional stability and empowerment. Clara talked about work helping her to feel more secure, “empecé a sentirme diferente, ya no como expuesta a andar en la calle” (“*I started feeling different, I was ready to quit being on the street.*”) and allowing her to gain a better sense of the city and her place in it. Others found satisfaction and pride in maintaining the same job over time, working up through the ranks of pay and responsibility.

Women working without a work permit were vulnerable to worker exploitation. In particular, women described housecleaning services as ripe contexts for wage abuses. Celia described her experiences working as a day laborer for housecleaning services:

Estoy buscando trabajo. Salen a veces a uno de limpiar casas. Quedó una señora mal conmigo la vez pasada por que no me pagó. Hice el trabajo gratis. Son trabajos así como que llevan a uno sólo para que uno trabaje y no te aseguran que van a estar, sino que esclavizan a uno, te meten presión en el trabajo y no te

pagan. Busca gente así que necesitan trabajo, como sabe que uno esta ilegal aquí, sólo utilizarla, hacerle la semana o hacerle el día y ya, ya no le hablan a uno. Cuando uno le llama, cortan la llamada. (Celia)

I'm looking for work. Sometimes cleaning houses comes up. A woman let me down last time because she didn't pay me. I did the job for free. There are jobs where they take you by yourself and they don't ensure that they're going to be there, they enslave you, they know you're illegally here, they put pressure on you at work and don't pay you. They look for people like this who need work, they know you're illegally here, only use us, do the week or do the day and that's it, they don't talk to you again. When you call them they don't answer. (Celia)

Beatriz also described being taken advantage of by an employer:

Fue a trabajar limpiando casas porque pagaban en efectivo, pero la señora me estaba explotando. Yo trabajaba desde las seis de la mañana hasta la tarde, hasta que terminábamos las casas y ella solo me daba \$42 dólares, \$50, o algo así. Y hacíamos cuatro o cinco casas. Cuando a ella le pagaban eran como \$150 o \$200 dólares por casa. Entonces yo decía, “cómo es posible que esta señora esté ganando todo esto y a mí solo me paga esto?” Entonces mejor me salí. Hay muchas personas aquí que abusan de tí en este país. (Beatriz)

I went to work cleaning houses because they would pay in cash, but the lady was exploiting me. I would work from six in the morning until the evening, until we would finish the houses and she would only give me \$42, \$50, or something like that. And we would do four or five houses. They would pay her about \$150 or \$200 per house. So I would say, “how is it possible that this lady is making all of this [money] and she only pays me this?” So I left. There are a lot of people who take advantage of you in this country. (Beatriz)

Regardless of immigration status, not all women felt ready to work immediately upon arriving in their destination, given the trauma and violence they had recently experienced during migration. Others were unemployed or described periods without work, given barriers including not speaking English, lacking childcare and transportation to and from work, and domestic violence. Zara spoke of the impact of domestic violence on her job, “tuve que presentarme a mi trabajo con mi cara golpeada, mi ojo verde, morado. Perdí

una semana de trabajar y después me dijo mi patrón que yo tenía que regresar al trabajo o sino me iban a correr.” (*“I had to show up to work with my face beat up, my eye was green, purple. I lost a week of work and then my boss told me I had to return to work if not they would fire me.”*) Sierra also talked about trying to maintain her composure and her job under similar circumstances:

En el trabajo yo tengo que andar sonriente, porque sino la gente dice: “Pues, ¿qué te pasó? ¿No dormiste bien anoche?” No, pues yo tengo que andar con una sonrisa. Yo sé como ando aquí adentro. Salgo del trabajo y me monto en el carro y se me salen mis lágrimas. (Sierra)

At work I have to be smiling, because if not the people say, “Well, what happened to you? Did you not sleep well?” No, I have to always smile. I know how I carry myself here inside. I leave work and get in my car and the tears come. (Sierra)

Navigating unmet needs. In addition to securing stable employment, women discussed how they navigated other needs, such as housing, mental health counseling, health care, children’s education. While women were often successful in identifying community services to meet their needs, they were not always eligible for these services or they cited other barriers to access – such as childcare, language barriers, bureaucracy, and discrimination. Hortensia, for example, tried to attend scheduled counseling sessions four times, but was turned away each time despite having an appointment. She had one or two children with her each time, with no other childcare options, and her counselor would not see her with children. Even reaching someone by phone can become problematic, as Beatriz describes, “te ponen en espera, y te dicen que marque tal número, que marque este otro número.” (*“The put you on hold, and they tell you to dial a number, then to dial another number.”*) Some described having a social worker or advocate to help smooth

the navigation of services as useful. Gilberta said, “cuando uno va solo no lo atiende rápido, pero cuando alguien va con uno, como una trabajadora social, es rápido cuando lo atienden a uno.” (*“When you go by yourself they don’t help you quickly, but when someone goes with you, like a social worker, they help you quickly.”*)

Celia described an example of how a seemingly small mistake can create great confusion and ultimately hinder access to much-needed services. She applied for a local health insurance program for the uninsured. When asked if she had a bank account, she mistakenly replied yes, “no sé de lo confundida que estaba traumada, un montón de cosas. No sé qué pasó. Eso confundió las cosas. Me pidieron un comprobante de banco, cosa que no tengo y nunca voy a tener.” (*“I was confused about a lot of things because I was traumatized. I don’t know what happened. That made things confusing. They asked me for a bank statement, things I don’t have and will never have.”*) Because Celia did not speak English and could not easily navigate the phone system for the health center, she could not secure a new appointment in order to explain her mistake. Consequently, she and her four-year-old son went without medical care.

Others found it difficult to reach out given their fears of deportation and the difficulty in talking to someone about sensitive, personal troubles. Gloria talked about contacting the domestic violence center for the first time:

Yo vi por la tele del centro de mujeres y vieron el numero entonces, entonces con miedo, con mucho miedo porque no tenía papeles, no tenía nada. Y pues hable y me dejaron una cita, y entonces yo no queria platicar de mi situación porque es muy dificil, yo solo platicaba de lo que me habia pasado en Honduras, pero de todo lo demás no quería platicar, porque no podía dormir tranquila, muchas pesadillas,

llorando todo el tiempo, sin dientes, porque me los arrancaron de muchos golpes que me daban. (Gloria)

I saw something on TV about the women's center and saw the number so, so with fear, with a lot of fear because I didn't have papers, I didn't have anything. And so I called and they gave me an appointment, and then I didn't want to speak about my situation because it was really difficult, I only talked about what had happened to me in Honduras, but I didn't want to speak about everything else, because I couldn't sleep restfully, a lot of nightmares, crying all the time, without teeth, because they knocked them out from the many beatings they would give me. (Gloria)

Finding safe and stable living arrangements was a particularly problematic task for women. Some women found themselves in a difficult cycle of unemployment and housing troubles. Without stable work, several were unable to access the housing assistance they needed. Several women described living temporarily in shelters available to survivors of violence or migrant women and children. While women were grateful for these options and some felt safe, they were anxious to find a more stable situation. They reported that communal living was difficult and uncomfortable and they often encountered arguments with other women related to the behavior, discipline, and supervision of their children. Others shared space with friends or family members and in time became uncomfortable living under others' conditions. Beatriz found herself suddenly without shelter after being kicked out by her roommate, "me sacaron de la casa a la una de la mañana me quedé en el frío, en la calle, en este país que no conocía nada, ni siquiera la tienda, porque nunca había salido a la calle a pasear." (*"They kicked me out of the house at one in the morning. I was in the cold, on the street, in this country where I didn't know anything, not even the store, because I had never left to go for a walk on the street."*)

Despite these barriers, women persisted in seeking what they and their children needed. This often required creativity and resourcefulness. Natalia for example, had 17 stitches in her face from a knife wound inflicted by an abusive partner. When it came time to have the stitches removed, she discovered that the low-cost health center would charge \$20 per stitch. She and her children took care of things themselves:

Yo en Guatemala estudié los primeros auxilios, y no tenía dinero ni mucho trabajo como estaba con mi rostro desfigurado. Y le fui a preguntar cuánto me cobraban. Me cobraban veinte por cada punto que me quitaban. Veinte dólares. Y digo que es demasiado dinero. Me dijo ¿sabés qué? Yo te voy a enseñar como se quitan y luego tu lo haces. Y mi hijo y mi hija, los dos, uno le alumbraba, y el otro miraba y le sacaba. Así me atendieron. (Natalia)

In Guatemala I studied first aid, I didn't have money or a lot of work with my disfigured face. I went and asked how much they would charge. They would charge twenty for each stitch they took out. Twenty dollars. I said it was too much money. I said, "You know what? I'm going to show you how to take them out and then you can do it." And my son and my daughter, both, one would hold the light, and the other would look and take it out. That's how they took care of me as a patient.

Emotional support and well-being. Despite challenges getting settled in the U.S., on top of past and ongoing violence, many women described feeling at times strong, supported, and safe. The breaking of the isolation and silence many women lived with represented the beginning of a new era. Women described feeling supported by individuals, groups, and spaces that were safe and without judgement. For some, this involved specific counselors or social workers who had been assigned them through a community organization. Gilberta said, “fue donde yo empecé a recapacitar,” (“it’s when I started to recover.”), and Anita said it made her feel like a strong and brave woman. For others, this strength was sparked by opportunities to be in community with other women who

had experienced similar violence. María described feeling safer and more aware of her rights, “yo he aprendido mucho. He aprendido a defenderme. He aprendido que yo tengo derecho a hablar. Yo tengo derecho a defenderme.” (*“I’ve learned a lot. I’ve learned to defend myself. I’ve learned I have the right to speak. I have the right to defend myself.”*) She found that her pain lessened each time she talked. Before finding this outlet, she said, “mi vida solo eran lágrimas tras lágrimas, dolor (sollozando), sentía que me estaba muriendo poco a poco.” (*“My life was just tears after tears, pain (sobbing), I felt I was dying little by little.”*) Zara also appreciated the opportunity to talk through her experiences in a setting of solidarity,

“de desahogarnos todo lo que pasa. Con nuestras vidas o algún sentimiento que uno ande, uno lo puede desahogar y eso me ayuda bastante. Uno también algo que tiene duda, por otra persona uno lo aclara, porque usted sabe que venimos diferentes tipos de personas, y a cada una nos pasan diferentes cosas y uno aprende de los demás. (Zara)

To let go of everything that happens to us. With our lives or some feeling that one may carry, one can let it go and that helps me a lot. Also, if you doubt something, you clarify with others, because you know we are all different types of people and different things happen to each of us, and one can learn from others.” (Zara)

Post Migration/Return Migration

It is important to recognize that women’s migration experiences may include more than one journey to the U.S. For example, among the women who participated in this study, two were deported back to their home countries and migrated a second time. Another woman elected to return to her home country, intending to remain there, until threats of violence again drove her back to the U.S.

Like Hortensia, whose story was described earlier in this chapter, Clara made a second trip to the U.S. after being deported back to her home country. Clara migrated from El Salvador, and after living in the U.S. for several years, and suffering both domestic and sexual violence, she was apprehended by ICE. She spent 8 months in detention and was then deported back to El Salvador. She made another trip to the U.S. in 2011, experiencing sexual violence along the way, in addition to being held hostage by criminal gangs. Immigration apprehended and detained her. She was given a date for her deportation, but was mysteriously released before the date and was monitored with an electronic bracelet for three months. Ultimately, Clara was able to adjust her status via VAWA.

Maria's return, on the other hand, was not due to deportation. She fled violence in Guatemala and came to the United States in 2008. She left her three children in Guatemala and promised them she would return within four years. She was raped and held hostage by the Zetas during the time of crossing into Texas, was extorted upon arrival to Houston, and experienced further sexual violence while living in Houston. In 2012, María made good on her commitment to her children and returned to Guatemala, leaving a committed partner in Houston. After being back in Guatemala a short while, violence within her family became severe, and she made the journey to the U.S. a second time. This time she brought her three children with her. Again the trip was difficult and included being held hostage by the Zetas at the border and spending time in ICE

detention. She ultimately received political asylum and planned to petition for her children and husband once receiving legal permanent residency.

Women who had made only a single trip to the U.S. continued to discuss both hopes and fears of returning to their home country. Many of these discussions were related to immigration status. Those without stable status feared that they would be deported and would face violence or economic desperation upon arriving in their homelands. Women with legal status looked forward to the day they would be able to travel back home, temporarily, to visit loved ones.

Others lived with mixed feelings about their situation and frequently considered whether they had made the right decision. Feelings of regret were not uncommon during the time of transit through Mexico, when women were often confronted with great physical danger, suffering, and the risk of sexual violence. Other women felt this sense of regret and desire to return home while they were detained in immigration centers. The conditions or duration of detention caused some women to contemplate signing their own deportation papers because they felt they could no longer endure being detained. Still others continued to struggle with the decision to return long after settling in the U.S. Clara told her sister,

Le dije, ‘me quiero ir para mi país. Yo me quiero ir y ya no más.’ Me dijo mi hermana, ‘pues si te vas a ir, pues empieza a ahorrar, mejor te vas. Ahorra algo. De agarrar algo de dinero y te vas.’ Le dije, ‘sí, porque yo ya no quiero estar.’ (Clara)

I said to her, “I want to go home. I want to go and that’s it.” My sister said, “well, if you’re going to go, start saving [money], you’ll leave better. Save some. Get some

*money and then you leave.” I told her, “Yes, because I don’t want to stay [here].”
(Clara)*

These experiences and considerations reveal the fluid and dynamic nature of the migration process. While it may appear linear or fixed at a given point in time, women’s experiences show otherwise when considered over time. These considerations are important in the following chapter’s analysis of the ways that violence, decision-making, survival, and motherhood operate in the context of the process of migration.

Chapter 7. Violence, Survival, and Mothering

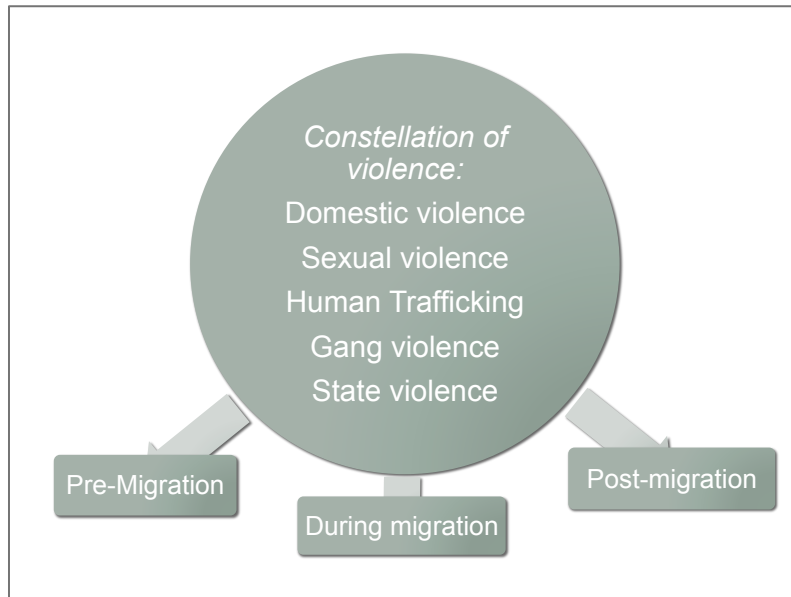
Building on the previous chapter's comprehensive description of the process of migration for Central American women migrating to the U.S., Chapter 7 offers a deeper level of analysis. This chapter presents findings related to four main concepts: 1) the constellation of violent acts experienced and witnessed by women during their processes of migration; 2) decision-making in the context of both migration and violence; 3) micro-strategies and collective strategies to survive and exert resistance during migration; and 4) women's roles as mothers and the dynamic and transnational nature of their mothering. The chapter is organized by these four sections:

- A. Constellation of Violence
- B. Decision-Making: Arriesgando Todo/Risking Everything
- C. Survival: Micro-Resistance, Support & Solidarity
- D. Transnational Mothering

A. Constellation of Violence

Throughout this process of migration, there exists a constellation of violence enacted upon women. Violence passes through both space and time. In other words, similar to how transnational frameworks help us understand that family relationships exist, persist, and evolve over time and across borders, so too does the web of violence experienced by women as well as women's efforts to protect their children from further violence.

Figure 3. Constellation of Violence Described by Central American Migrant Women.



Women described a wide array of violence over the course of time beginning with the motivation and preparation to migrate, up to the present. These were enacted on them by a host of different actors. These experiences occurred before, during, and after migration and coalesced around five major, and interrelated, categories - domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, gang violence, and state violence. Table 4 gives a sense of the number of women who had experienced discrete types of violence. Women did not talk about these experiences with violence along a continuum, which may presume rank order. Rather, these were complex acts of violence that were peppered and intertwined throughout their migration journeys - a constellation of violence.

Table 4. Types of Violence by During any Migration Stage.

