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Faith and Femicide: The Catholic Church's Efforts to Combat Femicide in Guatemala

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Faith and Femicide:
The Catholic Church's Efforts to Combat Femicide in Guatemala

Majaella Louise Ruden

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Prerequisite for Honors
in Peace and Justice Studies
under the advisement of Nadya Hajj

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Abstract:

In contemporary Guatemala, women frequently fall victim to the crime of femicide, the “systematic” “killing of females by males because they are females (Tierney FitzGerald 2016, 2; Russell 2001, 13).” By drawing on scholarship from multiple academic disciplines including Women’s and Gender Studies, Theological Studies, Peace and Justice Studies and Political Science, this study aims to expand its readers’ understanding of femicide and increase their ability to help address this phenomenon. To do so, I answer the central research question: *Though it has acted as a protector of the country’s most vulnerable communities in the past, is the Catholic Church, in fact, working to reduce rates of femicide in post-civil war Guatemala? And, if so how?* An analysis of the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s nine post-war collective pastoral letters, the individual actions of the thirty-one Guatemalan Catholic bishops who signed those letters, and the programs hosted by six Guatemalan Catholic social organizations ultimately reveals this religious institution is neither working to reduce the country’s femicide rate nor acting in ways that cause it to worsen.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On the morning of August 12, 2005, Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz, a 19-year-old young woman living in Guatemala City, Guatemala, left for class at a local university. After her school day ended, she decided to stay out late for a friend's party and spoke to her parents "one last time around 11:45pm."¹ When the clock hit 2am on August 13th, she was still not home, and her parents, Elsa Claudina Paiz Vidal and Jorge Rolando Velásquez Duran started to worry she might be in danger.² "When their search [for her] turned up no results of leads, the desperate parents attempted to make a report at the local police station."³ Unfortunately, "officers at the precinct [told Elsa and Jorge]...that 24 hours [of a person not being seen] must pass before they can file a missing person's report."⁴

Once those 24 hours were up, "the police formally received Claudina's parents and made an official report that classified Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz as missing."⁵ Sadly, later that day, authorities found her body and determined there were "signs that she was subjected to extreme violence and rape" at the time of her death.⁶ Then, to make matters worse, "Claudina's case was [originally] dismissed," "because she had a belly button ring and was wearing sandals, [which] to the Guatemalan police...indicated she was a gang member or a prostitute." Facing these and additional difficulties with the investigation of their beloved daughter's death, Elsa

¹ Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz et al. v. Guatemala, Vol. 41, Issue 4 Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review 1106 (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2016).

² Ibid., 1106.

³ Victoria Sanford, "Femicide in Guatemala," *Revista Harvard Review of Latin America*, accessed October 13, 2018, <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/femicide-guatemala>.

⁴ Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz et al. v. Guatemala, Vol. 41, Issue 4 Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review at 1106.

⁵ Ibid., 1107.

⁶ Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz et al. v. Guatemala, Vol. 41, Issue 4 Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review at 1107.

Claudina Paiz Vidal and Jorge Rolando Velásquez Duran were left without any semblance of justice for over ten years.⁷

Unfortunately, Claudina's story represents only one of the world's many instances in which a woman fell victim to the horrors of femicide, "the killing of females by males because they are females,"⁸ or feminicide, another word for this phenomenon created by Marcela Lagarde⁹ which denotes the "systematic nature of these killings."¹⁰ In recent academic scholarship, government reports and news articles, these terms often seem to be used interchangeably, but Victoria Sanford, a leading scholar on this issue, distinctly promotes the latter terminology. She writes "feminicide is a political term. Conceptually, it encompasses more than femicide because it holds responsible not only the male perpetrators by also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny."¹¹ Therefore, this study, along with some but not all of those included as references, employs the newer term as much as possible when presenting evidence and analysis.

Feminicide is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a problem confined to a single country or region of the world. In 2015, the UK documented 128¹² cases in its population of 65 million people¹³ and Spain found 76¹⁴ in a population of 46 million people.¹⁵ Meanwhile, in that same

⁷ Ibid., 1108-1114.

⁸ Diana E.H. Russell, "Defining Femicide and Related Concepts," in *Femicide in a Global Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 13.

⁹ Marcela Lagarde, "Del Femicidio Al Feminicidio," *Desde El Jardín de Freud* 6 (2006): 221.

¹⁰ Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, "Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence" (Doctoral Dissertation, Boston College, 2016), 2.

¹¹ Victoria Sanford, "From Genocide to Feminicide: Impunity and Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Guatemala," *Journal of Human Rights* 7, no. 2 (2008): 112.

¹² "Femicide: the numbers in Europe," Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, accessed October 3, 2018, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Europe/Femicide-the-numbers-in-Europe-184329>.

¹³ "U.K. Population (2018) - Worldometers," accessed December 15, 2018, <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/uk-population/>.

¹⁴ "Femicide: the numbers in Europe."

¹⁵ "Spain Population (2018) - Worldometers," accessed December 15, 2018, <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/spain-population/>.

year, Claudina's home country, Guatemala saw at least 209¹⁶ feminicides take place in its smaller population of 16 million,¹⁷ giving it the "third highest femicide rate in the world."¹⁸ Even though Guatemala is a signatory of protective international laws such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and has its own national Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women,¹⁹ more recently, in 2017, 221 feminicides occurred.²⁰

Multiple scholars including Michelle Bellino, David Carey Jr. and M. Gabriela Torres connect Guatemala's contemporary femicide problem to the violence that existed during the country's thirty-six-year long civil war (1960 – 1996). This conflict officially began when leftist rebels challenged their dictator, Carlos Castillo Armas, who replaced their progressive, democratically-elected president Jacob Arbenz in a 1954 US-backed military coup.²¹ At the time, the Cold War was taking shape, and the redistribution of wealth and power was consistently conflated with ideas communism. Within this social context, Arbenz's implementation of land and social welfare reforms seemed to threaten the authority of Guatemalan elites and their ally,

¹⁶ "Estadísticas de Violencia En Contra de La Mujer 2014-2016" (Guatemala, December 2017), 6, <https://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2017/12/14/20171214202518Qofx8MPyS9OdyK8BAy1XeZ3hIDJ1sUO9.pdf>.

¹⁷ "Guatemala Population (Live)," Worldometers, n.d., <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/guatemala-population/>.

¹⁸ Candace Piette, "Where Women Are Killed by Their Own Families," *BBC News*, December 5, 2015, sec. Magazine, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34978330>.

¹⁹ "Ley Contra El Femicidio y Otras Formas de Violencia Contra La Mujer: Decreto Número 22-2008" (Centro Nacional de Análisis y Documentación Judicial, 2008), http://www.sipi.siteal.iipe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sipi_normativa/decreto_22_de_2008_-_ley_contra_el_femicidio_y_otras_formas_de_violencia_contra_la_mujer_-_guatemala.pdf.

²⁰ "Femicide, the Most Extreme Expression of Violence against Women" (ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs, November 16, 2018), 1, https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/nota_27_eng.pdf.

²¹ "Timeline: Guatemala's Brutal Civil War," PBS NewsHour, March 7, 2011, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/latin_america-jan-june11-timeline_03-07.

the United States, which prompted efforts to ensure there was an immediate change in government.²²

“During the 1960s, the United States was intimately involved in equipping and training Guatemalan security forces that murdered thousands” in the name of anti-communism.²³ As the war progressed, an extremely violent counter-insurgency campaign instituted in the 1980s began to depict women “as potential mothers for future guerillas” and “threats to the State.”²⁴ Because of these ideas and the imposition of indiscriminate violence, overtime, “violations of women became common and ultimately normal.”²⁵ The Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA reveals the long lasting effects of this problem through its finding that “the rise of violence against women in the last decade [the early 2000s], including rape, dismemberment, and techniques of torture and mutilation, is reminiscent of tactics used during the war.”²⁶ And, Michelle Bellino even more distinctly declares, “it is the confluence of military strategies for victimization and the politics of the war’s aftermath that have produced the tragedy of femicide.”²⁷

After considering Guatemala’s civil war peace process, scholars Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz et al partially attribute Guatemala’s current crisis of violence against women to the way that neither of the country’s two truth commissions, the Recuperación de la Memoria

²² “Guatemala 1954,” Cold War Museum, accessed October 3, 2018, <http://www.coldwar.org/articles/50s/guatemala.asp>.

²³ “Papers Show U.S. Role in Guatemalan Abuses,” accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/march99/guatemala11.htm>.

²⁴ Julie Suarez and Marty Jordan, “Three Thousand and Counting: A Report on Violence Against Women in Guatemala” (Washington, D.C.: Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, 2007), 2.

²⁵ David Carey Jr. and M. Gabriela Torres, “Precursors to Femicide,” *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 3 (2010): 160.

²⁶ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?” (Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, 2009), 4.

²⁷ Michelle Bellino, “Femicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” *Women’s Policy Journal of Harvard* 7 (2010 2009): 7.

Histórica (REMHI) and the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), paid extensive attention to the role of gender in past atrocities.²⁸ They argue that since a full understanding of cycles of violence during the war was never found, the roots of gender-based violence were left to remain in existence today.²⁹

Additional observations from the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA and Michelle Bellino acknowledge that women become victims of femicide today as a result of not only historical factors. For instance, while “gang initiation often includes killing an innocent victim,”³⁰ interviews with Guatemalan women also suggest “men are killing women to forcefully communicate their distaste for women’s growing independence.”³¹ It seems prevailing “‘machista’ attitudes”³² make it acceptable to relegate Guatemalan women to a fixed, subordinate, and less valued role in society through violence. Further compounding the problem, Guatemalan authorities suffer from a “lack of resources” and are often not “trust[ed]” to support searches for justice.³³ As a result, “families and victims who denounce crimes against women are often faced with corrupt or indifferent police, strong gender bias, and a dysfunctional judicial system,” leaving them without any strong possibility of holding criminals accountable for their actions.³⁴

In the past, when Guatemala faced similarly pervasive social ills, religious institutions demonstrated an ability and desire to assist victims. For instance, during the civil war, advocates of liberation theology, “a social and political movement within the [Catholic] church that

²⁸ Rebecca Patternson-Markowitz, Elizabeth Oglesby, and Sallie Marston, “‘Subjects of Change’: Feminist Geopolitics and Gendered Truth-Telling in Guatemala,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 13, no. 4 (September 2012): 88–90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁰ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 5.

³¹ Bellino, “Femicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 7.

³² “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 5.

³³ Suarez and Jordan, “Three Thousand and Counting: A Report on Violence Against Women in Guatemala,” 6.