Type of violence	Number of participants
Domestic violence	15
Sexual violence	13
Human trafficking	7
Gang violence	14
State violence	7

Typologies of Violence

First, it is useful to describe the types of violence women talked about. Overall, women experienced violence at the hands of intimate partners, loved ones, strangers and new acquaintances. It involved being insulted, controlled, threatened, held captive, and restricted from accessing resources, in addition to physical acts of physical and sexual violence. These forms of violence occurred at one or more stages of women’s migration processes.

Domestic violence. Women described violence in the context of a relationship to include physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional violence controlling or coercive behavior. Acts of physical violence included: being hit, kicked, cut, and choked. In terms of emotional violence and controlling behaviors, women described their partners threatening to kill them; acting jealous and telling her she is not faithful; calling her names and insulting her; threatening that if she leaves or seeks help, he will have her

killed by gangs or deported; isolating her from family and friends; not letting her work; and following her and other stalking behaviors.

Sexual violence. Women described a wide range of acts of sexual violence perpetrated by husbands, partners, family members, acquaintances, and strangers. These included forced sex, attempted rape, sexual harassment, being forced or coerced into prostitution, and others demanding sex in exchange for transportation.

Human trafficking & exploitation. Women described elements of human trafficking that conformed to the general idea of traffickers making a profit through the forced or coerced labor or sex of others. For migrating women, this included being held captive and made to work in cooking, cleaning, or the commercial sex industry. It also included situations of debt bondage, or being made to work until a debt, which continues to rise arbitrarily, is paid off. It also included other forms of exploitation, such as unpaid work, which may not fall into the legal realm of human trafficking. Those who experienced human trafficking described traffickers' control and coercion strategies, including isolation, threats of harm, and exposure to violence.

Gang violence. Women described a range of ways that gang violence impacted their lives and their migration experiences. These included extortion by gang members, being held hostage and made to pay for release, forced to pay for crossing borders, and general acts of physical and sexual violence in territories controlled by gangs (such as neighborhoods, train stations, and border crossings). Being aware of, or witnessing, acts of violence by gangs created a general climate of fear. Sierra stated, “Al lado de la casa

yo vi cuando mataron a un muchacho a puros machetazos y yo me quedé esa vez como traumada.” (*“Next to the house I saw when they killed a young man with only blows from a machete and I became traumatized.”*)

Gang violence mirrored domestic violence in the ways that criminal networks used threats of violence and controlling behavior (isolation, hostage-taking) as methods to control both women and men. These methods were effective in maintaining control over women, because sexual violence was intermittently used. These acts of violence served to demonstrate to women that gangs’ threats were legitimate, possible, and even likely.

State violence. Apprehension and detention by U.S. immigration officials was described by women as another form of power and control exerted over their actions and decisions. In other words, women described fear-inducing, coercive, and isolating aspects of their interactions with border patrol and immigration officials.

Access to Justice

Across all types of violence, women reported limited access to justice. For some women, attempts to contact police had resulted in no response or an unsatisfactory response. Others felt a lack of trust that criminal justice systems would respond in a helpful way. At most, police may hold an abusive partner for the night and then release him. Celia stated, “la policía viene detiene el hombre, a los 24 horas, se lo sacan. Allí no hay leyes. O si el hombre viene y les da dinero, ellos lo sacan.” (*“The police come and hold the man, at 24 hours, they let him go. There aren’t any laws there. Or if the man comes and he gives them money, they let him go.”*) Furthermore, women felt that

contacting police may lead to the exacerbation of ongoing violence or increased potential for danger. Women feared retaliation at the hands of an abuser or by gang members, often thought to be embedded within the police. Zara's daughter called the police in Houston after her mother was beaten by her partner, "pero la Policía no quiso hacer caso en nada, prácticamente me ignoraron. Y yo en frente, con ellos, que estaba derramando sangre y todo." (*"But the police didn't want to listen to anything, they practically ignored me. I was in front of them bleeding and everything."*) On the other hand, Beatriz's attempts to seek help from law enforcement in the U.S. were thwarted by other immigrants who tried to help her but refused to call police for fear of being deported themselves.

Interaction of Types of Violence

Within the categories of violence described above - domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, and gang violence – women experienced multiple episodes and periods of violence, often across multiple categories of violence. Almost every woman interviewed (n=17) described having experienced more than one type of violence. Ten women had experienced three or more types of violence, and five women had experienced violence in all four categories. Of the two types of violence that are primarily considered to be gender-based violence, domestic violence and sexual violence, 11 women reported having experienced both.

In addition to women's experiences including more than one type of violence, women also reported that these types of violence interacted with and played off one

another. For example, sexual violence serves as a distinct type of violence, in addition to playing a significant role in domestic violence, human trafficking, and gang violence. Within the context of a marriage or relationship, women described men's use of sexual violence in terms of forced sex or rape, as a strategy to maintain control over her. Women who were trafficked experienced sexual assault at the hands of traffickers or were forced into the commercial sex industry. In terms of the use of sexual violence within gang violence, both the threat of rape and acts of rape were used as tools of coercion in hostage and extortion situations. Gang members also used women's bodies at their disposal, as a convenient by product of other criminal acts.

Women also talked about the intersection of domestic violence and gang violence, particularly for those who experienced controlling and abusive relationships in communities that also endured gang control. Abusive partners used the existence and proximity of gang violence, along with reports of femicide, to bolster the threats they made to women. When men claimed they would have their partner killed, these threats were perceived as real and valid. Women believed the threats and were impacted by them, because they had witnessed gang violence being carried out in their communities. Alma stated, "Iba a amanecer en una bolsa de plástico, no sé dónde." (*"By sunrise I would be in a plastic bag, who knows where."*) Even if an abusive partner did not threaten to have someone kill her, women were aware that they may be more vulnerable to gang violence if they left an abusive relationship. In other words, the specter of gang violence served to strengthen partners' strategies of control.

Violence Across the Migration Process

In addition to experiencing multiple and interconnected acts of violence, women described having these experiences across the time and space of their migration processes. Table 5 illustrates the types of violence described by women during the three main phases of migration.

Table 5. Types of Violence by Migration Stage.

Stage of Migration	Type of violence	Number of participants
Pre-Migration	Domestic violence in home country	12
	Sexual violence in home country	4
	Gang violence in home country	10
Peri-Migration	Sexual violence during travel	9
	Gang violence during travel	14
	Human trafficking	7
Post-Migration	Detention	7
	Domestic violence in US	7
	Sexual violence in US	3

Unfortunately, women who experienced violence prior to migrating, and who often described this pre-migration violence as a motivating factor in their migration decision, were not immune to subsequent acts of violence. Of the 16 women who experienced some type of pre-migration violence, 14 women also experienced violence

during or after migration. Of the 12 women who experienced domestic violence in home country, 10 also experienced another type of violence later during migration. Table 6 shows the number of women who experienced violence during each phase of migration, in addition to the numbers of women who reported violence during more than one phase of migration (n=13) or during every phase of migration (n=7).

Table 6. Migration Stages with Experiences of Violence.

Stage of Migration	Number of women who experienced violence
Pre-migration	16
Peri-migration	14
Post-migration	9
More than one stage of migration	13
Every stage of migration	7

Pre-migration violence. Women described violence against women in their home countries as a normalized part of life, supported by patriarchal gender norms and kept in place by socialization. María, for example, experienced multiple abusive relationships prior to migrating. She described having grown up believing that she did not have the right to protect her body from the men in her life, rather that it was for their use and pleasure,

Para mí era normal que una persona me violara o que me tocara, porque mi familia me dijo a mí que eso era muy normal, que nosotras las mujeres no

teníamos derechos a defendernos, porque los hombres eran los que tenían derecho. Yo traía un pasado muy frustrante de violación, de acosos por mi propia familia y sentía que eso era normal. (María)

For me it was normal for someone to rape me or touch me because in my family taught me it was very normal, that we as women didn't have a right to defend ourselves because the men were the ones who had the right. I was bringing a very frustrating past full of rape, harassment from my own family and I felt it was normal. (Maria)

Related to the notion of normalized violence against women, the idea of general impunity was described by women as an element in the violence they experienced in their home countries. In addition to the justice system not operating, women expressed a sense that the general public takes no action. Isabel described her perceptions of this situation in Honduras,

Allá en Honduras se vive una violencia. A las mujeres les golpean, les cortan la cara, lo que sea y el hombre sólo puede estar un día en la cárcel y ya está. Pueden caer muertas, y matan las mujeres y nadie hace nada. (Isabel)

Over in Honduras you live a certain type of violence. Women get beat, their faces cut, everything and the man can only be in jail for a day and that's it. [Women] can drop dead, they kill the women and no one does anything. (Isabel)

Both the normalization and climate of impunity created a sense of inescapability. In other words, women described feeling that there was no exit from violence or no way to find safety for themselves and their children. These feelings were aggravated by women's economic situation. That is, due to both the economic control abusive partners maintained and the general levels of poverty in their home countries, migrating to escape domestic violence was intertwined with the search for better economic stability. Hortensia, for example, left an abusive relationship and ended up in a position of not

being able to make ends meet, so her motivation to migration was economically-motivated on the surface, but with roots in domestic violence.

For some women, relationships involving domestic violence were so intense and lethal, that women feared for their lives if they remained in their home countries. Celia described not wanting to migrate but feeling that she had no other option,

Nunca lo planifiqué, nunca pensé en llegar aquí. Fue simplemente la desesperación, de tener a una persona que me estaba hostigando a pesar de que yo ya me había dejado con él, y él me seguía y me intentó matar, con una almohada casi me ahorca. (Celia)

I never planned it, I never thought about getting here. It was simply out of desperation, to have someone who was harassing me despite the fact I had already left him and he would follow me and he tried to kill me, with a pillow he nearly suffocated me. (Celia)

Peri-migration violence. Violence experienced during migration was primarily sexual violence and occurred while women were held hostage for the purpose of extortion or were crossing of the US-Mexico border into Texas.

Of the 19 women interviewed, 14 were held hostage at least one time during their migration and six were held in more than one hostage situation. These occurred near the border between Guatemala and Mexico and more commonly on both sides of the US-Mexico border or in the destination city (in and around Reynosa, McAllen, San Antonio, Houston, and Austin).

Much of this involved forced labor and sexual assault in the context of a hostage situation, when women were being held and extorted by gangs, smugglers, and

traffickers. As noted earlier, for many women these situations occurred multiple times, in different locations. Anita spoke of the horror in being raped by smugglers and hostage-takers, “eso es bien feo, que uno tiene que pagar para que lo esten violando, para que te destrozen la vida, porque es algo que nunca se va a olvidar.” (*“It’s really ugly, that you have to pay so they rape you, so they can destroy your life, because it is something you are never going to forget.”*) María talked about being taken advantage of while she was ill, “Estaba en un cuarto encerrada cuando llegó un coyote salvadoreño y el me violó, y me dijo que no dijera nada. Yo estaba tan débil. No sabía realmente lo que estaba pasando, y nadie se dio cuenta.” (*“I was in a locked room when a Salvadorian coyote came and he raped me, and he told me not to say anything. I was so weak. I really didn’t know what was happening and no one noticed.”*) Sexual violence was also a risk for women outside the context of being held hostage. Beatriz, for example, suffered at the hands of her coyote. What began as a voluntary journey to seek a better life for her children devolved into a forced march, “Él me traía a la fuerza. Ahí fue dónde yo me embaracé de la niña pequeña. Él me agarraba del pelo, me arrastraba por todo el camino, y yo le decía, “por favor déjame ir.” (*He took me by force, that’s where I became pregnant with the little one. He would grab me by the hair, drag me the entire way, and I would say, “Please let me go.”*) Isabel also described being hurt by someone who helped her during migration, “fue algo muy triste, porque la persona que me ayudó me violó.” (*“It was very sad because the person who helped me raped me.”*)

The process of crossing the river also presented risks of sexual violence, in addition to the physical danger involved in crossing described in the earlier section. Women described being afraid of and threatened with rape on the shores the Rio Grande. Gilberta spoke of the threats of the coyotes:

Cuando yo crucé los coyotes en el camino son muy groseros, le gritan a uno y que si no te vas a dejar te voy a matar, y que los hombres le dicen a uno te vamos a violar, te vamos a hacer esto, y uno viene con miedo. (Gilberta)

When I crossed, the coyotes on the road were very crude. They would yell at you and [say] if you are not going to let yourself [be raped] I will kill you, and the men say to you that they will rape you, we will do this to you and you come fearful. (Gilberta)

Women also described the reality of witnessing sexual violence against other women and girls. Included in these recollections was a painful sense of impotence in not being able to do anything about it.

Oía que otros de los mismos que habían pasado, pero los mismos hombres, estaban violando a las muchachas ahí, al otro lado del río. Pero cuando ya las violaban las tiraban de regreso al río. Y empezaban a gritar ellas, ‘ayúdenme, me acaban de violar, o estoy herida’. Y uno tenía que caminar. Son cosas que me tocó ver, hasta que violaran ahí mismo en las casas. Y también violar en los trenes. Venían haciendo, ahí en frente de uno y todo. Y yo sin poder hacer nada. No podía hacer nada, ni quejarse, porque es terrible. (Clara)

I heard that some of the same men who had crossed, but the same men, were raping the women on the other side of the river. But when they had raped them they would throw them back into the river and the women would start yelling, help me, they just raped me, or I'm hurt. And you had to walk [away]. Those are some of the things that I got to see, they even raped in the houses and raped on the trains. They did it in front of you and everything. And I couldn't do anything. I couldn't do anything, not even complain because it's terrible. (Clara).

Anita also spoke of the sense of helplessness in witnessing other women being sexually assaulted:

Una muchacha que la violaron a ella la dejaron tirada, porque ella estaba muy débil y ella no podía caminar, ella se quedo ahí, y entonces caminando mucho, mucho, mucho y pues uno no le podía ayudar porque ya ellos le pegaban a uno. (Anita)

There was one women who was raped and they left her stranded because she was too weak and she couldn't walk, she stayed there, so we walked a lot, a lot, a lot, and well one couldn't help because they would hit you. (Anita).

While being detained by U.S. immigration officials, Lorena was given a pregnancy exam. While she did not experience sexual violence during her journey, she described the reactions of other women detained with her,

Las muchachas ahí llore y llore porque estaban embarazadas y no venían embarazadas. Es traumante. Porque aparte de que pasa esas penas en el camino todavía te queda un recuerdo para toda tu vida. (llanto) Gracias a Dios yo no, pero es difícil. Hubo como dos o tres muchachas que estaban embarazadas y empezaron a llorar, y llorar. No sabían antes que estaban embarazadas. Es algo como el regalo del camino. ¿Sí me entiende? Casi la mayoría de muchachas que vienen llegando y tienen sus hijos aquí fueron violadas en el camino y el bebé es consecuencia del camino. (Lorena)

There were young women crying because they were pregnant but they hadn't come pregnant. It's traumatizing. Because apart from the difficult things that happen on the road you now have a souvenir for the rest of your life. (crying). Thank God I don't, but it is difficult. There were two or three young women who were pregnant and started crying and crying. They didn't know they were pregnant before, it is a gift from the road. Do you understand me? Almost the majority of the women who get here and have their kids here were raped on the road and the baby is a consequence of the trip. (Lorena)

Another common element described by women as they told of crossing the Rio Grande involved having to undress. Women spoke of their indignation and humiliation when coyotes told them they had to disrobe in order to cross the river. Coyotes instructed them to put their clothes in a bag so that it would be dry when they came out on the other side of the river. Even though women resisted these orders, the atmosphere of the crossing was one of urgency and rushing, and they were at the mercy of their guides.

Clara described crying and arguing with the coyote, but he told her she didn't have time to think about it. She noticed that all the other travelers were undressing, even elderly women, so she complied. Celia also resisted taking all of her clothes off and added that she was groped by the coyotes during these moments:

Cuando llegamos a la orilla del rio empezó el cauce. Okay Fue donde yo perdí todos mis documentos porque me decían quítate el brasierre. Quitense toda la ropa. Quitense el pantalón. Quitense todo. Tiene que cruzar desnudo como que Dios nos trajo en mundo. Y, yo, que raro es le digo yo. Qué raro que me van hacer estos hombres si nos quieren desnudamos las otras mujeres como nos vamos al cruzar el rio desnudas. Yo no quise. Yo no quise quitarme el brassiere. Y él dijo, "Quitase lo, si no, no va cruzar". Grito. Vine yo obviamente tuve que quitar la y que cuando me voy quitando me van agarrando así el pecho. Ni maíz, entre en pánico. Y él me quería que me quitar el pantalón, pero el otro ya estaba, "No, no, no." La quiere quédense así. Y una cruzo en calzón, sin calzones, pero querían como tocar a uno. (Celia)

When we got to the river bank is when the chaos began. Okay, it was where I lost all my documents because they said that I had to take off my bra. Take off all your clothes. Take of the pants. Take everything off. You have to cross naked, just like how God brought you to this world. And, I thought how weird, I'm telling you. How waird, what are these men going to do to me if they want us naked. The other women wondered how are we going to cross the river naked. I didn't want to. I didn't want to take off my bra. And he said, "Take it off, if not you won't cross." He yelled. I obviously had to take it off, and as I'm taking it off they start grabbing my chest. No way, I started to panic. And he wanted me to take off my pants but the other was saying, "No, no, no. If you want stay as you are." One crossed in her underwear, without underwear, but they wanted to touch you. (Celia)

The emotional and physical pain of these experiences with sexual violence remained with women. Isabel said, "Me siento sucia por tantas cosas que pasaron de Guatemala a aquí." ("I feel dirty from all the things that happened from Guatemala to here.") Anita described her first opportunity to bathe,

Cuando a uno lo violan, uno no se baña, echa un olor insoportable, y uno solo se da asco, y luego te mandan a bañar y pues lo que no me gusta es que ellos lo ven a uno como que si uno se deja de su gusto a hacer esas cosas, o sea, usted se está bañando

es un dolor bien horrible, te arde todo, ni cuando uno está estético no le duele tanto su parte del cuerpo, como cuando te violan y luego cuando tu te bañas pues quizás en un momento cuando uno anda frente al cuerpo no se siente, pero ya luego que tu te bañas y te cae el agua y el jabón, y luego te sale así mucha sangre, eso es horrible. Ahí te empieza a arder todo, a doler todo y pues tu dices, te duele mucho el vientre, y luego así vas. (Anita)

“When you get raped, you don’t shower, there’s a unbearable smell, and you’re disgusted, and then they send you to shower and what I didn’t like was that they would watch you as if you let these things happen to please them, I mean, when you shower it is horribly painful, everything burns. When they rape you and later you shower and the water and soap fall on you and then you start bleeding a lot, it’s horrible. That’s when everything starts to burn, everything hurts and you say your belly hurts a lot and that’s how you go. (Anita)

Post-migration violence. Violence experienced after settling in the United States included domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking.

Seven women reported domestic violence after settling in the United States. Four of these women had also experienced domestic violence in their home countries, although at the hands of different partners. Karla, on the other hand, left Honduras for fear of gang violence and extortion. She and her husband travelled separately to the U.S. but reunited in Houston. While she did not describe their relationship as abusive or violent before migrating, it changed after settling in the U.S. He became increasingly jealous and angry, “él empezó a golpearme. Cada vez que se enojaba, me agarraba del cuello, me asfixiaba.” (“He started hitting me. Every time he would get mad, he would grab me by the neck, he would choke me.”)

Similar to the experiences in home countries, women in the U.S. were socially isolated by their partners and felt afraid to ask for help or felt undeserving of help. Zara described her partner isolating her from friends and family, “él me alejó de muchas

amistades. Hoy no tengo amigas, no tengo a nadie. Él me alejó rotundamente de todas las personas. Él quería que yo solo pasara encerrada con él.” (*“He alienated me from many friendships. I don’t have any friends today, I don’t have anyone. He absolutely took me away from everyone. He wanted me to be locked away with him.”*) She also lost days at work, due to the beatings. While Zara’s partner was ultimately incarcerated on charges of family violence, she was left with tremendous emotional and financial scars, “Yo me sentía depresiva, yo me quería matar, por todo lo que él me había hecho. Me dejó desnivelada económicamente, me dejó mal en muchos aspectos.” (*“I felt depressed, I wanted to kill myself, because of everything he had done. He left me economically unbalanced, He left bad in many ways.”*)

Violence in the United States went beyond the context of domestic violence. For example, María and Clara were sexually assaulted by strangers after settling in Houston. Others were held by individual smugglers or larger trafficking rings, and at least five experienced something that falls under the definition of human trafficking. Gilberta described an experience with a smuggler, “Me encierra y pasan tres días, pasan cuatro días. Le digo “yo quiero irme a trabajar, quiero pagarte el dinero que tú me prestaste.” Me dijo “yo no quiero dinero, yo quiero que tú seas mi mujer.” (*“He locked me up, three days passed, four days passed. I said, ‘I want to go to work, I want to pay you back for the money you let me borrow.’ He said to me, ‘I don’t want money, I want you to be my woman.”*) Gloria and Belinda were part of larger human trafficking schemes in Houston. Gloria described arriving in Houston,

Cuando llegamos aquí nos amarraban de las manos y de los pies y un pañuelo en la boca y nos tiraban a una camioneta como una pelota. Cuando llegamos a una casa, nos compraban una ropa y nos obligaban a que nos vistieramos y traían una señora que los peinara y los pintara. Y nos obligaban a cosas que no queríamos. Y eso fue duro para mi. Pues mis hijos son de todo eso. Los tres hijos de aquí fueron del abuso. (Gloria)

When we got here they tied our hands and feet up, a handkerchief in our mouths and they threw us on a truck like a ball. When we got to a house, they bought us clothes and they made us put it on and there was a woman who brushed our hair and did our make-up. And they made us do things we didn't want to do. That was difficult for me. My children are from all of that, the three children here are from the abuse. (Gloria)

B. Decision-Making: Arriesgando Todo/Risking Everything

The reasoning and motivation to migrate to the U.S. ranged from the frantic escape of life-threatening encounters, to a less hurried consideration of economic needs. For women who had survived violence at the hands of a partner or gangs, their fears of future violence provided strong and urgent motivation to leave their home countries and seek safety in the U.S. These were considered to be desperate situations with lethal consequences, and women felt that their choices were limited. They perceived a single option – leaving the country to save their own life and/or their children's lives. For example, Sandra said, “la decisión de venirme fue por lo que estaba pasando, y tuve que tomarla bien, arriesgando todo.” (*“The decision to come was because of what was happening and I had to take it, risking everything.”*) These were described as spontaneous decisions made in desperation and with no, or very little, planning or preparation. Some women also considered economic hardship, lack of work, and their inability to put food on the table to also be urgent decisions of life or death.

Others described their migration decisions to be related to a more general escape from economic hardship, in order to provide better educational opportunities for their children and to support family back home. As mentioned earlier, economic hardship was sometimes connected to women's experiences in abusive relationships and a sense of not being able to provide for their families within that relationship or on their own, outside of that relationship.

In general, women described a sense of not being able to take it anymore, of coming to their limit of suffering, and of being compelled out of desperation. Nonetheless, women described an inherent sense of hope or belief that something different, and possibly something better, was possible through migration.

Consulting Others

While decisions to migrate were often urgently made, they were not always made in isolation from family and friends. Rather, women were often advised or encouraged to leave by family members or others who had witnessed or become aware of the violence. Gilberta's employer witnessed the life-threatening abuse she suffered and urged her to leave, "Me dice, 'Gilberta usted necesita irse de Guatemala. De aquí donde está necesita irse, muy lejos porque el hombre la va a matar a usted y a sus dos hijos.'" (*"She said to me, 'Gilberta you have to leave Guatemala. You need leave here, very far away because the man is going to kill you and your two children.'*") A psychologist, for example, told Sandra to do everything possible to get out, "me dijo que hiciera lo posible por salirme."

(“*She told me to do everything possible to get out.*”) In Celia’s case, a friend she had confided in via Facebook encouraged her to leave and even helped her pay a smuggler,

Me dice él a mí: “No sé qué tanto aguantas. Mejor vos te perdés, porque ese hombre está hecho oriata y te puede joder a vos, ya no le importa nada, caer preso, a él no le importa nada. Lo que tenés que hacer es salvarte la vida tú y tu hijo”, me dice. “Perdete de aquí de Honduras. No sé por que tú no te arriesgas y te vas, en vez de estar viviendo ahí con amenazas y con miedo, tú no puedes salir por que nunca se sabe que este hombre te esta esperando otra vez.” (Celia)

I was told, “I don’t know how long you’ll be able to stand it. It’s better if you get lost because this man [...] and he can hit you, he doesn’t care about anything anymore, end up in jail, he doesn’t care about anything. What you have to do is save your life and your son,” I was told “Leave Honduras. I don’t know why you don’t take the chance and leave instead of living here with threats and fear, you can’t leave because you never know if this man is waiting for you again.” (Celia)

Hortensia described asking for a sign from God to help her decide whether or not to leave,

Yo pedí a dios, le dije, “diosito, si es tu voluntad que llegue, yo voy a ir. Yo quiero que me des una señal, y si no me conviene irme, también quiero que tú me des una señal.” Solita yo estaba ese día. Y dije yo, “si voy a llegar con vida y bien, Señor, yo quiero que Tú me des una señal.” Vine yo y agarré una moneda y dije, “Señor, si Tú crees que voy a llegar bien, que en esta moneda me salga cara.” Es que tiene las dos partes la moneda, “y si no me conviene irme, que me salga escudo.” La tiré para arriba, y cayó en la carrera y me salió cara. Dije yo, “pues, me voy a ir. Es una señal que dios me da.” Como a los 3 días, me vine. (Hortensia)

I asked god, I said, “God, if it is your will that I arrive, I will leave. I want you to give me a sign, and if it’s not in my interest to leave, I also want you to give me a sign.” I was alone that day and I said, “If I am going to arrive with life and safe, Lord, I want you to give me a sign.” I went and grabbed a coin and said, “Lord, if You think I will arrive safely, I want to get a heads up on this coin.” The coin has both parts, “And if it’s not in my best interest to leave I want to get [tails.]” I threw it up in the air, it landed on the road and I got heads. I said, “Well, I’m going to go. It’s a sign from God.” About three days later I left. (Hortensia)

Maria, on the other hand, received strong guidance from her husband, who was in the U.S., to not return to the U.S. While her attorney in Guatemala suggested she go, her

husband feared for her safety and the children's safety along the route and told her he would not receive her if she came,

Me dijo, 'No, no puedes venirte. La frontera está mal. Los Zetas están reinando toda la frontera. Cuando ellos tienen un niño en sus manos para ellos es mejor porque lo venden a la prostitución, las pornografías. Tu sola con 3 no vas a poder.' Hasta incluso me dijo, 'si te vienes no te voy a recibir, porque si algo te pasa en el camino a mi me van a hacer responsable tus hermanos. No seas necia, no lo hagas.' (María)

He told me, "No, no you can't come. The border is dangerous. The Zetas have take over the entire border. When they have a child on their hands, it's better for them to sell him into prostitution, the pornography. You by yourself with 3 won't be able to do it," Even adding, "If you come, I'm not going to receive you because if something happens to you on the road your brothers are going to hold me responsible. Don't be foolish, don't do it." (Maria)

Weighing Risks

In remembering their considerations before migrating, women described a sense of awareness that the trip itself may be dangerous. While hoping for safety and thriving, women carried a degree of knowledge that more or different violence may lie ahead. Through news media and word of mouth, women were somewhat cognizant of the potential for accidents, exploitation, and gang violence along the journey. For example, Lorena recalled, "en las noticias actualmente cómo dice cosas que pasan: Que violan, que golpean, que roban, que matan." (*"In the news now they [always] talk about things that happen: They rape, hit, rob, kill."*)

Despite some anticipation that the trip may be dangerous, women did not always take those considerations into account in deciding to leave. Rather, women described feeling as though the risks outweighed the necessity and/or urgency to migrate. For example,

Anita stated, “no me quedaba otro rumbo que arriesgarme.” (*“I didn’t have any other way but to risk it.”*)

This element of women’s decision-making centered around risk versus exposure, or potential future violence versus experienced violence. In looking back on their trips, women reflected on this dynamic between escaping or resisting violence and being exposed to further violence - in a sense, actively choosing one type of violence over another. Anita recalled weighing the known risk of staying in El Salvador and the perceived risk of migrating, “si me van a matar aquí, me voy a morir en el camino, por lo menos me morí en el camino buscando el futuro para mis niñas.” (*“If they are going to kill me here, better to die on the road. At least I would die looking for a better future for my girls.”*) Gilberta also considered the risks associated with migrating, “Yo dije, prefiero que ellos me maten y no mi marido, yo no quiero morir en la calle, pero no quiero que mi marido me mate.” (*“I said, I prefer they kill me than my husband, I don’t want to die on the streets but I don’t want my husband to kill me.”*)

Sustained Decision-Making

Furthermore, the decision-making continues all along the journey and into life in the U.S.

In addition to deciding to migrate initially, be it related to domestic violence, gang violence, or poverty, women also encounter additional critical junctures in decision-making throughout the process of migration. These decision points occurred during the transit through Mexico and into the U.S., in terms of being raped, controlled by someone

or held hostage. They also continued during women's settling into life in the U.S., again in terms of being controlled by someone, being exploited, or related to a new abusive relationship.

Participants expressed moments of not wanting to continue forward and to instead return home. Sometimes this was in relation to extreme violence they were experiencing at the time. Other times it was related to despair about being separated from children and family or the death of a loved one. These episodes often caused women to reconsider their migration decisions and to want to turn around during migration or to ask to seek to be deported. Given that the trip is so difficult and fraught with roadblocks (both figurative and real), there are multiple opportunities to review that decision and either continue to commit to the trip or to decide to return. In other words, decision-making is sustained throughout migration, rather than being a one-time moment in the home country.

Clara, for example, described confronting danger during her travels through Mexico and having to decide whether or not to continue, "Yo venía huyendo de la violencia, porque me podían matar y todo. Ahora pienso que por venir a buscar un futuro yo puedo buscar mi muerte también en el camino." (*"I came fleeing violence, because they could kill me and more. Now I think while looking for a future I could have also been looking for my death on the road."*) Beatriz also reconsidered her migration decisions. She had second thoughts soon after deciding to leave Honduras, "ya cuando realmente decidí irme, ya no quería. Tenía mucho miedo, pero son decisiones que uno toma." (*"When I*

really decided to go, I didn't want to anymore. I was really scared, but those are decisions one makes.") Several encountered moments of reconsideration along the trip. Anita, for example, said that during a particularly difficult time in transit, "ahí sí me arrepentí de haberme venido la verdad." (*"Honestly, that's when I regretted coming."*) Beatriz described the violence she suffered at the hands of her coyote as so severe that she wanted to return to Honduras. In fact, she begged him to leave her behind, even though nothing there for her back home. Ultimately she continued to the U.S. and reflected, "entonces esos son los riesgos que uno tiene - regreso o no regreso, voy a morir o voy a vivir." (*"So, those are the risks one takes—do I go back or not go back, will I die or will I live."*)

For some women, their fears of what would happen if they turned back or were deported were stronger than fears of continuing the journey. Women were aware of the difficulties they would face back home. Some of those difficulties were the same reasons for initially leaving (domestic violence and gang violence) while others resulted from having left (being without work and having lost identification papers during migration).

Risks into the Unknown

Throughout their descriptions of their decision-making while encountering violence during migration, women expressed a pervasive and persistent sense of not knowing - not knowing what was happening, not knowing where to go, not knowing what would happen next. This begins before migration and may be considered a motivating factor in leaving the home country, in terms of not knowing how to find safety and

having no way out or no other option. Likewise, during the migration journey, that sense of uncertainty and unknowing permeates everything – from where and when and how the journey will take place, how and when to find food or get sleep, and how and when threats to personal safety (as a migrant and as a woman) will occur. Finally, for those who are detained by the U.S. government, there is a palpable sense of uncertainty about the process. How long will detention last? How or when will I get out? Will I be deported? Aside from detention, there is a similar experience in being in the community and finding stability, gaining legal status, and bringing children to the U.S.

Thelma, for example, reflected that she didn't understand what was happening, only that she wanted to save herself, “yo no entendía nada de lo que estaba pasando. Yo, más que todo, lo que quería era salvarme.” (*“I didn't understand anything that was happening. More than anything, I wanted to save myself.”*) Anita talked about not knowing how to proceed after being left by the coyote, “no sabíamos para donde agarrar, porque no teníamos ni idea donde andábamos.” (*“We didn't know which way to take, because we had no idea where we were.”*) Gloria stated, “no hallaba que hacer, porque como no conocía a nadie y yo me preguntaba ¿que voy a hacer yo?” (*“I didn't know what to do, because I didn't know anyone. And I would ask myself, ‘what am I going to do?’”*)

Interestingly, women's responses to the frightening and dangerous moments of migration were physical reflections of this context of the unknown. Women described a mental and emotional foggy, confusion, or dizziness during and after the migration journey. This can be interpreted as a physical manifestation of the not-knowing and the

vague sense of what is going on, where one is, who is in charge, what options exist, and where to go next.

In some ways, this movement ahead into the unknown paralleled women's previous experiences with violence. That is, when facing violence by an intimate partner or gangs, there was a static level of fearful uncertainty about when the next threat or assault will come. Women anticipated further suffering but may not have had a clear idea of when or how it would occur. Actions and strategies to find safety involved risks taken both within and towards this context of uncertainty. Furthermore, women recognized that they may be intentionally taking risks into the unknown while simultaneously incurring unanticipated risks at the same time, thereby incurring fear and a sense of vulnerability or being at the mercy of others.