³⁴ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity,” 6.

attempts to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ through the lived experiences of oppressed people”³⁵ and “creat[e] a space for liberation,”³⁶ inspired some Guatemalans to join rebel groups.³⁷ Unfortunately, Guatemala’s dictators and military viewed this popular ideology as being analogous to communism which enabled them to justify their infliction of terror on suspected subversives in the late 1970s and early 80s.³⁸ As massacres decimated Mayan and rebel villages,³⁹ Guatemala became a country defined by fear, and the government “targeted the Catholic Church because it was seen as siding with insurgents,”⁴⁰ putting the 84% of the population that identified as Catholic at the time at risk of death.⁴¹

After Guatemala’s period of genocide ended in 1983,⁴² a newly elected government, with the help of the international community, tried to begin a peace process between state institutions and guerrilla groups.⁴³ Within this context, Catholic bishop Rodolfo Quezada Toruño demonstrated the Catholic Church’s ability to get involved in the protection of public interests by acting as a key facilitator of inter-adversary peace negotiation sessions.⁴⁴ And, on an even larger

³⁵ Kira Dault, “What Is Liberation Theology?,” U.S. Catholic: Faith in Real Life, October 2014, <https://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201410/what-liberation-theology-29433>.

³⁶ “Liberation Theology in Latin America | Modern Latin America,” accessed October 2, 2018, <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-15-culture-and-society/essays-on-culture-and-society/liberation-theology-in-latin-america/>.

³⁷ Raymond Bonner, “Guatemalan Jesuit, Ex-Rebel, Now Preaches Rightist Cause,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/07/world/guatemalan-jesuit-ex-rebel-now-preaches-rightist-cause.html>.

³⁸ Carlos Arturo Salamanca Villamizar, “Los Lugares de La Memoria y de La Acción Política En Guatemala. Justicia Transicional, Políticas Del Reconocimiento y Ficciones de Secularismo,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 2015, 65–66.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁰ Amy Bracken, “Did War Change Guatemala’s Faith?,” Public Radio International, June 30, 2016, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-06-30/did-war-change-guatemalas-faith>.

⁴¹ Clifton L. Holland, “Expanded Status of Christianity Country Profile: Guatemala, 1980” (Latin America Socio-Religious Studies Program, 2008), 10, <http://www.prolades.com/historiografia/2-Guatemala/guate-profile1980.pdf>.

⁴² United Nations. Commission for Historical Clarification, “Guatemala: Memory of Silence - Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification Conclusions and Recommendations” (Guatemala, 1998), 41.

⁴³ Luis A. Padilla, “Conflict Transformation: Peace Making and Peace Building in Guatemala,” *Peace Research* 27, no. 4 (November 1995): 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

scale, the Catholic Church remained reliably concerned with human rights by setting up its own truth commission in 1995, the Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (REMHI).⁴⁵

Kevin Lewis O’Neill’s study of the conclusions of the REMHI and CEH truth commissions indicates that Christian stories and ideologies helped Guatemalans explain and move past their wartime experiences.⁴⁶ He argues that because the final publication of REMHI describes instances of violence in ways that are reminiscent of events in the Bible, it creates an atmosphere of hope for its readers⁴⁷ and an opportunity for the public to perceive similarities between the experiences of religious figures like Jesus Christ and themselves.⁴⁸ As a result, those who lived through past atrocities could internalize the message that despite their pain, there remains “the promise of a peaceful future.”⁴⁹ Since Guatemala’s social healing processes seem to be substantially influenced by religion and religious institutions, the country’s Catholic Church appears to have the potential to be a vital provider of social welfare and support for women facing the dangers of femicide.

While femicide rates remain high in Guatemala today, so does the popularity of the Catholic Church. Diverse sects of Christianity and other religions are growing, but approximately 50% of the population still identifies as Catholic.⁵⁰ Across the country, the Church maintains numerous locations for religious study and worship, many of which have become places of spiritual and artistic remembrance, indicating the Church provides important

⁴⁵ Kathy Ogle, “Guatemala’s REMHI Project: Memory Form Below,” NACLA, September 25, 2007, <https://nacla.org/article/guatemala%25E2%2580%2599s-remhi-project-memory-form-below>.

⁴⁶ Kevin Lewis O’Neill, “Writing Guatemala’s Genocide: Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports and Christianity,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 7, no. 3 (2005): 332.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 335–36.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 336–39.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁵⁰ “Religion in Latin America | Pew Research Center,” accessed September 30, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>.

emotional and psychological assistance to its followers.⁵¹ For those who do not choose to make the Church a large part of their lives, the institution sometimes inserts itself into their public spaces through its humanitarian work. For instance, in the early 2000s, the Guatemalan Catholic Church started a program to “halt the spread of HIV/AIDS,”⁵² and in 2018, various Catholic Churches helped supply resources to injured and displaced individuals after the unexpected eruption of a dangerous volcano.⁵³ Based on these and other former endeavors, the Catholic Church today appears to be a protector of the common citizen’s well-being and an institution concerned about social ills. *However, even though it has acted as a protector of the country’s most vulnerable communities in the past, is the Catholic Church, in fact, working to reduce rates of femicide in post-civil war Guatemala? And, if so, how?*

The present case study will determine whether or not this religious institution currently contributes to efforts to combat femicide, investigate a possible explanation for my results, and discuss their implications. In the end, I argue that while the Guatemalan Catholic Church is not currently working to specifically reduce rates of this crime, it also does not act in ways that make the issue worse.

⁵¹ Villamizar, “Los Lugares de La Memoria y de La Acción Política En Guatemala. Justicia Transicional, Políticas Del Reconocimiento y Ficciones de Secularismo,” 70.

⁵² Jill Replogle, “Sex and the Catholic Church in Guatemala,” *The Lancet* 366, no. 9486 (August 2005): 622.

⁵³ “Catholic Churches Offer Relief after Guatemala’s Deadly Volcano Eruption,” *The Catholic World Report*, June 5, 2018, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2018/06/05/catholic-churches-offer-relief-after-guatemalas-deadly-volcano-eruption/>.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Existing scholarship about Catholic Church involvement in efforts to combat social ills around the world maintains mixed conclusions. One side of this academic conversation suggests that the institution can work to reduce femicide rates in Guatemala by spreading awareness and providing targeted social welfare, which I consider to be “the direct delivery or indirect facilitation of services and programs that promote wellbeing and security.”⁵⁴ Opposing these optimistic visions, a smaller portion of this discussion takes on a more neutral point of view by showing that even if the Catholic Church does not have the power or does not use its power to thwart violence, at the very least, it will not worsen the issue. Unfortunately, additional studies go even further to contradict any positive predictions by indicating the Catholic Church may foment the continuation of violence against women through its promotion of traditional visions of women and gender roles.

2.1 The Catholic Church as a Protector of Civilian Welfare

One of the primary ways in which the Catholic Church can participate in the amelioration of injustice is by bringing an issue onto a national stage and surrounding it with an increased sense of urgency. In the early 2000s, the subnational authoritarian leaders, Carlos and Nina Juárez terrorized and controlled the Argentinian province of Santiago del Estero by trading employment opportunities for unwavering political support and by creating a coercive “provincial intelligence system.”⁵⁵ After the discovery of the bodies of two women murdered by members of the Juárez administration sparked local political protests in 2003, support from a Catholic Church bishop enabled a group known as Madres de Dolor to make the rest of

⁵⁴ Melani Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 12.

⁵⁵ Edward Gibson, “Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries,” *World Politics* 58, no. 1 (October 2005): 123–24.

Argentina aware of the violence that existed underneath the nose of a supposedly democratic government.⁵⁶ As a result of the issue's increased visibility, the country's president was prompted to remove the Juárez family from power, bringing an end to one situation of endemic injustice.⁵⁷ Based on this sequence of events, in Guatemala, the Catholic Church may be an invaluable source of support for nationwide femicide awareness campaigns and efforts to pressure the government to take concrete action.

Monica Maher sees another realization of the Catholic Church's potentially positive social influence in her study of the operations of a faith-based women's group in Honduras. This country's Mercy Weaver of Dreams Program teaches women "to question" norms that place them in an inferior social status and creates space for women to "reformulat[e] traditional interpretations of Biblical texts" and history.⁵⁸ Since this group enables women to "realize the truth of their own strengths and leadership capacities...and embrace the truth of who they are,"⁵⁹ it seems that social groups are a possible means through which the Catholic Church can promote efforts to combat gendered social injustice in Guatemala.⁶⁰

The Catholic Church's ability to act in favor of civilian's best interests is again made evident by a Peru-based comparative study of the work of Servicios Educativos El Agustino (SEA), a Catholic non-governmental organization (NGO), and El Estudio para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (DEMUS), a secular one. When building the argument that "the struggle for women's rights is part of a broader struggle for recognition and equality for the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 126-127.

⁵⁸ Monica Maher, "The Truth Will Set Us Free: Religion, Violence, and Women's Empowerment in Latin America," in *Global Empowerment of Women: Responses to Globalization and Politicized Religions*, ed. Carolyn M Elliott (Routledge, 2007), 274-76.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 276

⁶⁰ Ibid., 270.

poor,”⁶¹ Rosa Alayza Mujica and Mercedes Crisóstomo Meza emphasize the way “SEA played a key role in creating social organizations, promoting income-generating activities and building strong residential associations, as well as in training the women who participated in them.”⁶² It also turned out that SEA was uniquely able to function in difficult social “conditions...because many of its staff, as residents of the neighborhood, could still discreetly support their clients.”⁶³ Since the Catholic Church was able to augment female empowerment in Peru and remains deeply connected to the everyday lives and history of Guatemalans, it seems reasonable to expect that it is also well positioned to help combat femicide at a local level.

From an international point of view, Marianne Tierney FitzGerald’s doctoral dissertation prescribes additional ways in which the Catholic Church can work to prevent femicide in Guatemala. After developing her argument that “theology plays an important role for [grassroots] organizations” in Latin America,⁶⁴ she posits that Christian churches may benefit from partnering with international organizations. Together these entities can “collect important data and integrate prevention programs into the community,”⁶⁵ organize “awareness campaigns,” complete “comprehensive studies about the effects of gender-based violence on communities,”⁶⁶ and help women become “empowered.”⁶⁷ These optimistic suggestions, alongside Tierney FitzGerald’s main argument, indicate the Guatemalan Catholic Church can claim a positive role in efforts to push back against femicide.

⁶¹ Rosa Alayza Mujica and Mercedes Crisóstomo Meza, “Women’s Rights in Peru: Insights from Two Organizations,” *Global Networks* 9, no. 4 (2009): 486.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 490.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 500.