C. Survival: Micro-Strategies, Support & Solidarity

Similar to the constellation of violence experienced by women, the ways women resisted, coped with, and protected themselves and fellow migrants from danger are also varied and interconnected throughout the migration experience. Women's narratives counteract the notion of migrants as passive or agency-less actors in the migration process. Rather, the act of deciding to migrate, given the dangers it presented, in order to avoid the dangers at home, can itself be interpreted as an act of agency and resistance. In addition to everyday, or microstrategies of survival, women built and rebuilt support networks and engaged in collective survival strategies.

Micro-Strategies

During migration women acted through everyday acts, or micro-strategies to resist violence, maintain safety, and take action. The term micro does not minimize or make small these acts of resistance, rather describes the everyday nature of them. Particularly to avoid sexual violence, women described wearing pants at night as an added obstacle. They also made efforts to dress humbly or to pretend they were men by wearing large t-shirts and baseball caps. Celia said, “el coyote nos dijo no vayan tan sexy, tan provocativa. Váyanse como cholos. Y así nos vestíamos. Vestíamos con camisa grandes, pantalones flojos.” (*“The coyote told us to not go too sexy, too provocative. Go like ‘cholos’. And that’s how we dressed. We wore big t-shirts and loose pants.”*) Anita described getting dirty in order to thwart rape attempts, “nos ensuciamos bien apestosas, para que no nos tocan, y por ejemplo, de unos 4 días nos funcionó pero los últimos días ya no.” (*“We would get dirty, really smelly so they wouldn’t touch us, for example it worked for about four days but the last days it didn’t.”*)

Others talked about becoming small, quiet, or invisible as a micro-strategy. Beatriz described her frequent prayer to be made invisible, “ya con palabras se lo pedía, “Dios mío, hazme invisible al peligro.” (*“I would ask with words, ‘My God, make me invisible to the dangers.’”*) Several described trying to speak without a Central American accent while in Mexico, in an effort to blend in with Mexican travelers.

While women used these everyday strategies of micro-resistance to survive difficult and sometimes potentially lethal situations, they also encountered moments of

utter despair. Several women, in fact, described moments of wanting or trying to take their own lives. In recalling these depths of anguish and hopelessness, women sometimes struggled to identify where or how they found the strength to continue. Sierra reflected, “Yo saco fuerzas de donde a veces no las hay. Tengo que sacarlas.” (*“I find strength where there sometimes isn’t any. I have to find it.”*) Nonetheless, many described drawing on their faith in God, prayer, and singing. Celia recalled, “yo rogando a la Virgen que nos fuera iluminando el camino, que nos eliminara todo el mal del camino.” (*“I would beg to the Virgin to guide the way for us, to eliminate all the bad on the road.”*) Sandra described reciting Psalm 91 and Psalm 23 as a way to gain strength and to prevent bad things from happening to her. She also described using song to sustain her,

Cuando yo me siento triste, le oro bastante a Dios. Me pongo de rodillas, le pido a Dios de corazón que me ayude, que me de fuerzas. Cuando estoy orando, siento como que alguien me toca por dentro y me da una gran paz, y me hace sentir más fuerte. Y cuando me siento con ganas de llorar a veces en el día, me pongo a cantar alabanzas. La que me gusta dice que tengo que pasar muchas pruebas. Se la canto. Dice (Cantando):” Un día orando, le dije a mi Señor: Tú el alfarero, y yo el barro soy. A tu parecer, haz como tú quieras. Hazme un nuevo ser, me dijo: “No me gusta, te voy a quebrantar y en un vaso nuevo te voy a transformar”. Pero en el proceso, te voy a hacer llorar. Y quiero que aprendas también a perdonar. Quiero una alabanza cuando todo va mal, quiero tu confianza en lugar de tu quejar. Quiero tu confianza en la tempestad, y quiero que aprendas también a perdonar.” Ésa alabanza me gusta, no la sé muy bien, pero me hace quebrantar y decirle a Dios... Ésa alabanza sí me da fuerzas, me hace sentir bien, que Dios existe y está en mi corazón, y Él nunca me ha dejado ni abandonado. Y tengo que seguir adelante, desde el momento en que Él me ha dejado venir aquí y estar donde estoy, es porque es Gracia de Dios. (Sandra)

“When I feel sad I pray a lot to God. I kneel down and I ask God from the heart to help me, to give me strength. When I’m praying I feel like someone touches me inside and gives me great peace and makes me feel stronger. And when I feel like I want to cry, sometimes in the day I start to sing worship songs. The one that I like says that I have to pass through many tests. I’ll sing it, it goes (singing): “One day praying, I said to my god: You are the potter and I am your clay. To

your liking do as you wish. Make me a new being, he said to me: No, I don't like it I'm goin gto break you and in a new cup I will transform you. But in the process, it will make you cry. And I also want you to learn how to forgive. I want praise when everything goes bad, I want your confidence in place of your complaints. I want your confidence in the tempest and I also want you to learn to forgive." I like this worship song, I don't know it too well, but it breaks me and I say to God... that worship does give me strength and makes me feel good, That God exists and is in my heart and He has never left me nor abandoned me. I have to keep going, from the moment He let me come here and be where I am, it's because of the grace of God. (Sandra)

Despite most being separated from their children during or after migration, women described their children and their role as mothers as source of strength. María, for example, said, “por mis hijos, no me da miedo nada.” (“*For my children, I'm not scared of anything.*”) Women drew strength from them in terms of having migrating for them and in taking this risk in order for them to be safer and better cared for. Women also felt supported by the love and encouragement expressed by their children from afar.

(Re)Building Support

Despite the use of very personal and individual strategies, women did not act or cope in isolation from others. Even though often alone and isolated, with previous networks of support ruptured through migration, women constantly made and remade new supports along the way. In general, in leaving systems of support (back home), women are constantly building new systems of support. Women were the architects of their support systems, and then they also had to renew and re-design them over and over.

While some migrants travel with or join a family member who is already established in the U.S., many of the women in this study were coming into the unknown. They did not necessarily have established sources of support during migration or in the

U.S. and instead had to build support along the way and after arriving. The kinds of support received along the way vary from small acts, such as strangers giving directions, housing, money, or food along the way, to a stranger saving Celia's life by pulling her Celia from a moving train.

Building support often involved on-the-spot decisions about who to trust, and those decisions were made with very constrained options. The desperation and urgency in some of these situations is such that there is a necessity to rely on whatever hand has been extended, without any certainty that it will ultimately be supportive, as opposed to harmful. This parallels the decision to leave in the first place, in terms of sensing danger and seeing only two options for safety (the unknown of migrating versus the current continued violence). Along the way, women encountered decisions around building and accepting support. At times they had to consider whether to rely on unknown "assistance" (which could ultimately be revealed to be dangerous) or to remain in a dangerous or unstable situation.

Given the mobility inherent in the migration process and the frequent shifting of circumstances and relationships after settling in the U.S., women's support systems were often temporary. Supportive relationships and interactions tended to be short-lived. Gloria and Hortensia, for example, both relied on quickly-made, fleeting connections when escaping from exploitation and then hiding from their captors. Keeping in mind the passing nature of these supports along with the fear and isolation women felt during or after migrating, rebuilding systems of support was additionally challenging. Furthermore,

the violence women experienced interfered with those systems, because at times the support itself became violent, such as with an abusive partner.

Co-Survival & Solidarity

Women also described a multitude of ways they engaged in collective support and survival strategies - alongside fellow migrants, with strangers, with coyotes/guides, and with family members who lived in the home country or in the U.S. Most notably, fellow travelers co-survived during their travels through Mexico. This included keeping each other warm on trains by huddling close to one another, holding the train car door open so they wouldn't be locked inside, helping each other on and off trains, and sharing food and water. This was also described as women's strategic decisions to join groups of migrants that included other women, and forgoing joining all-male groups. Celia, who travelled with her four-year-old son, remembered the ways other migrants helped get her and her child on and off trains, kept her son from falling off the train, and helped her carry her bags and her son. A stranger once gave her the shoes off his feet, and another stranger gave her clothes when immigration apprehended her as she emerged from the Rio Grande naked. Moments of co-survival continued once women settled in the U.S., through sharing living arrangements, childcare arrangements, and employment connections.

Maria's description of migrants keeping each other safe while riding the train is particularly emblematic of surviving in solidarity,

Las personas que venían junto con nosotros, la mayoría era hombre. La única mujer era yo y mis tres niños pequeños. Ellos hicieron una rueda, nos metieron a

nosotros en medio, y ellos nos agarraban, nos agarramos de su ropa, y mis niños venían en el medio. Así nos pudieron ayudar. (María)

The people who came with us, the majority were men. The only women were myself and my three little children. They made a circle and put us in the middle, and they grabbed onto us, we grabbed on to their clothes, and my children came in the middle. That's how they were able to help us. (Maria)

Fellow travelers also shared emotional support and social connections during migration. For example, one woman made connections during the trip for someone to “claim” her once she entered the U.S., as she did not know anyone already living there. Another woman was aided in her escape from being held captive by a fellow hostage who introduced her to neighbors who could help her. Fellow travelers frequently urged one another on when they felt they’d reached their limit of tolerance for suffering, particularly during periods that required significant walking in harsh conditions.

Family members back home and in the U.S. also played roles in transnational co-survival by caring for children back home, helping pay the cost of coyotes, extortion and detention bonds.

While women talked of surviving migration in solidarity with other migrants, they also relayed moments when they were unable to help or protect others. Women recalled sometimes feeling powerless to intervene on behalf of other migrants. Even months and years later, women carried these painful memories with them and became tearful in describing them, particularly when they involved witnessing sexual violence against other women. Lorena, for example, talked about leaving behind a woman she travelled with briefly in Mexico,

Se quedó la señora y se quedó solita con los cuatro hombres que estaban en esa casita. Pues esos hombres estaban armados, marihuaneados, se sentían los olores. Ella se quedó solita con ellos, ahí. Sé que le ocurrió. Yo sé que le pasó algo. Uno sabe. Porque ella tampoco traía dinero. No sé. (Llanto) No sé, ojalá no le haya pasado nada, pero ahí se quedó ella. Esa fue como la parte más difícil en mi viaje, que la señora se quedaba y yo no podía hacer nada. (Lorena)

“The woman stayed and she stayed there all alone with the four men who were in that little house. Well, those men were armed, marijuana smokers, you could feel the smells. She stayed by herself with them. I know what happened. I know that something happened to her. One knows. Because she also didn’t have money. I don’t know (crying) I don’t know, hopefully nothing happened to her, but she stayed there. That was the most difficult part of my trip, the women would stay and I wouldn’t do anything. (Lorena)

Natalia also described a fellow migrant, who was left behind by her coyote and her group, wondering what had happened to him,

En nuestras cabezas quedan cosas que pasan, así como el compañero que se quedó. Ahora yo me pregunto en mi misma, ¿estará vivo ese señor? ¿Su familia, lo llegó a ver todavía? ¿Se regresó, estará por aquí, qué será de él? Esa persona pude haber sido yo. Pudo ser uno de mis hijos. Y me da dolor y me da tristeza. (Natalia)

The things that happen stay in our heads, like the man that stayed. Now I ask myself, Is that man alive? Did his family get to see him? Did he go back? Is her around here? What happened to him? That person could’ve been me. It could have been one of my kids. And it pains me and it saddens me. (Natalia)

D. Transnational Mothering

While transnational motherhood is not the primary focus of this research, all the women who participated are mothers. Their identities as mothers are woven throughout the telling of their experiences, making it inexcusable to ignore or deny the power and centrality of these relationships. The experience of migrating is intimately interconnected with children – as a piece of the motivation to migrate, in the experience of being separated from them and trying to support them back home, and in navigating how to get

them to the U.S. safely and quickly. In addition, women often took on the role of mothering other, unaccompanied migrant children along the way.

Mothering as Motivation to Migrate

Women's roles as mothers were embedded in the migration process from the beginning and played critical roles in their decisions to migrate. Motherhood was intricately tied into the violence-migration nexus, as women sought to protect their children from harm and provide them a life of violence-free opportunity. María stated her hopes for her children, through migration, "tienen derecho a vivir un futuro sin violencia, sin problemas, sin amenazas de muerte." (*"They have a right to live a future without violence, without problems, without death threats."*) Isabel also described her efforts to break the cycle of violence she had experienced, "no quería que mi historia se repitiera en mis hijos y por eso yo he sido bien luchadora." (*"I didn't my kids to repeat my history and that's why I've been a fighter."*)

Sierra was in an interesting, yet untenable, position as a mother trying to find safety for herself and her two young children, in the context of gang violence. She had enough money to pay for the journey for herself and one child to travel to the U.S. She was concerned about her son's vulnerability to being targeted by the gangs that controlled her community in Honduras. On the other hand, she feared for the likelihood that her daughter would endure rape or sexual abuse if left unprotected in Honduras. In the end, Sierra brought her daughter, "traje mi hija de Honduras para que no me la violaran, y vine

a este país justamente para protegerla.” (*I brought my daughter from Honduras so they wouldn't rape her and I came to this country so that I could protect her.*”)

Separation from Children

While a few women migrated with their children, most women also left children in their home country when they migrated to the U.S. Women talked about fearing for their children's safety back home and feeling guilty for having left them. The experience of being separated from their children was described as an experience of acute suffering. Sierra recalled leaving her son in Honduras, “mi corazón se partió en dos, dejar la mitad allá y traerme mi otra mitad para aquí.” (*“My heart broke in two pieces, I left one piece over there and brought the other with me here.”*) After talking with her children during her travels through Mexico, Clara said, “ponía a llorar después de oír a mi hijo. Y decía, ojalá que esto valga la pena.” (*“I would start crying after hearing my son. I would say, ‘I hope this is worth it.’”*)

During the separation, mothers were constantly thinking about the children, worrying about their safety, their well-being, their schooling. They expressed concern about how to send money to their children and if that money ever gets to them and their needs. Despite feeling some satisfaction with being able to financially provide for their children's education or health needs, women felt distress at not being physically present to keep their kids safe from gang violence. Beatriz stated that mothers break their heads with worry, “las madres rompen la cabeza pensando.” (*“Mothers break their heads thinking.”*)

In addition to fear and concern, women felt tremendous sense of guilt in having migrated and the resulting separation from their children. Beatriz, for example, returned to Guatemala after four years in the U.S., fulfilling a promise she had made to her children. When she arrived back in Guatemala, they passed right in front of her in the airport and did not recognize her. She said, “me sentía tan culpable haberlos abandonados cuatro años. El pequeño ya no me reconocía. Tuve que pegarme mucho a él para que me volviera a reconocer. Tuve que ganarme el cariño de los tres nuevamente, y pedirles perdón.” (*“I felt so guilty after leaving them abandoned for four years. The smallest didn’t recognize me. I had to stay close to him a lot so that he would remember me again. I had to win the affect of the three all over again and ask them for forgiveness.”*)

While Celia was not physically separated from her son, who she brought with her at great emotional and physical cost, she was grieving the death of her first child, who had died before she left Honduras. In living in the U.S., her physical distance from Honduras played a role in her her grief. She was concerned about not being in Honduras to provide him a “proper” burial. She was isolated from anyone that had known him and felt that she alone carried his memory. Furthermore, she carries the burden of her abusive husband having told her that the boy’s death was her fault.

These struggles with separation highlight the transnational nature of motherhood for women. That is, while the migration process proceeds, life continues to happen back home. A painful example is the murder of Hortensia’s daughter in Guatemala while Hortensia was in the process of migrating. Motherhood is played out over space and time.

As described earlier, however, women's support systems were not consistent over time and space, and so women searched for, found, and lost support all along the way.

Reuniting with Children

All women in the study had brought some or all of their children to the U.S. or were in the process of navigating a reunification with their children. Those with a T Visa (related to having experienced a form of human trafficking) were able to bring their children to the U.S. through official, legal avenues. Even with a T Visa, women in the process of bringing their children remained wary of these legal processes and felt unsure if their children would ever arrive.