⁶⁴ Tierney FitzGerald, “Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence,” 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

Finally, according to Celia Valiente, it is possible for apparent drawbacks of the Catholic Church to act as an asset for advocates of women's causes. In her study of female activism in mid-twentieth century Spain, she finds the "mass media provided to Catholic feminists by male allies...allowed Catholic feminists to publicize their claims...at a time when a severe censorship was imposed."⁶⁸ As a result of this support, "male allies sent society and the Church the message that Catholic feminists were reasonable women deserving respect."⁶⁹ Even though "individual men (and not collective actors) gave Catholic feminists important benefits," in this case, the male dominated power structure of the Catholic Church was actually helpful to women's causes.⁷⁰ Therefore, even though the Guatemalan Catholic Church continues to be led by mostly men today as all current Guatemalan bishops are men,⁷¹ the institution can still importantly validate female voices, concerns and fears. Daniel Levine expands on these ideas by maintaining that the Church "provides valued legitimation"⁷² and "a sense of solidarity"⁷³ to members of social justice movements in Latin America. Based on this, it seems that if the Catholic Church acts on its ability to support the fight against gender-based violence in Guatemala, a larger portion of the public may be willing and able to help resolve the problem as well.

2.2 The Neutral Effects of Catholic Church Involvement in Social Justice Causes

Even when the Catholic Church does not overtly support civilian welfare as in the previously described cases, its involvement in social justice movements may not hinder leftist

⁶⁸ Celia Valiente, "Male Allies of Women's Movements: Women's Organizing within the Catholic Church in Franco's Spain," *Women's Studies International Forum* 62 (2017): 46-47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁷¹ "Guatemala: Living Bishops," Catholic Church in Guatemala, n.d., <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/bgt2.html>.

⁷² Daniel H. Levine, "The Evolution of The Theory and Practice of Rights in Latin American Catholicism," in *Religious Responses to Violence: Human Rights in Latin America Past and Present*, ed. Alexander Wilde (University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 43.

⁷³ Ibid, 45.

projects. Starting in the 1980s in Argentina, Catholic women joined progressive meetings called Encuentros, which were supposed to be groups where women could learn from one another about how to understand and deal with topics such as “lesbianism” and “mental health.”⁷⁴ On the surface, the participation of Catholics originally seemed problematic, because instead of being entirely accepting of others, these women maintained more traditional mindsets.⁷⁵ However, in her final analysis of the situation, academic scholar Mónica Tarducci finds that their contradictory views did not disrupt the cohesion of the feminist movement fighting for more liberal causes.⁷⁶ In this instance, it seems the Catholic Church and its messages, while not always supportive progressive social change, do not create inhibitive barriers to activists who are.

W.E Hewitt ends his analysis of the inner workings of religious social justice projects in Brazil’s Christian Based Communities (CEBS) on a similar note. He finds that “within Brazil’s notoriously ‘machistic’ society, the CEBS, through a range of structured activities and undertakings, do indeed offer women opportunities for group-level political empowerment. At the same time, for the women under study, initiatives developed by the CEBS appear to have had only a limited impact in terms of increased political awareness and activism.”⁷⁷ This implies that in Guatemala, activities of the Catholic Church may help some women find their voice and participate in the fight against femicide but with potentially negligible effects overall.

⁷⁴ Mónica Tarducci, “La Iglesia Católica y Los Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres,” *Estudios Feministas* 12, no. 2 (2005): 397-98.

Original: “salud mental”

Original: “lesbianismo”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 399

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁷⁷ W.E. Hewitt, “The Political Dimensions of Women’s Participation in Brazil’s Base Christian Communities (CEBS),” *Women and Politics* 21, no. 3 (2000): 3.

2.3 The Potentially Negative Social Influence of the Catholic Church

A third side of the existing scholarship about the effects of the Catholic Church's involvement in social justice endeavors contends this religious institution might hinder efforts to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala and possibly even worsen the issue. In a study of anti-Vietnam War activism in the United States, Marian Mollin demonstrates that although the Catholic Church can heighten a movement's visibility, it may perpetuate some of the challenges that women face in society. For instance, "while strong women could carve out places of power and influence, they could not challenge the structures of power within a movement that defined itself as a defender of militant masculinity. There was not yet room for feminism in this otherwise radical struggle for social and political change."⁷⁸ Mollin's article suggests the emphasis on masculinity in messages from the Catholic Church can be inescapable. This being the case, the institution may struggle to effectively combat femicide in Guatemala or even reinforce one of its causes, a prevailing "machismo" attitude.⁷⁹

The Catholic Church's potential to foment the mistreatment of women appears again in a report written by Carlos Aldana Mendoza about how Christian Churches, with repeated reference to the Catholic Church specifically, affect cycles of violence against women in Guatemala. Mendoza observes that within these institutions, women face considerable amounts of "subtle or 'normalized' forms of aggression,"⁸⁰ and he believes Christian "churches end up constituting a political mechanism for the construction of cultural elements...that subordinate women."⁸¹ Instead of acting as a safe and supportive place for women, the Guatemalan Catholic Church

⁷⁸ Marian Mollin, "Communities of Resistance: Women and the Catholic Left of the Late 1960s," *The Oral History Review* 31, no. 2 (2004): 51.

⁷⁹ "Guatemala's Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?," 5.

⁸⁰ Carlos Aldana Mendoza, "Churches and Faith Communities in the Face of Oppression and Violence Against Indigenous and Mestiza Women in Guatemala" (Guatemala: Act Alianza, 2015), 40.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

seems to facilitate violence against them on its own, which ultimately leads to the further “justification and reproduction of violence.”⁸² Mendoza’s argument is further bolstered by the observations of scholar Alice McDermott from Johns Hopkins University who posits that since women have a “voice the Catholic hierarchy needs to [but refuses to] hear” by “barring women, for reasons of gender alone, from the priesthood,” “the institutionalized misogyny of the Catholic Church reinforces the notion of women, and their children, as lesser.”⁸³ Unfortunately, by acting in harmful ways, the Guatemalan Catholic Church, as illustrated by Mendoza, normalizes this “notion”⁸⁴ and sanctions male attempts to keep women in an inferior social status, which can take the form of femicide.

Feminist theologians express similar concerns in their “discourse [which] understands itself as critical reflection on the lived experience that women and men have of God...in order to advance toward new social relationships governed by justice and integrity for all in a cultural environment free of patriarchal domination.”⁸⁵ The work of a leading scholar in this field, Rosemary Radford Ruether, establishes that the Church and its ideologies, unless given major internal improvements, can motivate destructive actions and mindsets. She finds that while “redemption is about reclaiming an original goodness that is still available as our true selves,...[the possibility of attaining redemption is] obscured by false ideologies and social structures that have justified domination of some and subordination of others.”⁸⁶ She further

⁸² Ibid., 37.

⁸³ Alice McDermott, “Why the Priesthood Needs Women,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/23/opinion/sunday/women-catholic-priests.html>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ María Pilar Aquino, “Latin American Feminist Theology,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14, no. 1 (1998): 91.

⁸⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988), 8, quoted in Nancy Pineda-Madrid, “Chapter 10: Redemption, Latinas, and the Contribution of Rosemary Radford Ruether,” in *Redemption, Latinas and the Contribution of Rosemary Radford Ruether* (Routledge, 2014), 153.

expands on this by revealing how the Catholic Church's use of "dualisms serve[s] to distinguish the good, which is associated with elite ruling males, from the bad or evil, which is projected onto all others, women, men of color, animals and so forth."⁸⁷ Overall, her ideas suggest the Guatemalan Catholic Church perpetuates cycles of femicide in Guatemala, because its messages and actions validate the existence of unequal gender relations and efforts to protect those norms.

Glick et al. take another approach to these ideas by questioning if religiosity can indicate the existence of sexist attitudes. Their study finds that in Spain, "Catholic religiosity...predicted more benevolent [or "patronizing"⁸⁸], but not more hostile, sexist beliefs for both men and women,"⁸⁹ and that "benevolent forms of sexism" sanction the mistreatment of women, even if only in discreet forms.⁹⁰ Sonia Alvarez similarly connects conservative attitudes about gender to the Catholic Church after studying female involvement in local parishes and religious communities in Brazil. It turns out that "despite relentless pressure from women church activists and some progressive clergy,...the church's 'old' doctrines concerning the family, maternity, morality and sexuality remained largely unaltered."⁹¹ She argues that because of this, women faced "oppression in the private sphere" and struggled to take part in successful activism efforts.⁹² Together, the observations of these two scholars depict the Catholic Church as possibly having a negative effect on efforts to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala, as its ideologies

⁸⁷ Pineda-Madrid, 155.

⁸⁸ Peter Glick, Maria Lameiras, and Yolanda Rodriguez Castro, "Education and Catholic Religiosity as Predictors of Hostile and Benevolent Sexism Toward Women and Men" 47, no. 9/10 (2002): 434.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 440.

⁹¹ Sonia E. Alvarez, "Women's Participation in the Brazilian 'People's Church'" A Critical Appraisal," *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 2 (n.d.): 385.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 390.

enable various types of gender-based violence to exist and may at least partially inhibit women from working to combat injustice.

In additional discussions about the Catholic Church's unreliable responses to violence, Carolyn Cook Dipboye and Sarah Teresa Wicks McCallum suggest that although this religious institution can bring attention to a social issue, it is not always willing to do so. She describes that between the late 1960s and 1980, "Argentinean and Uruguayan bishops...were particularly closed to...public confrontation,"⁹³ while the Brazilian Church spearheaded advocacy efforts, and the Chilean Church directly supported victims of state violence.⁹⁴ Simultaneously, Wicks McCallum finds that Catholic Churches in Latin America, as well as other Christian Churches around the world, "responded [to violence] like any bystander to a dangerous situation"⁹⁵ within the timeframe of the 1960s and 70s.⁹⁶ The churches she studied were prompted to take action primarily by unavoidable threats to "the sustainability of their religious cause."⁹⁷ Based on these scholars' findings, it appears the Guatemalan Catholic Church may recognize but still permit problems like femicide to exist, unless they detrimentally affect the institution's overall social influence. By acting in this way, the religious institution would arguably condone, and thus, facilitate the existence of the crime.

Finally, in regard to the realm of politics, Barbara Norrander and Scott Desposato find an adherence to religious teachings can negatively affect an individual's inclination to participate in some types of activism.⁹⁸ They demonstrate that "the religious beliefs of frequent attenders at

⁹³ Carolyn Cook Dipboye, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Political Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America, 1968-1980.," *Journal of Church and State* 24, no. 3 (1982): 521.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 501-3.

⁹⁵ Sarah Teresa Wicks McCallum, "Innocent Bystanders to a Dangerous Situation: The Christian Churches and Human Rights Organizing in Ahmedabad India and Latin America" (Master of Arts, Carleton University, 2012), 8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹⁸ Scott Desposato and Barbara Norrander, "The Gender Gap in Latin America: Contextual Individual Influences on Gender and Political Participation," *British Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (2009): 160.

church may dissuade them from unconventional protest,”⁹⁹ “which encompasses protest activity such as demonstrations, boycotts and occupations.”¹⁰⁰ On a more positive note, they do find that “[religiosity] increased conventional political actions,”¹⁰¹ such as “awareness and interest in politics, participation in discourse and traditional efforts to influence government policy” including voting and campaigning.¹⁰² However, since “in Guatemala, current government measures enacted to deal with...violence [in general] are not sufficient to solve the problem,”¹⁰³ unconventional political involvement is likely vital to immediately heightening the public’s concern about and determination to address femicide. Unfortunately, since the Catholic Church remains highly popular in Guatemala today, “unconventional” political participation may not be widely promoted, which could limit policymakers’ ability to envision the urgency of this social ill.