Despite having experienced harrowing journeys themselves, several women relied on unofficial means of bringing their children to live with them in the U.S. This involved paying a coyote to bring them through Mexico and across the border. These unaccompanied children were vulnerable to similar processes of migration and dangers described earlier. Isabel described bringing her children to the U.S. and losing contact with them for an anxiety-ridden week,

Yo puse en riesgo la vida de mis hijos, me los tuvieron ahí una semana exacta, ocho días sin saber nada, yo me estaba muriendo porque sentía que ¿dónde los iba a hallar? México también es grande, ¿dónde los iba a encontrar? Yo decía que si yo no sabía de ellos, yo me iba a ir a buscarlos de lugar en lugar, que yo los tenía que encontrar. Los soltaron. Me los cruzaron, pero tuve que pagar más dinero. Y me dicen: “Los vamos a cruzar en la tarde, o por la noche y tú me tienes que mandar el dinero por la mañana, si quieres verlos”, así me dijeron. Les mandé cuatro mil dólares más y yo buscando dinero prestado, que todavía debo dos mil dólares, fueron casi veinte mil dólares en estar buscando cómo me prestaban. “No importa, yo se los mando, yo los voy a conseguir pero prométame, júreme que sí los voy a ver”. Dice: “Sí te los voy a entregar, cierto que eres una buena persona, una buena mamá porque a pesar de que

no sabes nada de ellos, sigues insistiendo”, decía. Migración los encontró a ellos en el monte. Los mandaron a la hielera. La niña padecía de asma y se enfermó por el frío en la hielera y entonces me la llevaron de ahí de migración, la llevaron al control. Estuvieron ahí tres días, de ahí los mandaron a un centro de los menores. Ahí es donde yo los fui a traer. (Isabel)

I put my children's lives in danger, they had them there for exactly one week, eight days without knowing anything. I was dying because I felt like, "Where was I going to find them?" Mexico is also so big. Where was I going to find them?" I said that if I didn't hear anything about them I would go place by place looking for them, I had to find them. They let them go. They crossed them, but I had to pay more money. And they said to me: "We are going to cross in the afternoon or by night and you have to send me the money by the morning if you want to see them." That's how they said it to me. I sent them four more thousand dollars and I was looking for money to borrow because I still owed two thousand dollars, it was almost twenty thousand dollars while I looked to see who would lend me money. "It doesn't matter, I will send it, I will find a way to get it, but promise me, swear to me that I will get to see them." He said: "Yes, I will give them to you, you are a good person, a good mother because despite you not knowing anything about them, you keep insisting," he said. Border Patrol found them in the countryside. They sent them to the hielera. The girl suffers from asthma and she got sick because of how cold the holding cells are, so they took her from immigration and sent her to medical. They were there three days. From there they sent them to a center for minors and that's where I went to get them. (Isabel)

Karla had 2 children back home in Honduras and gave birth to a third child in the U.S. She and her husband worked hard to save money to bring the older children to the U.S. They twice collected sufficient money, only to have it stolen. The third time they paid \$20,000, with the intention of bringing both boys safely, avoiding the danger and suffering they had experienced. Despite promises by coyotes, the boys ultimately came in the same manner – travelling for one month by train, sleeping outside, without food. They had been separated for six years. The boys arrived angry at their parents for having put them through the ordeal,

Estaban enojados con nosotros, porque dijeron cómo era posible que nosotros los queríamos os habíamos mandado traer así. Y les decíamos “no fue nuestra culpa”. Mi

mamá vino con ellos hasta cierto punto para acompañarlos. El grande que tenía ocho años venía enojado porque dice que dormieron en la calle, si montaron en un tren, dice que nos les daban de comer hasta dos días, tres días. Tenían que dormir afuera, en el patio de una casa, y le dijo “hijo, nosotros pagamos una viaje para que ustedes se vinieran, pero la gente engaña, no puede saber si lo van engañar o no”. (Karla)

They were angry with us, they said how was it possible that we would send for them to be brought like that. We would say to them, “It wasn’t our fault.” My mom came with them up to a certain point to accompany them. The oldest was eight years old and was very angry, he said they slept on the street, jumped on a train, he said they didn’t give them anything to eat for two days, three days. They had to sleep outside, on the patio of a house, and I said to him, “Son, we paid for this trip so that you could come, but the people are deceitful and one can’t know if they are going to lie to us or not. (Karla)

Some women reported that they would never bring their children to the U.S. unless they could do it by legal means. Natalia, for example, reflected on the poor treatment she and her daughter received by coyotes and was determined to not subject her other children to similar experiences,

Es algo que a mi me llena de tristeza, y por eso es que yo ya no me animé a traer a mis hijos así, a mis otros dos hijos. Yo dije no, ya no más. Porque si mi niño no camina, o si a mi niña le pasa algo, y lo van a dejar botado, yo digo que no ya no. (Natalia)

It’s something that fills me with sadness, and that’s why I couldn’t convince myself to bring my kids like that, my other children. I said no, no more because if my boy didn’t walk or if something happened to my girl and they would leave him abandoned I say no, no more. (Natalia)

In two cases, the process of bringing children to the U.S. was tied into and hindered by domestic violence. Karla and her husband, who had been married in Honduras, migrated to the U.S. around the same time in order to escape gang violence. Once in the U.S. and with a third child, Karla’s husband became jealous, controlling, and abusive. When the violence began to impact Karla’s employment, it also delayed the couple’s

ability to save for their boys' travel to the U.S. Once the boys arrived, they also became a target and a strategy of the control and abuse perpetrated by Karla's husband. Alma also had difficulties related to domestic violence in attempting to reunite with her children. Even though she had a T Visa and a legitimate avenue through which to bring her children, her abusive ex partner continued to exert control from El Salvador. He thwarted Alma's efforts to get the children's identification documentation in order so that they could migrate as derivatives of her T Visa. At the time of the interview, she had not been able to bring any of her four children to the U.S. yet.

Mothering Others

An interesting connection to the experience of transnational mothering lies in the way women took care of other children they encountered along their journeys, particularly through Mexico. In missing their own children, their stymied maternal roles were put into action in caring for others. María, for example, helped care for eight-year-old twins during the entire journey through Mexico, and Lorena spent several days taking care of a ten-year-old girl she found at a hotel,

La niña venía para acá y era de Guatemala. Venía sola, solita. Nunca le pregunté cómo se llamaba, porque la niña estaba callada y no hablaba. La encontramos ahí en el hotel y yo la agarré como que era mi hija, como que traía acá. La bañé, la peiné y que cámbiate y que no sé qué. La regañé porque no se quería poner sweater. Lave sus calzones, vete a cepillar los dientes y así pasamos la noche. Nos subimos a otro bus y fuimos a otro pueblo. Y como la niña se pegó un poquito conmigo, entonces se quedó conmigo. Ya venía la niña conmigo en el bus, como mi hija, me la traje yo. Yo no la conocía, nunca la había visto, dijo que iba para Nueva York, que su mamá y su papá estaban en Nueva York. (Lorena)

The girl was coming over here and she was from Guatemala. She came all alone. I never asked what her name was because the girl was quiet and didn't talk. We

found her there in the hotel and I grabbed her like she was my daughter, like I was bringing her. I washed her, I combed her hair and changed her and I don't know what else. I scolded her because she didn't want to put on a sweater. I washed her underwear, [told her to] brush her teeth and that's how we spent the night. We got another bus and we went to another town. The girl got a little attached to me, so she stayed with me. The girl was on the bus with me, like my daughter, and I brought her. I didn't know her. I had never seen her. She said she was going to New York, that her mom and dad were in New York (Lorena)

Sierra, who travelled with her own child, also took care of two other children who were travelling alone, in order to reunite with their mothers in the U.S. She told others they were her own children, in order to protect them from harm. It wasn't until she crossed the Rio Grande that others in her group realized they were not her children.

While women cared for unaccompanied children as if they were their own, these relationships were temporary. During or shortly after crossing into the U.S., women were separated from the children. Lorena continued to worry about what may have happened to the little girl she took care of in Mexico. Before crossing the border, the girl was passed to other smugglers. Lorena was concerned about the arrangement and the girl's safety but ultimately let her go,

Cuando llegó el muchacho que logró localizar este otro muchacho, se llevó la niña, y me dijo, ¿porque te vas a llevar a la niña? La voy a llevar a la casa porque en mi casa va a estar mejor que contigo. ¿Y porque va a estar mejor que contigo si a ti no te conozco? A mi tampoco pero ya tiene 2 o 3 días de estar conmigo, pero a ti ni una vez te ha visto, ¿o si? No, me dijo, pero ella va a estar mejor en mi casa que allá está mi esposa y mis hijos que contigo, ¿o quieres pasarla tú? me dijo... ¿para donde? Para el otro lado, el me va a llevar para Nueva York. No, yo no la quiero pasar dijo. Así me habló así muy fuerte, muy... no sé. En eso apareció una mujer muy elegante, muy bonita. Así alta muy arreglada, muy bonita la señora. Y dijo: Bueno, vengo a traer a la niña. Yo solo me le quedé viendo, ya no le dije nada, se llevó la niña la señora elegante. Una señora elegante, con joyas y todo, muy elegante, se llevó a la niña, saber... Ahí se quedó la niña en la frontera y nosotros fuimos a una casa. (Lorena)

When the young boy arrived he managed to find this other young man, he took the girl and said to me, "Why are you going to take the girl?" I'm going to take her home because at my house she is going to be better off than with you." "And why is she going to be better off with you if she doesn't know you? She doesn't know me either but she's spent 2 or 3 days with me and she's never even seen you." "Oh yeah? She didn't tell me, but she will be better off at my house with my wife and children than with you. Or do you want to cross her?" He said that to me. "To where?" "To the other side, He is going to take me to New York." "No, I don't want to take her across," he said. That's how he spoke to me, in a very harsh tone, very... I don't know. At that moment a very elegant woman appeared, very pretty. Tall, well-dressed, very pretty lady and she said, "well, I came to take the girl." An elegant lady, with jewelry and everything, very elegant, she took the girl, to know... The girl stayed there at the border and we went to a house. (Lorena).

Chapter 8: Understanding Interconnections: Building Theory around the Violence-Migration Nexus

This study reveals the unthinkable and constrained choices many women, particularly mothers, face. These are complex and nuanced contexts within which women make decisions about how to keep themselves and their children safe, and we run a risk of not recognizing the deep and multiple elements working against women. Building from the thematic findings described in Chapters 6 and 7, this chapter aims to begin developing a provisional theoretical framework to describe the workings of the violence-migration nexus encountered by Central American migrant women.

In general, the violence-migration nexus for Central American women is a process of interacting choice and chance against a backdrop of multiple scales of violence, strategies of resistance, and motherhood. Core elements of the violence-migration nexus are explored through grounded theory's method of examining the *context* of the migration process, *conditions* present within this context, and *interactions* among those involved. This analysis results in a description and interpretation of the *consequences* or outcomes of interactions among these elements. This chapter includes the following sections:

- A. Context: Motherhood
- B. Conditions: Moving Through Ever-Changing Unknowns
- C. Interactions of Power
- D. Consequences: Rolling the Dice

The preceding chapter illustrated five main thematic elements emerging from the data. First, these data described the process of migration to the United States for Central American women facing constrained choices related to violence and economic instability. Next, these data reveal a constellation of violent acts experienced and witnessed by women during their processes of migration. Women's experiences with decision-making in the context of both migration and violence were described next, in addition to the ways women used micro-strategies and collective strategies to survive and exert resistance during these experiences. Finally, women's roles as mothers and the dynamic and transnational nature of their mothering blanketed this violence-migration nexus. All of these data elements are interconnected, and this section aims to build some understanding around those interconnections.

I feel hesitation in putting order to these factors in interpreting the violence-migration nexus, given their complexity. In fact, these data resist being considered in a linear or hierarchical model. These complex interrelationships are also challenging to illustrate visually, as they remain fluid over time and space. Nonetheless, it is helpful to visualize them and begin to build new ways of conceptualizing and interpreting their relationships with one another.

A. Context: Motherhood

Throughout the process of women's migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America to the U.S., the context of motherhood is described as essential and

ever-present. Migrating women's internal motivation to find safety for their families, as well as the transnational nature of their mothering, serve as constants.

The role of motherhood and the separation from children represent an interesting and perplexing part of this complicated puzzle. It may seem strange or counter-intuitive to argue that in fleeing for their own safety and that of their children, women may flee without their children, leaving them behind. Rather, these are nuanced decisions when it comes to motherhood. Women flee violence in order to ensure their own physical safety and/or that of their children, in addition to fleeing in an attempt to break a larger cycle of violence facing their children in the future. While not all children face immediate threats of violence, they are nonetheless embedded within the macro structures of violence also at play. Mothers thus carry with them the expectation that they will soon settle in the U.S. and send for their children, with hopes that the configuration of violences across scales that they encounter in the U.S. will be more tolerable.

B. Conditions: Moving through Ever-Changing Unknowns

While the context surrounding the process of migration remains consistent over time, the conditions fundamental to the violence-migration nexus appear as a series of ever-shifting unknowns. Migrating women express a sense of movement through the dimensions of space and time. Throughout this mobility, women move into and through unknown and uncertain physical terrain, in addition to facing risks to and possibilities for personal and family safety and well-being. In addition to being unknown, the nature of

this migration is ever changing, as are women's everyday experiences of violence and strategies for survival and support.

C. Interactions of Power

Embedded within the conditions of ever-changing unknowns, interactions of power persist over time and space and influence the process of migration and the violence-migration nexus. These include women's active attempts to exert power or maintain control as well as others' attempts to use power over them.

Power & Control Over

During this movement and the repeated decision-making junctures that accompany it, a constant barrage of power and control is exerted over women. This comes in the form of a variety of types of violence perpetrated by a variety of actors (be they partners, family members, coyotes, gangs, state actors). These acts of violence are extreme extensions of the use of patriarchy as strategies to exert power and control over women's bodies, women's decision-making, and women's use of space in the world. These strategies work against women's will and against their efforts to find safety and stability.

The specter of uncertainty and the unknown plays a role in these strategies, in terms of keeping women off balance and preventing them from being able to exert power or regain control during times of decision-making. This persistent push of violence both compels women to move and remain mobile and also to remain in place. It serves as a controlling factor in women's movement. As more elements of power and control are

exerted over women's bodies, decisions, and mobility, the range of options available to them becomes restricted and constrained.

In looking more deeply at the decision-making junctures women encounter as they move through both time and space, it is useful to also look at the violence experienced by women at different scales – at the micro, meso, and macro levels. That is, in addition to the navigation of power, control, and violence across time and space, these elements operate at multiple scales, adding a third dimension to this complex phenomenon. It is with this added dimension that we begin to see the mounting depth of urgency and need that propel women from one decision to another.

Micro-level violences entail those women experience in relationships with other individuals. These include violence experienced in the context of an intimate relationship or sexual violence perpetrated against a migrating woman by a coyote, for example. In other words, these are discrete threats of violence in everyday interactions with individuals. Meso-level violence refers to the community support of, or engagement in, violence against women. This includes community gang violence that may interact with the control of women, criminal networks that operate systems of hostage-taking and extortion, and state actors engaged in the detention of women in government institutions. At the macro level, women are impacted by multiple structural elements that contribute to violence. These are not discrete acts of violence, but rather persisting and overarching structures of oppression and inequality, such as patriarchal gender norms, poverty and underemployment, and widespread impunity for perpetrators of violence against women.

Another macro element is the construction of migrant women as “illegal,” maintaining migrant women in silence and isolation, without access to support or protection of rights.

Violence enacted on one scale is interdependent with violence enacted on other scales. Each level relies on the other levels for the maintenance and expansion of control over women. For example, the sexual violence enacted on women’s bodies as they cross the border between Mexico and Texas is dependent on both the meso and macro levels of violence. These other levels of violence are in turn complicit in that discrete act of violence. In fact, it is the gendered control of gang networks along the border, along with the larger structure of silence and shadowed illegality that surrounds migrant women, that make rape along the riverbanks feasible.

Experiences of violence often play out in parallel ways throughout the migration process and across scales. In other words, there are connections or parallels between the types of control and coercion women may have experienced in the context of a violent relationship, or with a coyote, or while held hostage or trafficked. In addition, we see parallels in the control and coercion the migration process, as a whole, places on them. For example, migration itself is isolating and disorienting, keeping women off balance and disconnected from one another. Elements that are purposefully introduced by those who exert power over migrating women in order to maintain control are also visible in the ways that migration, as a process, controls migrating women.