2.4 Takeaways

In sum, this literature review suggests there are multiple ways in which the Catholic Church can influence rates of femicide in Guatemala. On one hand, the institution can potentially help to ameliorate the issue by bringing it onto a national stage, surrounding it with an increased sense of urgency and legitimacy, and providing social welfare services. While some scholar’s arguments may be more optimistic or more widely applicable than others, at the very least the Catholic Church is not portrayed as an institution that will hinder a crusade to stop this specific type of violence against women.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰² Ibid., 142.

¹⁰³ Corinne Ogrodnik and Silvia Borzutzky, “Women under Attack: Violence and Poverty in Guatemala,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 12, no. 1 (2011): 62.

On the other hand, additional authors contradict these positive perspectives by indicating that the Catholic Church may act in ways that perpetuate femicide in Guatemala. It appears the institution can promote a “machismo” or patriarchal attitude in society, legitimize the subordination of women, and discourage women from utilizing unconventional, yet important, methods of political participation. Based on these mixed results, the current role of the Catholic Church in the fight against femicide in Guatemala remains uncertain.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To investigate whether or not the Guatemalan Catholic Church is working to reduce the country's rate of femicide, I examined multiple arenas in which the Catholic Church can demonstrate not only rhetoric, but also clear action to support those efforts. I began by creating a hypothesis based on the messages of the Guatemalan Catholic Church's nine post-war, collective pastoral letters. These documents are periodically written by many country's bishops with the intent of directing the attention of lower down parishes to their leaders' specific "social concerns."¹⁰⁴ While attempting to be conservative in my expectations of what these pastoral letters can and should do, I created four lists of indicators to guide my evaluation of them. In order to assign each letter a category, I placed them in the context of the Pope's yearly "Messages for the World Day of Peace" and ideologies of feminist theologians. Because the Pope's statements act as a major guide for the messages promoted by Guatemala's and other countries' bishops, I found this additional research to benefit how well I could understand each letter. In particular, I looked at the Pope's World Day of Peace messages, because in 1995, the Pope's *Letter to Women* suggested these specific documents provide a space in which the hierarchy's leader can approach the topic of "women's liberation."¹⁰⁵ Once all letters were classified into a group, I made a final prediction based on the predominantly chosen category. The following chart contains the details that I looked for in each letter alongside the possible corresponding hypotheses.

¹⁰⁴ "Pastoral Letters," Archdiocese of Newark, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.rcan.org/offices-and-ministries/archbishops-office/pastoral-letters>.

¹⁰⁵ Pope John Paul II, "Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women," Holy See, 1995, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html.

Hypothesis	Indicators: Statements that...
The Catholic Church is actively working to stop femicide.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mention the word “femicide” specifically and define it as an issue that needs to promptly be addressed 2. Outline the cyclical and ongoing nature of femicide and its causes (i.e. machismo/sexist attitudes, the normalization of violence against women during the civil war, biases against women, inability of the police to combat it, impunity, etc.) 3. Condemn the cyclical and ongoing nature of femicide and its causes (i.e. machismo/sexist attitudes, gender roles, the normalization of violence against women during the civil war, biases against women, inability of the policy to combat it, impunity, etc.)
The Catholic Church is not working to stop femicide specifically, nor is it actively making the issue worse.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do not mention the word “femicide” 2. Outline any of femicide’s cyclical and ongoing causes (i.e. machismo/sexist attitudes, the normalization of violence against women during the civil war, biases against women, inability of the police to combat it, impunity, etc.) 3. Condemn any of femicide’s cyclical and ongoing causes (i.e. machismo/sexist attitudes, the normalization of violence against women during the civil war, biases against women, inability of the police to combat it, impunity, etc.)
The Catholic Church is ignoring femicide and passively worsening the issue.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do not mention the word “femicide” 2. Do not mention any of femicide’s cyclical and ongoing causes (i.e. machismo/sexist attitudes, the normalization of violence against women during the civil war, biases against women, inability of the police to combat it, impunity, etc.) 3. Do not condemn any of femicide’s cyclical and ongoing causes (i.e. machismo/sexist attitudes, the normalization of violence against women during the civil war, biases against women, inability of the police to combat it, impunity, etc.)

The Catholic Church is actively making the issue of femicide worse.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minimize the urgency of addressing femicide in Guatemala 2. Imply the issue is a part of life that cannot and/or should not be changed 3. Discourage women from reaching out for help when facing any of femicide's cyclical and ongoing causes (i.e. machismo/sexist attitudes, the normalization of violence against women during the civil war, biases against women, inability of the police to combat it, impunity, etc.)
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*Note: I use femicide as an indicator, rather than feminicide, because femicide continues to be used in many of Guatemala's legal contexts, public conversations and newspapers reports. To pay due attention to the cyclical and complex nature of the issue, I lean towards the use of feminicide throughout this thesis when describing my own ideas, descriptions and analyses, but for evaluating the work of others, femicide was most helpful.

My investigation into whether or not the Guatemalan Catholic Church is working to reduce rates of femicide did not stop at these collective pastoral letters, because while important to look at, they do not provide evidence that conclusively answers my research question. For instance, the Catholic Church may not translate any concerns into action, if it expresses any at all. Or, it is possible that the Church is taking action without advertising it. Therefore, to give a clear vision of this religious institution's efforts to combat femicide, I next investigated whether or not the thirty-one Guatemalan bishops who signed the collective pastoral letters and six Guatemalan Catholic social organizations contribute to related endeavors. Since the more positive side of my literature review indicates the Catholic Church can openly participate in this cause through affiliated individuals and groups, if it helped at all, I looked for efforts in which the issue of femicide was the explicit focus of the work being done.

To complete this next portion of my research, I conducted a digital scan of the actions taken by Guatemala's Catholic bishops and social organizations. This began with an intense dive into the results of a simple Google search where for the social organizations, I used their names as keywords, and, for the bishops, I connected their names to two topics: femicidio (femicide)

and *violencia contra la mujer* (violence against women). I altered my search for the bishops, rather than the social organizations, because of time constraints and in an attempt to filter out information about solely theological work. By using *femicidio*, rather than *feminicidio* in this portion of my research, I also hoped to widen the results I was able to get, since many of the articles I originally read used *femicidio*. Lastly, I used the Spanish translation of these words instead of English, which I used to research the context of each collective pastoral letter, because I believed this would be most helpful for finding sources from Guatemala itself.

Once this was done, I focused on researching information archived by the online platforms of two of Guatemala's main newspapers *Prensa Libre* and *El Periódico*.¹⁰⁶ In the search engines of these sites, I used personal and organizational names as keywords. Then, to be thorough, I turned back to google, input the same list of names alongside either *Prensa Libre* or *El Periódico* and scoured through the results. Finally, I looked through Facebook, the most prevalent source of social media in Guatemala,¹⁰⁷ for posts from the bishops and social organizations from the last six months that advertise any anti-femicide work. With the help of the chart of indicators that I used when analyzing the Guatemalan Catholic Church's collective pastoral letters and the ideas of feminist scholars, I unpack the implications of my findings to ultimately demonstrate the Catholic Church is neither working to combat femicide nor worsening the issue.

To conclude, I turned to the ideas of multiple researchers and feminist theologians to try to explain my findings. In doing so, this section affirms and elaborates on the ideas presented by Marianne Tierney FitzGerald's dissertation which illustrates that Catholic Churches in Latin

¹⁰⁶ "Top Newspapers in Guatemala," International Media & Newspapers, 2016, <https://www.4imn.com/gt/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Guatemala Profile - Media," BBC News, March 6, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19635977>.

America, and specifically in Guatemala, contribute to anti-femicide projects by acting as a basis for civil society, and thus a primary driver of many individuals' participation in activism.¹⁰⁸ While Tierney FitzGerald does not explicitly use this terminology of "civil society," by connecting her observations to the work of Marsin Alshamary, I suggest the Catholic Church does act in this capacity, and as a result, opens up a social space, which is originally identified by Tierney FitzGerald,¹⁰⁹ in which anti-femicide projects may be best able to succeed in the future.

3.1 Methodological Limitations

Despite my attempts to ensure the validity of my research results, my process for data collection remains arguably flawed. The information I use as evidence does not come directly from any of the bishops of Guatemala's Catholic Church nor the families of women who were killed, leaving open the question of whether their personal narratives would alter my final argument. I did contact various offices and organizations including but not limited to the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, the Guatemalan Archbishop's Office of Human Rights, the *Cáritas* Guatemala Office in Huehuetenango and Jutiapa, Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, and Fundación Sobrevivientes. From the few people who I did receive answers, at most I was able to find out either the email of a specific bishop or reaffirm my background knowledge about Guatemala's femicide problem. It turned that unfortunately most individuals avoided discussing the Catholic Church's involvement in combatting this social ill or just did not answer me. As a result, rather than struggling to find additional information from afar, I decided to alter my research tools to rely on internet-sourced data.

¹⁰⁸ Tierney FitzGerald, "Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence," 63-68, 71-72, 75, 195.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 63-68, 71-72, 75, 195.

The success of this plan may have been restricted by my use of only one source of social media and two newspapers and the way that internet user history and diverse computer algorithms affect Google search results. Furthermore, as suggested by scholar Carlos Aldana Mendoza in a Skype call, my focus on publicized information may have caused me to miss efforts that are not advertised because of a fear of retaliation.¹¹⁰ I did my best to move past these limitations by cross referencing Google-provided information with searches on specific sites; conducting secondary Google searches using additional keywords; going through either all or almost all of the articles, news pages and organizational pages that resulted from each internet search; and, clearing my internet history before beginning this project. Therefore, even though there may exist some drawbacks to my methodology and my own background knowledge on my chosen research topic, my research process tries, as best as possible, to create a comprehensive vision of the efforts being taken by the Catholic Church to reduce Guatemala's high rate of femicide today.

¹¹⁰ Carlos Aldana Mendoza, Interview with Carlos Aldana Mendoza, Skype, January 31, 2019.

Chapter 4: A Preliminary Analysis of the Catholic Church's Efforts to Combat Femicide

To initially answer my research question about whether or not the Catholic Church is working to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala, I analyzed the nine cartas pastorales colectivas or collective pastoral letters that were written by the country's bishops after the signing of the 1996 civil war peace accords. Every few years, Catholic leaders from many countries publish these types of documents "to instruct those in their diocese in aspects of Catholic teachings, worship, or social concerns."¹¹¹ All Guatemalan letters are now posted online where they can accessibly act as guidelines for the ideologies and actions of priests in lower ranking parishes.¹¹² After looking at each letter within the context of the Pope's World Day of Peace statement from the year of its publication and the writings of feminist theologians, I ultimately predict that the Catholic Church is not working to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala, and instead, acts in passively harmful ways that facilitate the existence of the crime.