Power & Resistance from Within and Among

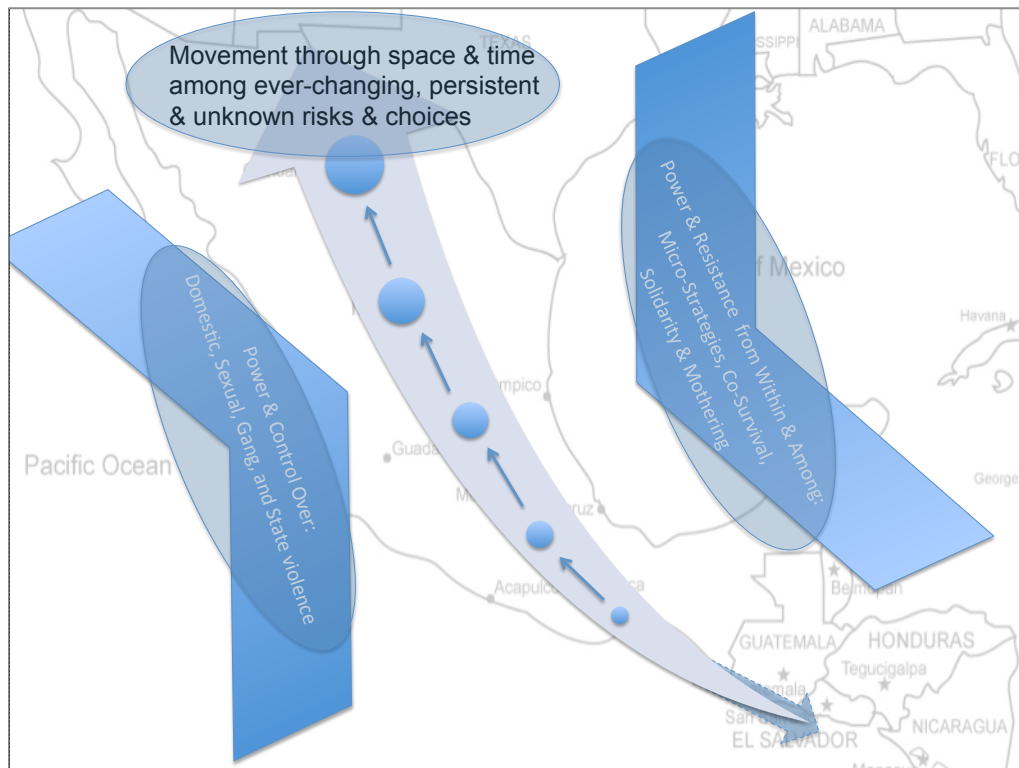
While it is important to recognize the ways that patriarchal structures of oppression materialize in acts of power and control over and violence against migrating women, it is critical to also identify and women as actors in the migration process. In the face of this violence, women develop and utilize strategies for survival and resistance. Similar to the variety of violence and strategies of power and control enacted on and over women, the ways women resist that violence and protect themselves from it are also varied. This resistance comes in the forms of everyday or micro-strategies, collective agency and solidarity against violence, and role of mother as strength and motivation to resist and survive. The coming together of women, in particular, – through shared experience, co-survival and solidarity – becomes vital. Patriarchal actions and structures are more successful if women are disconnected. In other words, “control over” is more easily gained and sustained if women are not actively exercising “power within and among.”

These strategies function as mechanisms to retain control or to gain control over specific situations and over women’s own bodies. They operate as vehicles for women to take action and to exercise agency and self-determination, and to not be or feel submissive to these powers during migration. These actions, even if some may be short-lived, serve as avenues to challenge power structures women experience before, during, and following migration.

Nonetheless, in exerting power and in their acts of resistance, women again and again come into spaces where their power is challenged or other's power is exerted over them anew. For example, in fleeing violence, which can be considered active resistance to being controlled by a partner, migrating women come into new spaces where they are also without power or must assert or regain power in new ways. Larger structures of power and control over women exist throughout the time and the geographic spaces women occupy during migration. The micro forms of power and oppression are reconfigured along the way – both in terms of how power is exerted over women and how women actively resist that power and maintain control. In other words, as women physically move through space, they repeat and re-enact this cycle of survival and resistance.

Figure 4 represents an initial effort to put these puzzle pieces together and form a new image of the interplay among the context, conditions, and interactions of the violence-migration nexus. Interestingly, the pre-, peri-, and post- phases of migration begin to blur into one sense of movement and lose some of the punch of distinctness, no longer serving as discrete phases. This is described above as moving through ever-changing unknowns. Likewise, the violence women experience and its impact on them passes through space and over time. The violence and women's responses to it, in the context of migration, do not operate as separate, disconnected fragments. Rather, these represent over-arching and sustained efforts by others to exert power over migrating women and women's individual and collective effort to challenge that power.

Figure 4. The Process of the Violence-Migration Nexus for Central American Women



D. Consequences: Rolling the Dice

Migrating mothers repeatedly find themselves in intolerable situations, and the process of movement through time and space is punctuated by repeated junctures of decision-making related to those situations. Women experience relentless stop-and-go movement in which they encounter a critical decision-making juncture, followed by decisions that often involve further flight or movement to seek safety. Women repeatedly make choices and take chances - between escaping or maintaining a present or known danger versus launching into an unknown or anticipated danger. They then encounter

another critical juncture, again followed by new decisions. These relentless, repeated encounters with choice, chance, and decision-making episodes are constrained by the power and control exerted over women or attempts to remove women's power. At the same time, the narrowing choices are broadened and expanded by women's recurring resistance, both individually and collectively.

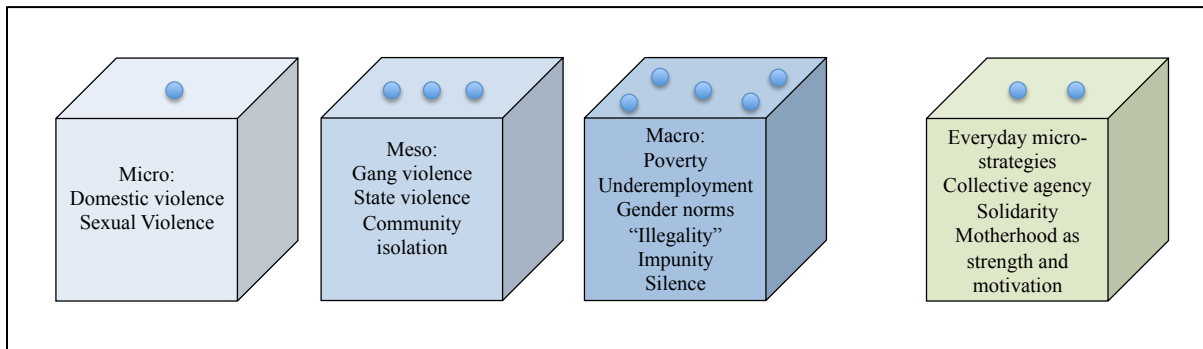
These repeated crossroads of decision-making occur within changing sets of constrained choices. The combined elements of context, conditions, and interactions result in a delicate balance of choice and chance. It is here that the analogy of rolling a set of dice becomes useful.

During the time prior to leaving her home country, a woman's experiences of violence, combined at the micro, meso, and macro levels, may become so intolerable that a decision to leave feels inevitable in order to survive. That is, the experiences at different scales line up in such a way that women are propelled into leaving. It seems to be this multiple configuration of threats and violence that compel women to risk launching into unknown territory and risks, as opposed to remaining with known factors.

At the moment of this decision, women roll a set of dice, in a sense. These dice represent elements of power and violence exerted over women, and they head into the unknown, in search of survival, with some degree of uncertainty about which kinds of micro, meso, or macro level violences lay ahead. Women also roll a die of support, co-survival and solidarity, representing the power women hold or exert in the collective

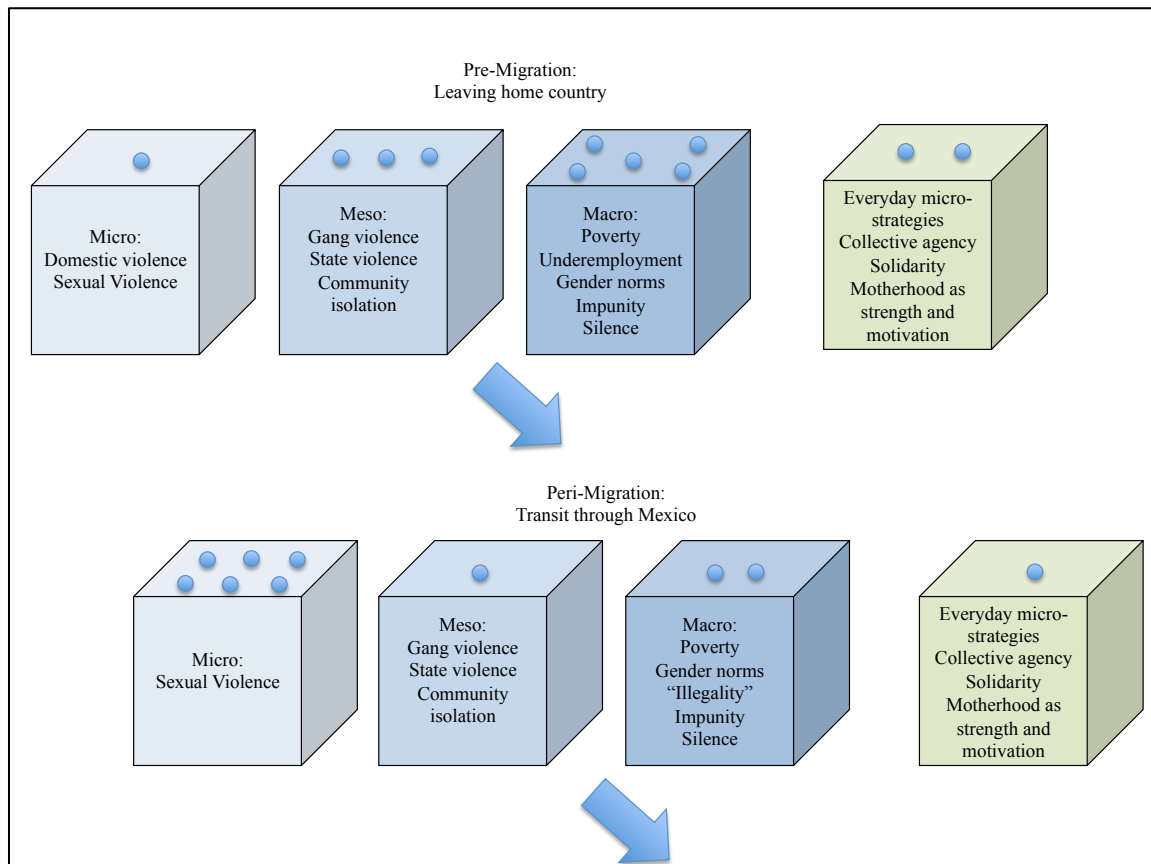
sense and resistance they may exert. That is, they also enter into uncharted waters in terms of the support they will rely on and/or create along the way.

Figure 5. Rolling the Dice – Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels of Violence



Similarly during transit through Mexico, women encounter interconnected, multi-scalar constellations of violence that propel another rolling of the dice. Experiences with violence may again reach an intolerable level that culminates in another decision-making juncture, leading to a new configuration of micro, meso, and macro-level factors, as well as a new configuration of collective coping and survival strategies.

Figure 6. Rolling the Dice in Succession



Again and again, migrant women’s tolerance for violence and the power exerted over them comes to a breaking point, and the dice are rolled again. During each stage of migration, women confront new junctures. Each time, a new landscape of violence and resistance emerges. Again we are reminded of this repeating cycle in Hortensia’s words, “salía de uno y me metí en otro.” In other words, in leaving or fleeing one set of violent circumstances, she found herself in yet another. Her story is a series of attempts to escape danger only to land in a new dangerous situation, with a new backdrop of micro, meso, and macro factors of violence and a new landscape of solidarity and resistance strategies.

Chapter 9: Discussion

This study describes the process of migration to the United States for Central American women facing constrained choices related to violence and economic instability. In addition, it reveals a constellation of violent acts experienced and witnessed by women during their processes of migration. Women's experiences with decision-making in the context of both migration and violence were described next, in addition to the ways women used micro-strategies and collective strategies to survive and exert resistance during these experiences. Finally, women's roles as mothers and the dynamic and transnational nature of their mothering blankets this violence-migration nexus. All of these data elements are interconnected in a complex and perpetuating web.

Researching violence and gender, as noted by Mo Hume (2007), "is akin to doing a puzzle that can never be complete" (p.155). Yet we can maintain hope for uncovering additional elements to understand the complexities of the migration process for women who navigate experiences of violence. This dissertation serves as an initial attempt to put these puzzle pieces together, drawing directly from Central American women's lived experience, and form a new image or theoretical model explaining these experiences and relationships.

Disrupting Dichotomies

This research supports many scholars' efforts to disrupt the harmful dichotomy of economic versus forced migration (Garcia, 2006; Gonzales, 2014; Jonas & Rodriguez, 2014; Snyder, 2012). These data and the resulting theory-building make an argument

towards considering women as forced migrants or refugees, despite considerable political pressure to continue viewing them as economic migrants or illegal migrants.

First, this study describes the ways that migration related to domestic violence can be misinterpreted as purely economic migration. Given the economic control strategies inherent in domestic violence relationships, Central American women fleeing such violence may seem, on the surface, to be responding to a one-dimensional economic push. This interpretation fails to include the myriad ways that domestic violence, in combination with meso-level gang violence and macro-level poverty and underemployment, may create intolerable situations for women. In other words, finding economic stability for herself and her children may be intimately tied into fleeing a controlling intimate relationship.

Some argue that the continued insistence on viewing Central American migrants as economic migrants is part of the larger denial or minimization of the role the U.S. has played in building and supporting structures that lead to the current migration patterns. Garcia (2006), for example, argues that the intentional categorization of migration as economically-driven is based on a reluctance on the part of U.S. government “to admit its policies caused displacement and generated refugees” (p. 33).

As part of this discursive debate about forced and voluntary migration, we cannot ignore the production or construction of illegality (Gonzales, 2014; Jonas & Rodriguez, 2014). With the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment and nativism, Latino migrants are increasingly portrayed as national security threats and subsequently constructed as

‘illegal.’ With the construction of “illegality” and the maintenance of Central American women as voluntary or economic migrants, come other harmful and false binaries - deserving/undeserving migrants and good/bad migrants. Under this depiction as “illegal,” the contemporary response to Central American migrant women and children follows.

Contemporary Responses to Forced Migration

While there are most definitely legal immigration “remedies” that can allow many Central American women to adjust their status and remain in the U.S. legally and possibly to bring their children as well, there also exists a very troubling pattern of responses related to the detention of women and children.

During the summer of 2014, while the U.S. government and the media focused on the arrival of unaccompanied Central American children, many Central American women also travelled to the U.S. alone or with their children. The response to these women and children corresponded to their depiction as economic migrants and hence “illegal.” In fact, the summer of 2014 marked the re-institution of a practice that had gone out of favor in the U.S. – immigrant family detention. In order to send a message of deterrence to Central Americans, the U.S. government began to detain women and their children again in detention facilities in New Mexico, Texas, and Pennsylvania, despite the fact that many were eligible for immigration relief in the form of asylum. Initially, these women and children were categorically denied release on bond. Consequently they suffered the negative social and emotional impacts of being held in controlled detention

environments, compounding the tremendous violence they experienced before and during migration.

These new responses are reflective of an argument made by migration scholar Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. She states that “the process of migration and resettlement may also present new inscriptions and reinscriptions of structural oppression” and that “integrating into a host state, resettlement state or country of origin may equally lead to new or repeated forms of exclusion and marginalization” (2014, p. 405).

It is through the past year that we have begun to see clear parallels between the process of immigrant detention and other types of violence. Testimonies of women involved in this research, in combination with the testimonies of women recently and currently detained at Karnes, Dilley, Artesia, and Berks, describe detention as a form of state violence. We cannot overlook the connections between the conditions in detention, for example, and the control tactics used by traffickers, abusers, and criminal gang networks. U.S. immigrant detention practices include keeping women and children in cold “hieleras,” keeping lights on at all hours, insults and humiliation, efforts to withhold information, isolating women from one another and from their own children, in addition to outright sexual harassment and abuse. These are, of course, reminiscent of the strategies used by abusers, traffickers, and gangs to exert power and violence over the women they aim to control. The situations women find themselves in and the violence that may be committed against them are not equivalent, but they may be revealed as mirror images of one another. We may call one human trafficking, another extortion, and

the other detention. However, to what extent do the three feel the same for women? This question and the meaning migrant women make of these experiences merit further research. Furthermore, those who are unable to successfully defend their asylum claims in immigration court may be deported, ultimately becoming forced return migrants.

Nonetheless, detained women's responses and actions during the spring of 2015 also reflect this study's findings related to collective resistance and solidarity. In an effort to gain control over their situation of being held without bond or without avenues for release, and to regain control over their mothering, detained women began to organize and to speak out. In addition to sending letters with their stories and their requests to media outlets, women engaged in courageous and collective political resistance in the form of hunger strikes from within the cells of detention (End Family Detention, 2015; Hylton, 2015). This ultimately resulted in social action and solidarity outside of detention, among advocates and activists across the U.S.

Multi-Scale Policy Responses

Ultimately, if we are to consider these findings and view Central American women as forced migrants, or as refugees, how might this change our policy responses to Central American migrant women? Similar to the ways that violence operates at micro, meso, and macro levels, responses and solutions must also come at all three levels. Katy Long (2014) warns against the "solution" of "fixing" people into places. She argues that just as we must consider the historical and political systems and structures that contextualize a "refugee problem," we must also consider political structures in our

solutions. In other words, it is problematic to focus on resettlement or place-based solutions without regard to political solutions.

Considerations for policy solutions from the immediate perspective of the United States are vast. First, we must ensure that migrants are adequately informed of their rights and are comprehensively screened for potential immigration relief related to violence, exploitation, and persecution. Many women and children may be eligible for some kind of immigration relief (asylum, SIJS, U or T visa). However, attempts to seal the southern borders of the U.S. and the urgency towards deportation removes any possibility of migrants revealing what has happened to them. Given trauma, fear of authorities, and lack of awareness of rights, migrants may not make an outcry about the kinds of trauma, violence or exploitation they have experienced. Furthermore, the recent and troubling displays of hatred, fear, and anti-immigrant sentiment keep migrants from feeling safe and prevent them from seeking help. All governmental personnel and contractors working within the U.S. immigration system would benefit from in-depth training on violence and trauma. It is critical that comprehensive screening be conducted by trained interviewers, in private settings, in migrants' preferred language, with patience and consideration for migrants' trauma responses. Furthermore, it is critical that border militarization and the re-invigorated practice of family detention, in addition to its expansion, be exposed and heavily scrutinized. In particular, questions about trauma-informed solutions must continue to be explored, including arguments that immigrant detention is antithetical to trauma-informed practices. Terminating the practice of

immigrant family detention and improvements in the processing of asylum claims are crucial.

In addition to U.S.-based responses, this research calls us to attend to the experiences and rights of women and children in the Northern Triangle of Central America and to those on the move. Greater efforts must be made to reducing impunity and improved access to justice in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Regional efforts are needed to ensure that migration is a safe option for those who choose to migrate or are otherwise compelled to migrate.

Finally, while immediate responses to the suffering of women and children are crucial, we must not be distracted from the need to dismantle oppressive systems that serve to maintain violence against women, that perpetuate violence during and after migration, and that restrain the movement of those who are marginalized and suffering.

Affirming Migrant Women's Agency and Voice

This research also describes women as being engaged actors in their lived experiences and exerting power and resistance in multiple ways. Echoing the continuous decision-making of migrant women, Jonas and Rodriguez (2014) state, "migration involves continual processes of negotiation with different actors that can facilitate or impede their migration" (p. 206). Similarly, this study supports the work of scholars who affirm the agency of women and warn against falling into the trap of portraying women as agency-less subjects. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014) highlights, "displaced women [can] simultaneously be victimized and yet remain active agents deserving of respect, and not

simply pity” (p. 398). Chandra Mohanty (2003) writes, “defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into ‘objects-who-defend-themselves,’ men into ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence,’ and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people” (p. 24). Women are “agents who make choices, have a critical perspective on their own situations, and think and organize collectively against their oppressors” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 72).

Geraldine Pratt (2009) also warns of the dangers inherent in using maternal discourses, in particular. She maintains that these discourses can easily turn to blame mothers and promote discourses of the bad mother. She alerts us that simplified and de-individualized narratives can promote victim discourses and rescue fantasies, thus robbing women of agency. Pratt suggests that we instead aim for “response-ability” in presenting testimonials, by encouraging “responses that affirm the testifier’s capacity to respond and hence their agency and subjectivity” (p. 10).

While this research begins to describe the intersections of motherhood, gender, and immigration status, other elements of women’s identities and experiences are missing. Further analysis and research should explore additional intersections of migrant women’s identities, in addition to the multiple ways that women may describe and define these intersections in the context of migration. Similarly, further research with other migrating communities may explore the degree to which either violence and/or motherhood are described as central to migrant women’s identities.

Nando Sigona (2014) struggles with the idea of refugee voices and the use of testimonies. He describes the tension between “on the one hand, dominant representations of the refugee as speechless and traumatized and, on the other, refugees’ quest for political recognition” (p. 371). While most of the women who participated in this research were not politically active, many expressed a desire to speak and have their stories make a change for future migrant women. In this way, participating in research might be considered a political act.

The research process, and the human subjects protection processes in particular, often err on the side of “protecting” undocumented survivors of violence from harm. On the one hand, we must indeed be very careful to not re-traumatize participants and to not repeat violence. On the other hand, some research protocols may create barriers that further silence women. Some participants in this study were immediately ready and interested in talking to me. Others came to the interview with more hesitation. Regardless, almost all participants spontaneously mentioned the benefits of having talked while a stranger listened patiently and without demands. One woman, for example, told me it was easier to speak with a stranger than her own family, who would judge her.

Nonetheless, we must also be cognizant of and transparent about the motivations of this type of research and who it serves (the researcher, academia) and not convince ourselves that it is an act of benevolence, allowing space for migrant women’s voices to be heard.

Similar questions are also raised in the context of immigration court and the use of expert witnesses. While many would argue that women are themselves the experts of their own experiences, immigration court hearings often use an expert witness to add credibility to the woman's testimony. Migrant women's voices are often not considered believable on their own, particularly due to their status as undocumented immigrants. Thus, outsiders are brought in to speak on women's behalf. Those using expert witnesses or serving in these roles must negotiate and come to terms with how the use of expert witnesses may re-enact other types of violence enacted on women or take away migrant women's power, control, and voice. Questions remain about how to bring voice and expertise back to being situated within and among women themselves.

In recognizing the importance of making space for the voices of women, we must also exercise caution that these findings do not further entrench fixed notions of Latino men as violent abusers or reify cultural norms that maintain women and men into static and narrow positions as victim and perpetrator. Rather, it is crucial that we see these experiences in a broader context - one that takes into account the regional, transnational, and historical contexts that create an atmosphere of war, chaos, and conflict. Both those who experience violence and those who engage in acts of violence all operate within the larger scope of structural oppressions that impact the actions and responses of all. It is my hope that this study's limited focus will not diminish the relevance of or the need for additional research on the wider spectrum of individuals who experience gender-based violence and on those who engage in acts of gender-based violence at multiple levels.

Contexts of Protective Violence

It is tempting to cling to clear and simple separations between protection *from* violence and exposure *to* violence. However, experiences of violence and protection from violence are often messy and intermingled. We struggle to make sense of contexts and relationships that are simultaneously protective and violent in nature. For some, the person offering support, safety or protection from “public” violence may be the same person inflicting control, coercion, or physical violence in the “private” realm. Interpersonal relationships throughout migration may offer some shelter from some violence (gang violence, for example) for women and their children, as well as a safeguard against economic risk and instability. This study’s findings lead us to question how strategies of resistance may be used to manage the dynamics of protective violence. In balancing decisions between lived experiences of violence and anticipated violence, to what degree do women weigh the benefits of a relationship context that offers some elements of protection versus anticipated risks of embarking into an unknown, but likely risky, situation or future relationship? Furthermore, how do women manage their social and emotional attachment to that perceived protection or protective violence and the ways the understanding and experience of that attachment may shift during migration? These questions merit further inquiry.

Historical Remnants of Violence

While this research explores the ways that various forms of violence interact with one another in connection with migration, it did not investigate violence in the more distant past. The case of sexual violence across time may be particularly interesting. For

example, while research participants referenced having experienced early childhood sexual violence, the study did not delve deeply into these experiences. It is possible that further exploration, especially a longitudinal or intergenerational perspective, would shed additional light on mothers' responses to the risk of future violence, particularly for their children.

Going back further into the past, we understand that sexual violence was used against women during the armed conflict in Guatemala. Looking further back in time to the colonial era, the conquest, and even pre-conquest eras, sexual violence also punctuated women's lives. What happens if, for Guatemalan women as an example, we consider the histories of sexual violence used as a weapon of war and control by the state, the high rates of femicide, and high rates of impunity – alongside the realities of Guatemalan women fleeing domestic violence, seeking asylum in the U.S. and being subjected to detention? Sexual violence, then, follows women across a broad expanse of time and history, in addition to across space and borders. In a sense, sexual violence may be conceptualized as a legacy that becomes part of a historical, transnational experience.

Incorporating the Affective

The narratives shared in the context of this research and in simultaneous pro bono work with migrant women and children are stories of enduring suffering and unbearable choices. This work has generated frequent questions about how to understand and how to navigate the pain, grief, and trauma encountered as everyday components of research and service. How can I embrace and value “emotional labor” as a researcher and the affective

as a means of knowledge production? How can I value these essential affective elements without letting myself devolve into navel-gazing and a disregard for the power and privilege I hold in my relationships with migrant women?

Unfortunately, these experiences with, and questioning of, the emotional aspects of research are shrouded in silence. In fact, silence is woven throughout the experiences of violence, of suffering, of migration, and of conducting emotionally charged research. We recall that gender-based violence is relegated to the “private” sphere, where it is marginalized, delegitimized and kept silent. Through the construction of illegality, migration is also enveloped in silence and shadows. In addition, suffering, particularly grief and trauma are often relegated to the private sphere as something to be done alone, to be “gotten over” and to “move on” from. Through the traditional structures that surround research and the protection of human subjects, the affective is again devalued and silenced. Assuming we want to expand the way we experience and respond to the affective and to dismantle the silence around it (both as researchers and in relation to those we study and hope to support), how are we to proceed?

I suggest that in order to move these tender pieces from private to public spaces as researchers, we are called to build community and relationships, and to open conversations among colleagues. We must consider breaking the silence and isolation around emotional labor in how we train graduate students, how we write, and how we design and implement research. How do we also encourage these conversations as they relate to research participants and those we study and hope to support? While we cannot

assume to build community on behalf of another, we can set our efforts to removing barriers to community and to relationship-building. For the migrant women I work with, some of these barriers include the silence around their violence and trauma, in addition to physical barriers such as detention, and structural barriers such as the production of illegality and access to services and human rights protections.

Perhaps the dismantling of silence and isolation around emotional labor can even be transformative. In fact, Chicana feminism and borderlands epistemologies may inform our efforts here. K.D. Hudson (2014) notes that Chicana feminists “conceptualized the border as a liminal space that generates and resolves conflict; it is situated both physically and symbolically between domination and resistance, but it is also a “home” with the power to restore and transform” (p. 110). There remains much to explore in terms of Central American migrant women’s experiences in and through borderlands and the possibility for restoration and transformation.

Conclusion

The movement of women and children across borders is not a new facet of migration, nor is the U.S. new to responding to neighbors fleeing violence and persecution. However, the recent increases in those migrating from Central America have spurred panic and flat-footedness among legislators, policymakers, and other responders. In addition to improving immediate responses, we must also continue to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems that perpetuate violence and constrain the movements of marginalized communities, further harming those fleeing violence.

The more I delve into these data and into social work practice with migrant families, the more connections I see *and* the more questions I have. As images become clearer, more fleshed out and expanded, they also become foggier, with looser boundaries. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) insightfully reminds us, "research for social justice expands and improves the conditions for justice; it is an intellectual, cognitive and moral project, often fraught, never complete, but worthwhile" (p. 215). Undoubtedly, this puzzle will never be considered complete. Nonetheless, this research provides some degree of scaffolding with which to continue improving our understanding and our responses to women and families, in the context of ever-changing dynamics of migration and shifting political landscapes.

Ultimately, as researchers and social workers, and as communities, we are also faced with a choice. We can choose to continue to respond to migrants with fear and hostility. We can respond to the multiple episodes of violence and trauma experienced by those seeking safety with further confusion, incomplete information, shallow support, isolation, detention, and deportation. But that is not our only option. We can instead step boldly into the fray, call on existing and trained service providers, make central migrant women's voices, needs, and rights, and respond with our full humanity to neighbors seeking safety. Finally, we must collectively begin to transform these migration-related crises and trauma into journeys that are neither constrained nor determined by violence.

Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Demographic Information

- Age:
- Country of origin:
- Number of children (in US and elsewhere):
- Marital status:
- Number of years in the US:

Tell me about how you came to the US. Potential probes include:

- What was it like?

Tell me about the events that led up to your journey to the US.

- What was going on in your life then?

Tell me about your decision to migrate to the US. Potential probes include:

- How did you decide to come to the United States?
- How old were you when you came to the United States?
- How long (in years/months) have you lived in the United States?
- What kinds of things did you think about when deciding whether or not to come, when to come, and how to come?
- What were some of the things that made you want to come to the US?
- Was there anything that made you not want to come?
- What kinds of risks or danger did you anticipate in making the journey? What kinds of risks were you aware of before you left? In contemplating the journey, what worried you about the journey? Worries about your own safety? Your health? Your body? Your mind/spirit? Your family back home? Money?
- What kinds of risk or danger did you anticipate by staying in your home country? What worried you about staying? Your health? Safety? Body/mind/heart?
- Do women in your home country experience violence or abuse in their homes?
- Why do you think some women experience violence or abuse in your home country?
- What kinds of help or support are useful when women encounter violence or abuse in your home country?

Tell me about your family back home. Potential probes include:

- Do you have children back home? Parents/siblings?
- How did your family respond to your leaving?

- Does your family rely on you for financial support? Other kinds of support?

Tell me about the journey itself. Potential probes include:

- How was the journey?
- How did you travel from your home country to the United States?
- Who did you travel with?
- Did you feel safe? What made you feel safe or unsafe?
- What was it like to cross borders?
- Did you experience any violence or abuse along the way?
- Tell me about other women from your home country who experienced violence or abuse along the way.
- Why do you think some women experience violence or abuse along the way?
- What kinds of strategies do women use to cope with violence? What do women do when faced with violence along the way? How did you or how do women find safety?
- What kinds of help or support are useful to women who encounter violence or abuse along the way?

Tell me about settling here in Texas. Potential probes include:

- What has it been like to live here?
- Who do you live with?
- What are some of the positive aspects of living here?
- What kinds of challenges do you face?
- How do you find help or support when you need it?
- Do immigrant women in Texas experience violence or abuse in their homes?
- Why do you think some immigrant women experience violence or abuse here in the United States?

How have you grown as a person during this? (Charmaz, 2002)

Tell me about strengths you discovered or developed through this experience?

How have your experiences impacted the way you parent your children, or your relationships with your children now?

What kinds of support or help do immigrant women need? Potential probes include:

- What kinds of help or support would be useful when you encounter challenges here in the United States?
- How do women in your community help one another?

After having these experiences, what guidance would you give someone in a similar situation?

Tell me about what you hope for your future. Potential probes include:

- What are your dreams for yourself? And for your family?
- What kind of job would you like to be doing five years from now?
- What will your family look like in five years?

Is there anything you would like to tell me that we haven't discussed yet?

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

If I have other questions that I think of later, would you be willing to talk with me again?

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval Letters



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873

FWA # 00002030

Date:

PI:

Dept:

Title:

Re: IRB Expedited Approval for Protocol Number

Dear

In accordance with the Federal Regulations the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the above referenced research study and found it met the requirements for approval under the Expedited category noted below for the following period of time: _____ to _____ . Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date. If the research will be conducted at more than one site, you may initiate research at any site from which you have a letter granting you permission to conduct the research. You should retain a copy of the letter in your files.

Expedited category of approval:

- 1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met. (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review). (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
- 2) Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows: (a) from healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or (b) from other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
- 3) Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means. Examples:
 - (a) Hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner.
 - (b) Deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
 - (c) Permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction.

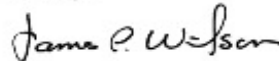
- (d) Excreta and external secretions (including sweat).
 - (e) Uncannulated saliva collected either in an un-stimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue.
 - (f) Placenta removed at delivery.
 - (g) Amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor.
 - (h) Supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques.
 - (i) Mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings.
 - (j) Sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.
- 4) Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications).
- Examples:
- (a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy.
 - (b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity.
 - (c) Magnetic resonance imaging.
 - (d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography.
 - (e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
- 5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.
- 6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- 7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.
- Use the attached approved informed consent document(s).
- You have been granted a Waiver of Documentation of Consent according to 45 CFR 46.117 and/or 21 CFR 56.109(c)(1).
- You have been granted a Waiver of Informed Consent according to 45 CFR 46.116(d).

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1. Report immediately to the IRB any unanticipated problems.
2. Submit for review and approval by the IRB all modifications to the protocol or consent form(s). Ensure the proposed changes in the approved research are not applied without prior IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. Changes in approved research implemented without IRB review and approval initiated to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject must be promptly reported to the IRB, and will be reviewed under the unanticipated problems policy to determine whether the change was consistent with ensuring the subjects continued welfare.
3. Report any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to continue to participate.
4. Ensure that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.
5. Use only a currently approved consent form, if applicable.
Note: Approval periods are for 12 months or less.
6. Protect the confidentiality of all persons and personally identifiable data, and train your staff and collaborators on policies and procedures for ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and their information.
7. Submit a Continuing Review Application for continuing review by the IRB. Federal regulations require IRB review of on-going projects no less than once a year a reminder letter will be sent to you two months before your expiration date. If a reminder is not received from Office of Research Support (ORS) about your upcoming continuing review, it is still the primary responsibility of the Principal Investigator not to conduct research activities on or after the expiration date. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted, reviewed and approved, before the expiration date.
8. Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the ORS.
9. Include the IRB study number on all future correspondence relating to this protocol.

If you have any questions contact the ORS by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,



James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873

FWA # 00002030

Date:
PI:
Dept:
Title:

Re: IRB Expedited Continuing Review Approval for Protocol Number

Dear

In accordance with the Federal Regulations the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the above referenced research study continuing review report and found it met the requirements for approval under the Expedited category noted below for the following period of time: to . Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date.