In the year directly preceding the official end of Guatemala's civil war, Pope John Paul II published his *Letter to Women*, a unique statement in which the Vatican "speak[s] directly to every woman."¹¹³ As a whole, this document presents somewhat mixed messages about gendered injustices, which likely affected the ideologies presented by the first few Guatemalan collective pastoral letters. For instance, at one point he writes "blame, [for permitting that "women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and...they have often been relegated to the margins of society"]...has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry."¹¹⁴ While this apology seems to reveal the Vatican recognizes how "churches and theologies are

¹¹¹ "Pastoral Letters."

¹¹² Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, "Cartas Pastorales Colectivas Del Episcopado Guatemalteco," n.d., http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/cartas_pastorales.htm.

¹¹³ Pope John Paul II, "Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women."

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

deeply complicit within...multiple systems that oppress women in particular,”¹¹⁵ a following statement puts forth a very different idea. The Pope notes, “we [cannot] fail, in the name of the respect due to the human person, to condemn the widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality and corrupts even very young girls into letting their bodies be used for profit.”¹¹⁶ In this instance, the implication that women have even the slightest bit of choice in avoiding the social issues they face exemplifies a “dangerous religious apathy in the face of social suffering.”¹¹⁷ His use of the word “letting” seems to dismiss how many women are forced into harmful situations by socioeconomic norms and injustices. As a result, at least in the early years of official peace, the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s collective pastoral letters, and likely its participation in efforts to combat femicide, were influenced by both positive and negative messages about women from the Vatican.

In Guatemala, victims of femicide and their affected family members often struggle to gain ample support from law enforcement and the courts¹¹⁸ which, in many instances, permits perpetrators of violence to easily escape serious consequences for their actions.¹¹⁹ The Guatemalan Catholic Church’s collective pastoral letter from 1997 seems to approach this general topic of concern by justifying the country’s need for a more strict enforcement of the law overall. It bleakly describes how “if the people continue suffering from hunger and injustice, and the dignity of people is not respected and individual human rights and social rights are violated, there will always be conflicts and discontent that generate violence and division.”¹²⁰ Through

¹¹⁵ Ivone Gebara, “The Abortion Debate in Brazil: A Report from an Ecofeminist Philosopher Under Siege,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11, no. 1 (1995): 131.

¹¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, “Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women.”

¹¹⁷ Jessica Coblenz and Brianne A.B. Jacobs, “Mary Daly’s The Church and the Second Sex after Fifty Years of US Catholic Feminist Theology,” *Theological Studies* 79, no. 3 (2018): 547.

¹¹⁸ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 6.

¹¹⁹ Suarez and Jordan, “Three Thousand and Counting: A Report on Violence Against Women in Guatemala,” 6.

¹²⁰ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “Jesucristo Ayer, Hoy y Siempre” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, March 1997), 13, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/19970330.pdf>.

this vague condemnation of social ills, the Guatemalan Catholic Church replicates the lack of specificity that characterizes the Pope's World Day of Peace declaration from that year. He states that Church members, "called upon to serve the common good, [should] exclude no one from your concerns; [and] take special care of the weakest sectors of society."¹²¹ Based on the similarly general scope of the Guatemalan bishops' statements, the 1997 collective pastoral letter does not indicate the Catholic Church is working to reduce Guatemala's high rate of femicide. However, because this document, which emulates the messages put forth by the Vatican that year, demonstrates they understand and care about the daily violence affecting Guatemalans, it also does not imply the Guatemalan Catholic bishops act in ways that distinctly perpetuate the crime.

In the collective pastoral letter from 1998, Guatemala's bishops, like the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA¹²² and scholar Michelle Bellino,¹²³ recognize that a machismo attitude, or an "aggressive masculinity;" ... [and] 'a strong or exaggerated sense of the right to dominate,'¹²⁴ facilitates nationwide instability. It is declared that "Guatemala is a country that has been characterized by enduring tribulations, persecutions, poverty, violence, unemployment, marginalization and attacks on its values...[and], machismo."¹²⁵ This bleak illustration of the

Original: "si el pueblo sigue padeciendo de hambre e injusticias y no se respeta la dignidad de las personas y se violan los derechos humanos individuales y sociales, siempre habrá conflictos y descontentos que generen la violencia y la división."

¹²¹ Pope John Paul II, "Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the XXX World Day of Peace: Offer Forgiveness and Receive Peace," January 1997, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121996_xxx-world-day-for-peace.html.

¹²² "Guatemala's Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?," 5.

¹²³ Bellino, "Femicide and Silence in 'Postwar' Guatemala," 7.

¹²⁴ Susan Wiedel, "Women, Machismo, and Politics in Latin America," *Panoramas: The Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh*, October 5, 2016, <https://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/health-and-society/women-machismo-and-politics-latin-america>.

¹²⁵ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, "El Espíritu Santo Presencia de La Paz de Cristo En El Mundo" (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, January 1998), 18, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/19980412.pdf>. Original: "Guatemala es un país que se ha caracterizado por soportar las tribulaciones, las persecuciones, la pobreza, la violencia, el desempleo, la marginación y ataques contra sus valores...[y] el machismo"

past status of Guatemalan society, alongside the Pope's *Letter to Women*, reveals the Church does not entirely turn a blind eye to the existence and consequences of an unjust understanding of gender relations. However, when placed in the larger context of the Pope's message for the World Day of Peace from that year, it becomes evident that the Guatemalan Church's likely does not contribute to efforts to combat femicide. In his statement, the Pope avoids discussing this specific issue, even though he takes time to call out how "women [are] taken hostage, children [are] barbarously slaughtered...[and there is] violence of forced prostitution and child pornography."¹²⁶ Since "one of the deepest problems of Roman Catholicism today is its promotion of the struggle for democracy for many groups and within nations but its refusal to allow such struggle within its own institutional life,"¹²⁷ this brief mention of specifically female issues indicates most of women's causes are not the Church's greatest concerns, even if some are. By choosing to not even follow the Pope's example of including some direct references to any kind of violence against women, the collective pastoral letter from 1998 implies the bishops do not push back against femicide, even though the Guatemalan Catholic Church criticizes "machismo."¹²⁸ Furthermore, this religious institution's decision to contrast its message with the Pope's and vaguely address only some details of violence against women enables the existence of persistent injustices that relegate women to subordinate social positions, allowing them to remain vulnerable to crimes like femicide.

In the following year, the Pope once again slightly touches upon gender-based violence by saying "the right to life is inviolable...A genuine culture of life, just as it guarantees to the

¹²⁶ Pope John Paul II, "Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All," January 1998, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121997_xxxi-world-day-for-peace.html.

¹²⁷ Gebara, "The Abortion Debate in Brazil: A Report from an Ecofeminist Philosopher Under Siege," 134.

¹²⁸ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, "El Espíritu Santo Presencia de La Paz de Cristo En El Mundo," 18.

unborn the right to come into the world, in the same way protects the newly born, especially girls, from the crime of infanticide.”¹²⁹ He concludes by reminding his followers that “in [the love of God] is found the secret of respect for the rights of every woman and every man.”¹³⁰ Since the Pope compares abortion to the killing of female babies, his words might encourage conflicting understandings of what constitutes and how to deal with violence against women, hindering the possibility of success for efforts to prevent it. Within this context, the 1999 collective pastoral letter from the Guatemalan bishops recognizes that “in our society so marked by machismo and a history of ambitions that have marginalized the mother-woman, the ‘father’ not infrequently represents the claims of ambition, power, authoritarianism and oppression, justified sometimes with a false religious sense.”¹³¹ In contrast with the Pope, the Guatemalan Catholic Church pointedly identifies some of the harmful results of the Church’s and the world’s institutionalized patriarchy. However, despite their recognition of this problem, by officially connecting women with the role of motherhood, the bishops still enable their followers to consider women an inferior part of society. While this implies the Guatemalan Catholic Church is not working to reduce rates of femicide, feminist theologian Mary Daly further suggests the classification of women as “mother-woman”¹³² may indicate the Church passively perpetuates the crime. Since “to consider a person...a symbol is to treat him or her as an object, which is fundamentally an egoistic and hostile act,” the bishops’ depiction of women as primarily

¹²⁹ Pope John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace-Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace,” January 1999, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_14121998_XXXII-world-day-for-peace.html.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “Padre Nuestro: Carta Pastoral Sobre Dios Padre” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, February 1999), 8, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/19990226a.pdf>. Original: “en nuestra sociedad tan marcada por el machismo y por una historia de ambiciones que ha marginado tanto a la mujer-madre, el ‘padre’ no pocas veces sigue representado las pretensiones de la ambición, el poder, el autoritarismo y la opresión, justificadas a veces con un falso sentido religioso”

¹³² Ibid., 8.

representatives of motherhood places them in fixed and therefore, limiting social roles.¹³³ By promoting this type of mindset, the Catholic Church seems to act in ways that could negatively affect Guatemala's femicide rate.

In 2002, the World Day of Peace message from the Vatican was primarily focused on the important implications of how “the World Day of Peace this year is being celebrated in the shadow of the dramatic events of 11 September last,” without much mention of violence against women specifically.¹³⁴ The Pope accompanies his declaration that “*the pillars of true peace are justice and that form of love which is forgiveness,*” with a discussion about how “*no religious leader can condone terrorism, and much less preach it.*”¹³⁵ In Guatemala, the Catholic Church's collective pastoral letter of June 2002 similarly demonstrates a rejection of indiscriminate violence and a refusal to accept a general reality of lawlessness. The country's bishops announce, “we worry about the actions of groups that act with impunity outside the rule of law and that are engaged in ‘social cleansing,’ putting themselves above the law, totally lacking the minimum sense of humanity.”¹³⁶ As in some previous years, Guatemala's Catholic leaders in this instance follow the example put forth by the Vatican by lacking specificity in their statements condemning crime and violence. As a result, their statements imply the country's church is not working to specifically combat femicide, but also that it likely does not act in ways the cause the problem to worsen.

¹³³ Mary Daly, “The Pedestal Peddlars,” in *Mary Daly*, ed. Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 30.

¹³⁴ Pope John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness,” January 2002, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20011211_xxxv-world-day-for-peace.html.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “Anda y Haz Tú Lo Mismo” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, June 2002), 8, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/20020602.pdf>.