Expedited category of approval:

- 1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met. (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review). (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
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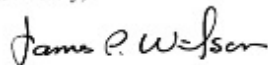
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- 4) Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications).
Examples:
- (a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy.
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Sincerely,



James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

Appendix C: Brief Research Participant Narrative Summaries

1. ISABEL: Isabel grew up in Honduras without parents, as hers died when she was about 7 years old. She worked for other families as a child and into her adulthood. She had her first child with a man she thought she loved but who left her when she got pregnant. She later met her other two children's husband Isabel left Honduras in 2007, leaving her 3 children in Honduras and father. He was verbally abusive did not help the family, and she was essentially a single mother. He came to the United States and got with another woman. Isabel came alone to the United States in 2007 in order to find a better life for her children, so that they would not grow up on the streets like she did. She did not initially pay a coyote. Rather, her sister in the U.S. lent her money to buy a bus ticket. She arrived in Guatemala City and was kidnapped and held captive for 5 days. She was let out with someone who said he would help her, but he raped her and delivered her to another house in Chiapas, Mexico. She was also raped during this time. She was brought up through Mexico and again held captive in a house in Mission, Texas. There she was held for about a month and also endured physical violence and sexual violence. One year ago she sent for her children, who were also temporarily held captive in Mexico and extorted. They are now doing well in Austin in school, and her oldest son is also doing well in Honduras, in school to become a pilot.
2. BEATRIZ: Beatriz left Honduras due to extreme poverty. She has two children in Honduras. She had all money and ID taken from her during the travel through Mexico. The coyote abused her along the way, raping her, and getting her pregnant. In Austin, he continued hurting her, and she escaped with the help of neighbors. She found housing elsewhere and cared for children in exchange for rent. However, they kicked her out one day at 1 am. She looked for help and was afraid of losing the baby. At the hospital, she was referred to a domestic violence shelter, where she lived for 3 months. She received help from a community organization with getting a T visa and other services. She was also exploited while working at a house cleaning service.
3. HORTENSIA: Hortensia made the journey to the United States twice. The first time she was deported back to her home country of Guatemala. Hortensia has four children. Her first husband died, and her second husband was abusive. When Hortensia came to the U.S. the second time, she was held hostage in San Antonio. During this time, she learned of her daughter's murder back in Guatemala. She escaped and made it to Austin, where she was exploited by a woman she was staying with. She met people who helped her, received a t visa, and got a stable

- job. She brought 2 of her children to the U.S. Her oldest and her youngest children are still in Guatemala.
4. SANDRA: Mother and 7 year old daughter left El Salvador, travelling about a month, arriving in U.S. in July 2014. She and daughter took buses and taxis to border, not coyotes for the most part. Nonetheless, they were detained as part of new-ish family detention, started back up again at Karnes during the summer of 2014. Great public outcry by immigration advocacy groups lead to their release, because the daughter has untreated brain tumor.
 5. ALMA: Alma left El Salvador due to a domestic violence situation with her partner and fear of gangs. She used a coyote to get from the Distrito Federal to the border. In Piedras Negras, she was held hostage, threatened, and extorted, along with about 14 other migrants. She was also made to cook and clean. They were released when military raided the house and she made her way to Reynosa with two other migrants. They paid again and crossed into McAllen. After crossing, she was held in a series of houses, where her captors asked for money again. She was raped in one of these houses. She escaped along with several others and was apprehended by immigration. She spent 9 months in detention. She now has a t visa and works in a factory. She has received support from several local community organizations. Alma has 4 children (ages 19, 17, 15, 12) in El Salvador, and she is working towards bringing them to the U.S. One of her children has Down's syndrome, which has posed some difficulties with the reunion. In the meantime, she is worried about her children and their vulnerability to the gangs.
 6. BELINDA: Her journey story was quite different than others, in several ways. First, she came for 10 hours in a boat, not on train. Then crossed over in a car past the immigration stop, using a false identification card and passing for that other person. In both of these ways, she represents an outlier among other participants (who came by train/bus and who crossed the river). She was recruited to work in cantina in Houston but escaped before the cantina network was busted by immigration and FBI. It was only years later that she discovered she, too, might be eligible for status adjustment. While she knew her cousin had received help after the raid, she was nervous to speak out and instead waited to make sure it would be OK. She seemed very intent on distinguishing herself from the others. She did not want the kind of life her cousin wanted. She wanted a decent and honest life and referred several times to her cousin wanting to stay in the life of the cantina.

7. CELIA: Celia is a Honduran mother of two boys. Her oldest child was killed in a tragic accident, when a television fell on him and electrocuted him. Celia fled domestic and sexual violence in her home country and migrated with her 4 year old son to the United States in 2014. She feared for her life and feared possible harm to her child as well. She travelled by train with her child and experienced tremendous fear and danger getting onto and off of the trains. At one point, two children travelling with her group were separated and ended up continuing on for a time on the train, alone. They ultimately found the two children again. She and her son were held captive by the Zetas in Mexico, close to the US-Mexico border. She crossed the border through a tunnel, suffering sexual harassment and losing all her documents. At the time of the interview, she was living in a shelter, looking for work, and seeking to adjust her status (undocumented). She had been exploited by housecleaning crews.

8. GILBERTA: Gilberta is a mother of three boys in the U.S. She suffered severe violence at the hands of her partner in Guatemala. She left him and lived with his parents, but the violence continued. She left again but he found her and the violence continued. He sent someone to kill her, but she survived. She went to the country to live with her parents, but he called by phone and threatened to kill her. She attempted to migrate alone to the U.S. but was apprehended and deported. She attempted a second time and crossed the border. She was held hostage in a home in Austin to pay off her debt. During this time she experienced physical and sexual violence. She escaped and met a man she began to live with and had third child with. She found help with a local community organization while in hospital with that child, separated from the father. She brought her two children from Guatemala and is raising all three boys.

9. KARLA: She left Honduras due to fear of gangs. Her husband left first, when she was pregnant with their second child (first child was 9 months old). He was involved with drugs, and the gangs were looking for him. They began looking for her after he left. She travelled by train and slept in the streets. She crossed with others through some sort of sewage canal and was then driven to Houston in a car with many other people. In Houston, they were put in a room of 80 people and held until their family paid. Her husband picked her up and brought her to Austin. They had another child in the U.S. and brought both children from Honduras, with a coyote. She has since separated from him, due to domestic violence.

10. ANITA: Anita fled domestic violence in El Salvador in 2013. She was abused by her husband and father of her two young daughters. He was gay and did not want anyone to find out. He abused her and threatened her life. She reported him, and

the threats became worse. She left her daughters with her mother and took a bus to Guatemala. From there, she and another woman she met travelling were apprehended by a man who took them hostage in a house with other women. The men made them work in the fields and raped the younger hostages. Anita was held for several days there until she and another woman escaped in the night. They walked through the mountains and jungle and eventually crossed the border into Mexico. There they received some help from the other woman's relatives and took a bus north through Mexico. When the bus stopped, they were apprehended again by men who took them hostage and raped them. The men left them outside of a town, and Anita and her companion had to walk again to find safety. They arrived in a town and asked a couple for help. The couple took them to Reynosa. There the two women lived in the trash heap for a week, foraging for food. Anita managed to cross the river with a group. She escaped from the group after crossing, because she was afraid that she would be abused further along the way. She walked, lost, until she came upon another group and was apprehended by immigration. She spent a couple days in the *hielera* and was then let out. She now awaits a decision on her asylum case.

11. CLARA: Clara has made two trips to the United States from her home country El Salvador. The first trip came on the heels of economic desperation when she was laid off from a factory job. She and her husband tried to start their own businesses, but were thwarted by the "rent" from gangs. They only had enough money to send one person to the U.S. She went, and her husband and 10 year old son stayed behind, with the intention of coming later. Clara took a bus from El Salvador to Guatemala and her money was taken from her by police in Guatemala. She and other bus passengers managed to cross the border. They were offered water on the other side (Mexico) by some men and were then held hostage by them (with the intention of raping them). She managed to escape with another woman. The men she was travelling with fought with the hostage-takers, sustaining injuries, in order to protect themselves and to protect the women. From there, they took the train. On two occasions, people came onto the train to rob and hurt the passengers. During one occasion, Carla went inside one of the train cars with others, to avoid the thieves. She later took a truck, stayed with a stranger, then another truck to the border area. There she spent 3 days in a house controlled by gangs. She paid more money and was allowed to cross the river. She was apprehended by immigration but let go to join her brother in Houston. Given what she had endured, her husband no longer wanted to make the trip with their son. He tried to come "legally" but was swindled out of money. Meanwhile Clara began to work but was raped by a stranger coming home from work one day. She left her work and moved apartments. She was later raped by another stranger. Subsequently, she became involved with a man who helped her get her cosmetologist license. She fell in love with him, and they had a son. He became

violent when she became pregnant. She ultimately left him and sought custody of her child. However, in 2011 she was apprehended by ICE and spent 8 months in jail, and was then deported back to El Salvador. She tried to convince her older son to come back with her, but he would not agree to travel “illegally.” She made another trip to the U.S. in 2011. She came by train and crossed the river. She was taken to a house where about 100 people were kept for about 8 days with little food. In groups of twenty they were taken in vans. Her van was stopped, and everyone fled. She walked for 3 days with little to eat or drink. She was raped by the coyote during this time. Immigration apprehended and detained them. She was told she was going to be deported on February 6. However, they let her out for some unknown reason. They later put an electronic bracelet on her for three months. She was ultimately able to gain status via VAWA.

12. GLORIA: Gloria is the mother of 7 children – 3 born in the United States and 4 born in Honduras. She doesn’t know her oldest child, a daughter born from a rape and taken from her at birth. Gloria came to the United States from Honduras in 2007. She fled a violent relationship. Her husband had thrown boiling water on her, burning her body. She crossed the border to Guatemala, where she met a stranger who helped her recuperate. She had planned to return to Honduras and be with her three children, but her husband was threatening to kill her. She met a man who said he could help her get to the United States. She continued with him and the women he was transported. He exploited them along the way. She was exploited in the U.S. as well, working in a cantina as part of a sex trafficking ring. During this time, she had her three youngest children from this work. She managed to escape and lived for a time under a bridge with her children. She met a woman who helped her and is giving her shelter. She is not working and is applying for a t visa.
13. MARIA: Maria is from Guatemala and came to the United States in 2008 and again in 2013. She originally came in 2008 after an altercation with the current wife of her ex-husband. She was raped and held hostage by the Zetas during the time of crossing into Texas. During this time she was also drugged and had to be revived from an overdose. The gang members were crossing drugs at the same time they were crossing her and the others in her group. After crossing, she was put into a car and taken to Houston. There she was asked to spend one more night with her smugglers. When she tried to decline, they extorted more money from her but let her go after her sister paid a portion of the extra amount requested. She worked, sent money home to her children, and stayed with her sister until her brother-in-law tried to rape her. She left to live with the cousin of her later boyfriend. During this time she was raped by her boyfriend’s cousin and her boyfriend’s friend. She later went to live with a friend, but her friend was living in

an abusive relationship. Ultimately, she and her boyfriend moved in together and were later married. He provided for her and helped her send money home, because she had reproductive health complications that kept her from being able to work very much. In 2012, she returned to Guatemala because she had promised her children she would only be gone for 4 years. After being back in Guatemala a short while, violence within her family became severe. Her sister's husband became violent with her and her children. She got a lawyer who told her she needed to flee the country, as her brother-in-law was an attorney and would win the case. She found a coyote and made the trip with her three children. They were held for 9 days at the border by the zetas. When they crossed, they were apprehended by immigration. She was released after 4 days and went to live with her husband in Houston. She has since received political asylum and will petition for her children and husband once she receives legal permanent residency.

14. ZARA: Zara came to Houston from El Salvador for economic reasons and with fear of growing gang violence. She left her daughter, who was about 2 years old at the time, in El Salvador with her husband's mother. Her husband fled to the United States first, and she followed shortly afterward. She had a difficult journey, as she was ill and needed surgery upon arrival in the U.S. She was able to get a renewable temporary permit to work, due to past earthquake in El Salvador. Her husband no longer wanted to maintain a relationship, so they separated. She brought her daughter (4 years old at the time) to the U.S. Her ex-husband then became violent with her, and she fled with her daughter temporarily to another state. Ultimately, she returned to Houston. She had a relationship with another man and became pregnant with her youngest child, but the relationship ended soon after. She became involved with another man who was abusive, controlling, and violent. She separated from him, and he is currently incarcerated. She lives with her youngest child, who is 3. She is estranged from her daughter and her daughter's child, who also live in Houston.

15. MATILDA: Matilda and her husband left Honduras in 2007 looking for a better life for her family in the U.S. At the time, she had a 7 year old daughter in Honduras, and she wanted to support her daughter's studies. She and her husband came with the help of a guide or coyote, but she felt alone on the journey and that they had to look out for themselves along the way. It took them two months to arrive in the U.S. She and her husband had two children in the U.S. At the time of the interview, her husband had recently been deported back to Honduras, and Matilda was having trouble making ends meet and living in a shelter. While Matilda has not experience domestic or sexual violence, she described it being very common for other women in her home country and along the route to the

U.S. She said that travelling with her husband kept her safe from sexual violence during migration.

16. NATALIA: Natalia came to the United States from Guatemala in 2012 with her oldest daughter. She was separated from her husband, who was abusive. She had a small business and began to be extorted and threatened by the gangs. She travelled with her daughter on the train to Reynosa. They were held in two different houses before crossing into the United States. After crossing, the coyotes left them and they had to find their own way. Natalia has worked hard in the United States to provide for her two children in Guatemala and her two children in the United States. She has had to make multiple arrangements for her children in Guatemala, as some of the placements were not appropriate. In one home, her daughter was molested by the man of the house. In the U.S., Natalia was in another abusive relationship with a man who ultimately cut her face with a knife. She separated from him. She is in the process of settling her immigration status and wants to bring her other two children to the U.S.

17. THELMA: Thelma came to the United States in 2006 with her youngest child, who was 5 years old at the time. She discovered that her husband was sexually abusing her daughters. When she confronted him, he began to beat her. She ultimately reported the sexual abuse. He threatened to murder her and fled to the U.S. with the three oldest children. She was afraid of the men he had hired to kill her and was also left without any way to provide for the other children or for herself, and so she also came to the U.S. with her son. She spent a year travelling through Mexico, because she and her children did not have enough money to pay her way. After a couple months, her children paid for her son to be brought the rest of the way. Thelma continued slowly on and ultimately crossed the river and was apprehended by immigration. She spent 8 months in detention and was released on bond. She lives in Houston with her youngest son. In Houston she has suffered abuse from her ex-husband at times and has also been mistreated by her daughter, who is still manipulated by him.

18. SIERRA: Sierra left with her daughter who was 3 years old at the time, and her 4-year-old son stayed in Honduras with her mom. She had fled an abusive relationship and was without a way to care for her two young children. She was also increasingly afraid of gang violence. Her siblings (already in the U.S.) helped her pay for the trip but there was only enough money to bring one of her children. She decided to bring her daughter to protect her from sexual abuse. She worried about leaving her son behind and his being a target for the gangs. She said, “Pero mi corazón se partió en dos, dejar la mitad allá y traerme mi otra mitad para aquí.”

(but my heart split in two, leaving one half there and bringing the other half here with me). When it was time to cross the river to Texas, the coyote helped them cross and then said they were on their own after that. They walked until they caught a bus. Immigration apprehended them but gave her permission to pass, given that she was from Honduras. She travelled to Houston, stayed with her siblings and worked. Eight months later, her husband and son travelled to the U.S. The violence continued in the U.S. until Sierra saved enough money to move out with her children and separate from her husband. He came to live with them and the violence continued. One night her daughter saw him come at her mother with a knife, and Sierra fled once again with her children, leaving all her belongings and her car behind. Her husband eventually went back to Honduras, leaving her with a telephone bill debt. Sierra later fell in love with another man who treated her well at first and then became abusive as well. Like her first husband, the abuse and their financial situation worsened when he was drinking. She discovered she was pregnant and stayed with him so that her children would have a father. He isolated her from her family and friends. Sierra's oldest daughter became pregnant, and Sierra discovered that her husband had been molesting her and also secretly taking her to be with her boyfriend. She currently has a protective order.

19. LORENA: Lorena migrated to the United States from Guatemala in 2009. She made the trip in order to seek a better life and better opportunities for her five children, who joined her in the U.S. in 2012. She fled experiences of domestic violence and family violence. She did not directly experience violence during the journey or once settled in the U.S. However, she witnessed the dangers and violence against other women and girls. She was detained for 4 months in the U.S. and was initially not informed about access to immigration remedies. Eventually, she applied for and received humanitarian asylum, which subsequently allowed her to bring her children to the U.S. as well.

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