Original: “nos preocupa la actuación de grupos que actúan con impunidad al margen del Estado de Derecho y que se dedican a la ‘limpieza social’ poniéndose por encima de la ley, carentes totalmente del mínimo sentido de humanidad”

In a second collective pastoral letter published that year, the bishops again avoid speaking about gendered injustices, and instead advocate for strengthening the capacity and reach of missionary work. A concluding sentence from this document declares “we ask our Lord to increase the number of our missionaries in distant lands ... we confidently hope that all faithful people feel the call that God makes for them to be messengers of his Word and instruments of his redemption.”¹³⁷ The details of this second letter portray the Guatemalan Catholic Church as acting as might be expected by Sarah Teresa Wicks McCallum who finds that in the midst of past violence in Latin America, the Church took on the role of a “bystander” by providing assistance to civilians only when its own existence and power was threatened.¹³⁸ Since this can allow “some persons [to] claim their own rights in an absolute fashion such that the rights of others are disregarded,...with some persons being exalted and others devalued,”¹³⁹ and the bishops barely reference the country’s daily violence, this letter suggests the Catholic Church does not work to combat femicide and may take actions that enable the crime to continue.

Five years later, the Pope’s 2007 World Day of Peace Message declares that “inadequate consideration for the *condition of women* helps to create instability in the fabric of society. I think of the exploitation of women who are treated as objects...[and] of the mindset persisting in some cultures, where women are still firmly subordinated to the arbitrary decisions of men, with grave consequences for their personal dignity and for the exercise of their fundamental

¹³⁷ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “Ay de Mí Si No Predico El Evangelio” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, October 2002), 3, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/20021030a.pdf>. Original: “pedimos al Dueño de la mies que aumente el número de nuestros misioneros en lejanas tierras...esperamos confiadamente que todos los fieles laicos sientan el llamado que Dios les hace para ser mensajeros de su Palabra e instrumentos de su redención”

¹³⁸ Wicks McCallum, “Innocent Bystanders to a Dangerous Situation: The Christian Churches and Human Rights Organizing in Ahmedabad India and Latin America,” 8.

¹³⁹ Pineda-Madrid, “Chapter 10: Redemption, Latinas, and the Contribution of Rosemary Radford Ruether,” 157.

freedoms.”¹⁴⁰ In this instance, the Vatican appears to fulfill Ada María Isasi-Díaz’s call for “a denunciation of inadequate and false universalisms that ignore Latinas’ daily lived experience” as a means of working towards “an ever more inclusive social justice.”¹⁴¹ This same year, the Guatemalan bishops use their collective pastoral letter to prescribe general means of addressing Guatemala’s widespread social instability. They state, “it is essential that the Government increase its efforts to give security to everyone...It is necessary that the judges, with quick and complete justice, apply the law against those acting outside of it, defending the unjustly incarcerated innocent and any victimized person.”¹⁴² Because the Guatemalan bishops choose to not follow the example set forth by the Vatican, their messages suggest the Guatemalan Catholic Church not only does not work to combat femicide but also may perpetuate it. Feminist theologian Mary Daly validates this possibility through her argument “that while the church and its prominent figures proclaim the equal worth and dignity of every person, including women, it simultaneously expresses women’s inferiority.”¹⁴³ Therefore, the inaction of the Guatemalan Catholic Church in comparison with the Vatican seems to sanction women’s subordinate status in society in a way the Vatican does not, even though it calls for an end to general injustice.

Turning the world’s attention to the concern that “the right to religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person,” the 2011 Pope’s World Day of Peace message points

¹⁴⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: The Human Person, The Heart of Peace,” January 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html.

¹⁴¹ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Chapter 4: Mujerista Theology - A Challenge to Traditional Theology,” in *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 70.

¹⁴² Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “La Gloria de Dios Es La Vida Del Hombre” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, April 2007), 10, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/20070420.pdf>. Original: “es fundamental que el Gobierno incremente sus esfuerzos para dar seguridad a toda la población...Es necesario que los jueces, con justicia pronta y cumplida, apliquen la ley contra quienes actúen al margen de la misma, defiendan a los inocentes injustamente encarcelados y a cualquier persona victimizada.”

¹⁴³ Coblentz and Jacobs, “Mary Daly’s The Church and the Second Sex after Fifty Years of US Catholic Feminist Theology,” 546.

out that “there is a need to value those elements which foster civil coexistence, while rejecting whatever is contrary to the dignity of men and women.”¹⁴⁴ In its collective pastoral letter from that year, the Guatemalan Catholic Church similarly promotes “coexistence”¹⁴⁵ but more specifically highlights a need to push back against the normalization of gender-based injustices. The bishops describe how “crime and violence affect the entire population, particularly when the victim is a woman.”¹⁴⁶ By validating calls for support of women’s causes and enabling the public to better understand how “violence against women...deprives the family of needed sources of income and emotional strength and limits the country’s development as a whole,”¹⁴⁷ this distinct recognition of women’s particular vulnerability to harm seems to be “an attempt to make our Latinas’ experience count.”¹⁴⁸ Therefore, even though this collective pastoral letter does not suggest the Guatemalan Catholic Church specifically works to reduce the rate of femicide, it also does not indicate this religious institution acts in ways that cause the issue to worsen.

Even though the 2013 collective pastoral letter from the Guatemalan Catholic Church primarily focuses on the importance of missionary work, the bishops do briefly speak about Guatemala’s domestic violence problem which shares causes with femicide. By describing how “intrafamilial violence...is marked by suffering, humiliation and the fear of the spouse and

¹⁴⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace,” January 2011, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace.html#_ftn2.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “Construir En Justicia, Inspirados Por Dios: El Desarrollo Humano” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, January 2011), 15, <http://www.iglesiaticolica.org.gt/20110128cp.pdf>.

Original: “criminalidad y violencia afectan a toda la población, pero se ensaña particularmente cuando la victima es una mujer”

¹⁴⁷ Ogrodnik and Borzutzky, “Women under Attack: Violence and Poverty in Guatemala,” 60.

¹⁴⁸ Isasi-Díaz, “Chapter 4: Mujerista Theology - A Challenge to Traditional Theology,” 70.

children,”¹⁴⁹ the bishops publicize that what the Pope believes is “the basic cell of society”¹⁵⁰ is at risk of harm. However, by not contradicting the static vision of family as “the union of a man and a woman” described by the Vatican,¹⁵¹ the Guatemalan Catholic Church accepts and facilitates the continuation of previously established understandings of gender roles, leading “Catholic women into obedience that denies them agency and the hope of flourishing today.”¹⁵² Since the “Church’s glorified images of Mary [the mother of Jesus] continue to serve as a mechanism of women’s subjugation”¹⁵³ and “theological writings praise the feminine ideals that render women passive and inferior to men,”¹⁵⁴ these traditional discussions about family can relegate women to fixed social positions. As a result, this collective pastoral letter, which ignores femicide and tolerates singular understandings of gender roles, indicates the Guatemalan Catholic Church is not working to reduce rates of femicide and that it may facilitate the continuation of the crime.

Finally, the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s most recent collective pastoral letter seems to encourage “distaste for women’s growing independence,”¹⁵⁵ even though the Pope’s World Day of Peace statement from last year points out the Vatican is concerned with the way “women and children...find themselves in situations that expose them to risks and abuses that can even

¹⁴⁹ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “Creí y Por Eso Hablé” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, August 2013), 25, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/CartaPastoralFE.pdf>. Original: “la violencia intrafamiliar...está marcada por el sufrimiento, la humillación y el miedo del cónyuge y de los hijos”

¹⁵⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI For the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: Blessed Are the Peacemakers,” January 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121208_xlvi-world-day-peace.html.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Coblenz and Jacobs, “Mary Daly’s The Church and the Second Sex after Fifty Years of US Catholic Feminist Theology,” 548.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 551.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 549.

¹⁵⁵ Bellino, “Femicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 7.

amount to enslavement.”¹⁵⁶ In their 2018 collective pastoral letter, the bishops simultaneously claim that “the solution to machismo is not feminism”¹⁵⁷ and illustrate how inherent differences between men and women, such as “their way of playing and who they do it with, the tone of voice, the expression of emotions and the way that they dress” should not be questioned nor lost.¹⁵⁸ Later on, in a discussion of abortion, machismo is defined as problematic but not because it places women in a difficult social position. The bishops declare “the promotion of the culture of death [or abortion] has been possible because of the tacit agreement between macho selfishness and ideological prejudices of the prophesized and...denounc[e] [a] culture of death that, disguised as supposedly ‘good’ feminism, falsely affirms the misnamed ‘rights’ of women.”¹⁵⁹ By writing this, Church leaders express the concern that machismo can cause women to gain an incorrect understanding of their place and power over their own lives. Since “the church’s direction to suppress the embodied dimensions of women’s existence, including their sexuality and reproduction, in order to reach spiritual salvation, is oppressive,”¹⁶⁰ it seems the Catholic Church is not working to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala and may promote social norms that make the issue worse.

¹⁵⁶ Pope Francis, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis For the Celebration of the 51st World Day of Peace - Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace,” January 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20171113_messaggio-51giornatamondiale-pace2018.html.

¹⁵⁷ Los Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, “La Verdad Los Hará Libres” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, January 2018), 35, <http://www.iglesiaticolica.org.gt/CEG-InstrPast-201801.pdf>. Original: “la solución al machismo no es el feminismo”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 155.

Original: “su forma de jugar y con quien lo hacen, el tono de voz, expresión de las emociones y la forma en que visten”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 37.

Original: “la promoción de la cultura de la muerte ha sido posible debido a ese tácito acuerdo entre el egoísmo hedonista del machista y los prejuicios ideológicos de la profetizada y ...denunci[ar] [una] cultura de la muerte que, disfrazados de un supuesto feminismo ‘bueno’, que afirma falsamente los mal llamados ‘derechos’ de las mujeres”

¹⁶⁰ Coblentz and Jacobs, “Mary Daly’s The Church and the Second Sex after Fifty Years of US Catholic Feminist Theology,” 551.

Overall, my analysis of these collective pastoral letters leads me to predict the Guatemalan Catholic Church is not working to reduce the country's femicide rate and may be passively causing the issue to worsen. In the following chapter, research about specific Catholic bishops and local social organizations investigates whether or not this hypothesis is correct. My goal is to conclude with a clear vision of the (in)action of this religious institution in anti-femicide efforts in Guatemala and a possible explanation for and implication of my findings.

Chapter 5: Is the Catholic Church Working to Reduce Rates of Femicide in Post-Civil War Guatemala?

“On the 15th of May, in the Jungle of Nool, in the heat of the day, in the cool of the pool, he was splashing... enjoying the jungle’s great joys... When Horton the elephant heard a small noise.

So Horton stopped splashing. He looked toward the sound. ‘That’s funny,’ thought Horton. ‘There’s no one around.’ Then he heard it again! Just a very faint yelp as if some tiny person were calling for help. ‘I’ll help you,’ said Horton. ‘But who are you? Where?’ He looked and he looked. He could see nothing there but a small speck of dust blowing past through the air.

‘I say!’ murmured Horton. ‘I’ve never heard tell of a small speck of dust that is able to yell. So you know what I think?... Why, I think that there must be someone on top of that small speck of dust! Some sort of a creature of very small size, too small to be seen by an elephant’s eyes...

... some poor little person who’s shaking with fear that he’ll blow in the pool! He has no way to steer! I’ll just have to save him. Because, after all, a person’s a person, no matter how small.’”

- Dr. Seuss

Horton Hears A Who! 1954

Even though it can be easy for adults to forget the stories they are told as children, doing so discounts the everlasting applicability of the messages each one contains. In *Horton Hears A Who!*, Horton the elephant acts as an advocate by creating an opportunity for the Whos of Who-Ville, the community inhabiting the “small speck of dust,” to prove their existence and voice their needs. Despite multiple roadblocks and criticism from his peers, Horton definitively acts as he knows is right, providing the Whos with assistance and instilling in readers, a sense of their responsibility to place as much value on the needs of others as their own.

While some individuals learn this lesson in a more secular fashion, many others use religiously-based stories and morals to emphasize the same or similar ideas. The research of scholar Cecilia Lynch confirms the ability of religious narratives to influence and reflect how one interacts with others by relying on “recent scholarly, journalistic, and fictional accounts of

religion-in-politics to illustrate dominant attitudes about religion and culture.”¹⁶¹ Additional scholars further demonstrate that not only religious stories and morals, but also religious groups and individuals can play a role in building generations of people who value their ability to respect and uplift their community’s wellbeing. Through a demonstration of how religious communities can provide social welfare services to civilians in need, these authors suggest Catholic leaders and affiliated social organizations are capable of beneficially participating in efforts to combat pervasive problems like femicide in Guatemala. This chapter begins by reviewing multiple case studies promoting this possibility before proceeding with an exposition of my research about the anti-femicide actions taken by Guatemala’s Catholic bishops and Catholic social organizations. In the end, my fairly bleak results partially contradict my hypothesis from Chapter 4. Instead, this thesis ultimately argues the Guatemalan Catholic Church neither helps works to reduce rates of femicide in the country, nor perpetuates the problem.

5.1 Precedents of Religious Individuals and Groups Acting as a Primary Source of Social Welfare

Based on case studies from around the world, religious individuals and groups appear to positively influence the ways in which social welfare and civilian protections are carried out. In Lebanon, when religious sectarian groups “adopt a state-centric strategy” of pushing forward social and political goals, and there is no “competition from co-religionist organizations,” Melani Cammett finds they will likely provide social services – such as the creation of access to scarce goods and “a sense of security and psychological comfort” – to members and non-members of

¹⁶¹ Cecelia Lynch, “Dogma, Praxis, and Religious Perspectives on Multiculturalism,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (2000): 745.

their faith.¹⁶² While Guatemala's femicide problem may require the distribution of slightly different benefits, such as the establishment of resources like safe houses, and counseling and educational programs, religious leaders and organizations could have comparable effects on the lives of vulnerable women by bringing stability, assistance and safety to their lives.

Christopher Candland provides another perspective on this topic in an article demonstrating that when "the state is partial to the majority religion but does not endorse a civic religion, ... religious associations are effective in community development and social change."¹⁶³ In other words, as long as government entities are not officially attached to specific religious identities, religious group membership helps individuals build social capital, or "trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions,"¹⁶⁴ which helps fulfill "social and economic needs."¹⁶⁵ Candland clarifies this idea by further noting that "states that institute a civic religion negatively influence the degree to which faith-based NGOs development organizations and people with religious convictions are involved in social change."¹⁶⁶ Although this study focuses on Southern Asia, its results, like Cammett's, indicate the Catholic Church and affiliated groups and are capable of acting as an essential resource for Guatemala's fight against femicide.

In the United States, a study about a specific Catholic Church in New Orleans, Mary Queen of Vietnam, illustrates how a religious institution can provide inclusive social support in times of crisis. After Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana in 2005, this specific congregation reached out to not only the Vietnamese community, but also to African Americans facing similarly

¹⁶² Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*, 8–9.

¹⁶³ Christopher Douglas Candland, "Faith as Social Capital: Religion and Community Development in Southern Asia," *Policy Science* 33 (2000): 132.

¹⁶⁴ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 167.

¹⁶⁵ Candland, "Faith as Social Capital: Religion and Community Development in Southern Asia," 145.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 132

destructive circumstances.¹⁶⁷ According to researchers Jason David Rivera and Ashley E. Nickels, these newly connected groups of people began “reestablishing bonding social capital at the local level,”¹⁶⁸ which enabled the creation of “a local action network for social organizing, information exchange and rebuilding.”¹⁶⁹ By also facilitating social interactions, the Catholic Church in Guatemala could beneficially bolster the effectiveness of and help garner support for efforts to reduce the country’s femicide rate.

Another study, conducted in North Carolina by William H. Lockhart, a professor of sociology, reveals that faith-based, secular nonprofit, secular for-profit and government-run organizations “build relationships and a sense of community (i.e. social capital)” in similar ways.¹⁷⁰ After observing the actions of each type of establishment, Lockhart finds that all of these groups teach disadvantaged individuals valuable “life-skills” and help them form strong inter-personal connections.¹⁷¹ Based on these results, it appears that neither messages from a specific faith, nor a lack of faith, limits a group’s capacity for helping others. This suggests that in Guatemala, religious individuals and groups can conduct projects, as secular programs might, to directly push back against femicide. Religion in this case appears to only serve as another way to create bonds between members, leaders and those in need of help, not a hinderance.

Laura Murray et al.’s research about the Catholic Church’s involvement in promoting and maintaining a HIV/AIDS program lastly reveals how religious institutions can be an asset to social justice endeavors. In Brazil, “shared values of solidarity” and “mercy and charity in the

¹⁶⁷ Jason David Rivera and Ashley E. Nickels, “Social Capital, Community Resilience, and Faith-Based Organizations in Disaster Recovery: A Case Study of Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church,” *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy* 5, no. 2 (2014): 192.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁷⁰ William H. Lockhart, “Building Bridges and Bonds: Generating Social Capital in Secular and Faith-Based Poverty-to-Work Programs,” *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 1 (2005): 3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

face of suffering” compelled the Church to take advantage of its “autonomy to respond at the local level” to help strengthen an existing government-run health program.¹⁷² It turns out, “the Pastoral’s distance from the ‘top’ and ‘official discourse’ ...[created] elbowroom for some priests to develop approaches to HIV treatment, care and to some extent even prevention, that may contradict the structure of the international institution.”¹⁷³ Based on this, it appears the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s historically respected and authoritative leaders are able to address negatively gendered social ills like femicide, regardless of overarching social norms about women’s roles in society.

This brief overview of past research indicates religious groups are capable of acting as the provider of social welfare, or “the direct delivery or indirect facilitation of services and programs that promote wellbeing and security,”¹⁷⁴ to communities with distinct needs around the world. These more positive findings cause my original prediction that the Catholic Church in Guatemala is not working to combat femicide and instead, may perpetuate the problem to seem slightly surprising. However, additional research about the Church’s actions reveals this prediction was not entirely off. Even though the institution does not appear to act in ways that exacerbate femicide rates, I find it remains largely silent about the issue.

5.2 The (In)Action of Guatemala’s Catholic Bishops

Before the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s collective pastoral letters, or documents that define the institution’s major “social concerns,”¹⁷⁵ are published, they are worked on and approved by bishops from across the country. While some of these Catholic Church leaders act

¹⁷² Laura R. Murray et al., “Strange Bedfellows: The Catholic Church and Brazilian National AIDS Program in the Response to HIV/AIDS in Brazil,” *Social Science & Medicine* 72 (2011): 948.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 949.

¹⁷⁴ Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*, 12.

¹⁷⁵ “Pastoral Letters.”

on their capacity to direct the public's attention to specific social ills, others dedicate their time mainly to missionary work. The individuals falling into the latter category include Julio Amílcar Bethancourt Fioravanti, Luis María Estrada Paetau, Mario Enrique Ríos Montt, José Aníbal Casasola Sosa, José Ramiro Pellecer Samayoa, Gustavo Rodolfo Mendoza Hernandez and Victor Hugo Palma Paul.

In these bishops' attempts to preserve the longevity of the Catholic Church's influence on the Guatemalan public, they do not specifically address femicide. However, this still arguably valuable work of spreading ideologies and knowledge that can help with "alleviating suffering, illuminating the mind, and igniting the Spirit"¹⁷⁶ does not necessarily facilitate the existence of the crime either. Since one's "potential for guidance, direction, and leadership is done not only with the body, but the heart, the hands, and the head,"¹⁷⁷ individuals who find comfort in the messages of the Church can experience how "spirituality...[can] becom[e] the inspiration of our leadership."¹⁷⁸ While it is also possible that these bishops spread more "oppressive"¹⁷⁹ Catholic doctrines, the forthcoming analysis of the actions of the majority of the other Guatemalan bishops suggests their theological work does not negatively affect the country's femicide rate.

5.2a Bishops Focused on Causes Other Than Femicide

Additional Guatemalan bishops participate more directly in efforts to provide social welfare and create justice. However, many of these individuals tend to focus on causes other than femicide. At the height of Guatemala's civil war, the alleviation of inter-personal, political and societal tensions was the primary focus of many activists. Within this context, bishop Juan José

¹⁷⁶ "About Us," Catholic World Mission, n.d., <https://catholicworldmission.org/about-us/>.

¹⁷⁷ Jeanette Rodríguez, "Chapter 6: Latina Activists Toward an Inclusive Spirituality of Being in the World," in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology* (University of Texas Press, 2002), 128.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁷⁹ Coblenz and Jacobs, "Mary Daly's The Church and the Second Sex after Fifty Years of US Catholic Feminist Theology," 551.

Gerardi Conedera advocated for a search for truth and the improvement of protections for civilians, especially those of indigenous descent, throughout the country.¹⁸⁰ After working as a facilitator of dialogue for the United Nation’s National Commission of Reconciliation, Gerardi Conedera also supported “the establishment of the Office of Human Rights of the Archbishop,” and led its efforts to run a Catholic truth commission, “the project of the Recovery of Historical Memory.”¹⁸¹ Sadly, his presentation of this commission’s findings in 1998 ended up making him a target of violence, and he was killed two days afterwards by opponents of his work.¹⁸² Even though this bishop obviously holds an important role in Guatemalan history, he is not a key supporter of efforts to combat femicide. However, in spite of his lack of overtly anti-femicide action, this truth commission beneficially provided victims of all genders with the opportunity to share their stories,¹⁸³ ensuring that violence against women is now on the radar of activists attempting to bring justice to the country.

Since the signing of the peace accords, the conditions characterizing daily Guatemala improved dramatically. For instance, USAID reported in 2017 that almost everyone attends elementary school now, and about half continue through middle school.¹⁸⁴ Unfortunately, amidst this positive change, a majority of the population still is not given a “quality” educational

¹⁸⁰ “Mons. Juan Gerardi: La Memoria Recuperada,” *BBC*, June 8, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_1378000/1378086.stm.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Original: “el establecimiento de la Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado”

Original: “el proyecto Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica”

¹⁸² Pacto internacional de derechos civiles y políticos, “Informe Alternativo Presentado Al Comité de Derechos Humanos de Las Naciones Unidas,” October 2010, 33, Note 22, http://www.myrnamack.org.gt/images/stories/fmm/archivos/informes/2010/Informe_alternativo_al_PIDCP_Guatemala.pdf.

¹⁸³ “Informe REMHI: Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de La Memoria Histórica - Tomo I: Impactos de La Violencia,” Fundación Acción Pro Derechos Humanos, n.d., <http://www.derechoshumanos.net/lesahumanidad/informes/guatemala/informeREMHI-Tomo1.htm#t1c5>.

¹⁸⁴ USAID Health and Education Office, “Guatemala Sector Brief: Education,” August 2017, 1, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/Sector_Brief_Education_August_2017.pdf.

experience and does not stay in school much past ninth grade.¹⁸⁵ Concerned with this struggle, Catholic bishop Victor Hugo Martínez Contreras promoted “the evangelization of educators” and the proliferation of “bilingual intercultural education” in the Archdiocese of Quetzaltenango-Totonicapán,¹⁸⁶ and Mario Fiandri publicized school attendance and education as a means of challenging social problems at their roots. In 2011, Fiandri claimed, “a youth that is educated and that has opportunities will have less of a possibility of falling into delinquency, narco trafficking or corruption.”¹⁸⁷ Even though these bishops’ do not address femicide specifically, Michelle Bellino’s argument that “formal education is the critical, national site where the state’s accountability for protecting human rights is communicated – and where young people can develop into informed citizens who engage with social and political issues” indicates their actions do not facilitate the continuation of the crime either.¹⁸⁸

Aside from his school-centered work, bishop Fiandri also supported disadvantaged individuals in Guatemala City by conducting mass at a shelter for migrants.¹⁸⁹ In 2018, over 50,000 Guatemalan families arrived at the United States border¹⁹⁰ after having left the country

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸⁶ “Homenaje a Los Obispos Eméritos de La Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala,” *La Hora*, March 19, 2008, <https://lahora.gt/hemeroteca-lh/homenaje-a-los-obispos-emeritos-de-la-conferencia-episcopal-de-guatemala/>.

Original: “la evangelización de los educadores”

Original: “la educación bilingüe intercultural”

¹⁸⁷ “Foro Para Superar La Impunidad En Petén,” CICIG Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, July 12, 2011, <http://www.cicig.co/index.php?page=0031-20110712>.

Original: “una juventud que se educa y que tiene oportunidades tendrá menos posibilidades de caer en la delincuencia, el narcotráfico o la corrupción”

¹⁸⁸ Bellino, “Femicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 9.

¹⁸⁹ Isabel Díaz Sabán, Édgar Girón, and Alexander Coyoy, “Riesgos No Frenan Sueño de Migrantes,” *Prensa Libre*, September 2, 2013, <https://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/migrantes/riesgos-frenan-sueno-migrantes-0-985701448/>.

¹⁹⁰ Lorena Arroyo and Andrea Patiño Contreras, “The Great Guatemalan Migration Industry,” *Univision Noticias*, 2018, <https://www.univision.com/especiales/noticias/2018/the-great-guatemalan-migration-industry/>.

because of a lack of financial stability¹⁹¹ and extensive violence.¹⁹² While some individuals do not have a desire to leave or are being taught vocational skills that enable them to stay, many others have not been given that opportunity and end up in need of multiple types of aid.¹⁹³ As a means of dealing with these difficult circumstances in Huehuetenango, bishop Rodolfo Francisco Bobadilla Mata tried to remind the public that “the pathway to alleviating human pain and suffering of migrants is solidarity and the communion of the heart,” and that “we should promote justice and the truth by constructing paths of solidarity that unite us with those more excluded and marginalized.”¹⁹⁴ By spiritually assisting migrants and distributing these lessons, bishops Fiandri and Bobadilla Mata help recreate a sense of trust between women and authority figures in society which has been erased by the way that an “institutionalized acceptance of impunity for offenders” facilitates crimes like femicide.¹⁹⁵ As a result, these bishops avoid perpetuating femicide, even if they also do not distinctly address it, by enabling female migrants to feel they can ask for help if they need it.

Migration from Guatemala to the United States increased between 2017 and 2018, at least in part, because of food shortages and unproductive land in the country.¹⁹⁶ Unfortunately, these

¹⁹¹ Marisa Peñaloza and John Burnett, “A Guatemalan Village Tells the Story of Immigration to the U.S.,” *National Public Radio*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/19/649300559/a-guatemalan-village-tells-the-story-of-immigration-to-the-u-s>.

¹⁹² Jeffrey Hallock, Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, and Michael Fix, “In Search of Safety, Growing Numbers of Women Flee Central America,” Migration Policy Institute, May 30, 2018, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/search-safety-growing-numbers-women-flee-central-america>.

¹⁹³ Peñaloza and John Burnett, “A Guatemalan Village Tells the Story of Immigration to the U.S.”

¹⁹⁴ “Mensaje Pastoral de Monseñor Rodolfo Bobadilla,” *Sin Fronteras*, 2006, 22–23, <http://www.scalabrinians.org/Sin%20Fronteras/SinFronterasNO12.PDF>.

Original: “el camino para aliviar el dolor y el sufrimiento humano de los migrantes es la solidaridad y la comunión de corazón”

Original: “debemos fomentar la justicia y la verdad para construir caminos de solidaridad que nos unan con los más excluido y marginados”

¹⁹⁵ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 1.

¹⁹⁶ Nick Miroff and Kevin Sieff, “Hunger, Not Violence, Fuels Guatemalan Migration Surge, U.S. Says,” *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/hunger-not-violence-fuels-guatemalan-migration-surge-us-says/2018/09/21/65c6a546-bdb3-11e8-be70-52bd11fe18af_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4c0ee02cbcd5.

harsh environmental conditions are continuously exacerbated by the imposition of mining projects of economically stronger nations that take advantage of Guatemala's natural resources. For instance, in 2012, the Canadian company Radius Gold Inc. began the *El Tambor* silver and gold mining project a near Guatemala City.¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately, a reactionary non-violent protest was met with a less than welcoming response, and one activist was shot.¹⁹⁸ In an attempt to address mining conflicts like this one, bishop Bernabé de Jesús Sagastume Lemus provided a public statement of measured criticism. While noting that as long as there is "respect for communities, their culture and their environment," these projects can benefit Guatemala in the long run,¹⁹⁹ he discouraged "the politics of development of the economy of the country focused on the promotion of big and generally transnational business oriented towards the exploitation of natural goods."²⁰⁰ Because of his focus on environmental issues, femicide does not seem to be one of this bishop's major concerns. However, by supporting activists pushing for justice, this bishop "provides valued legitimation"²⁰¹ to the work of female leaders in society, including the activist who was shot a few years ago, and pushes back against presumptions about women's need to occupy subordinate social roles.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ "US Company Continues Illegal Mining Operations at El Tambor Mine," Guatemala Human Rights Commission, March 2016, <https://ghrcusa.wordpress.com/2016/03/22/us-company-continues-illegal-mining-operations-at-el-tambor-mine/>.

¹⁹⁸ Alexandra Pedersen, "Power, Violence and Mining in Guatemala: Non-Violent Resistance to Canada's Northern Shadow," *Revista Harvard Review of Latin America*, 2014, <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/power-violence-and-mining-guatemala>.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

Original: "el respeto a las comunidades, su cultura y su entorno"

²⁰⁰ Rodolfo Valenzuela Nuñez and Bernabé de J. Sagastume Lemus, "Bienaventurados Los Que Trabajan Por La Paz Porque Serán Reconocidos Como Hijos de Dios" (La Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, May 31, 2012), 2, <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/20120531.pdf>.

Original: "la política de desarrollo de la economía del país enfocada a la promoción de grandes empresas, por lo general transnacionales, orientadas a la explotación de bienes naturales."

²⁰¹ Levine, "The Evolution of The Theory and Practice of Rights in Latin American Catholicism," 43.

²⁰² Pedersen, "Power, Violence and Mining in Guatemala: Non-Violent Resistance to Canada's Northern Shadow."

Alongside this and additional environmental issues, there exists the challenge of improving Guatemala's healthcare system. To provide a small snapshot of the current situation, the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2016 that the country has .93 doctors for every 1,000 people²⁰³ and that on average there were 24 deaths per 1,000 live births.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, for comparison, measurements from Mexico show that in 2016 there were 2.36 doctors for every 1,000 people²⁰⁵ and 12 deaths per 1,000 live births.²⁰⁶ To combat medical program inefficiencies and ineffectiveness in general, bishop Fernando Claudio Gamalero González, as head of "the National Sub-commission of Health," oversaw projects trying to establish "a Guatemala where everyone enjoys the right to health and receives humanized and comprehensive attention."²⁰⁷ Although his work can be classified as unrelated to femicide and gender-based crimes, this bishop's promotion of the inclusive idea that all individuals deserve to receive quality physical care, regardless of their gender and backgrounds, indicates his work also does not exacerbate rates of the crime.

Further adding to the list of diverse problems facing Guatemalans is the issue of impunity, which stands out as a major impediment to any search for justice. In 2018, impunity in general was pushed into the public's view when the current president Jimmy Morales permitted the mandate for the CICIG, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala,²⁰⁸ to

²⁰³ "Healthcare Access and Conditions in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d., <https://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/profiles/central-american/healthcare-diet/index.html>.

²⁰⁴ "Mortality Rate, Infant (Per 1,000 Lives Births)," The World Bank, 2017, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN>.

²⁰⁵ "Mexico: Number of Doctors per 1,000 Inhabitants 2006-2016," Statista, n.d., <https://www.statista.com/statistics/787632/number-doctors-inhabitants-mexico/>.

²⁰⁶ "Mortality Rate, Infant (Per 1,000 Lives Births)."

²⁰⁷ "Quiénes Somos," Subcomisión Nacional de Salud, n.d., <http://www.iglesiacatolica.org.gt/cns/>.

Original: La Subcomisión Nacional de Salud

Original: "una Guatemala en donde toda la población goza del derecho a la salud y recibe atención integral y humanizada"

²⁰⁸ "International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala," United Nations: Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, n.d., <https://dppa.un.org/en/mission/cicig>.

expire.²⁰⁹ While one analyst from the Washington Post believed the CICIG's efforts to "radically restructure the justice sector" led to "major reductions in the country's homicide rate,"²¹⁰ at the very least, its creation revealed a national commitment to "the rule of law."²¹¹ Beforehand, most Guatemalans faced almost insurmountable obstacles to holding perpetrators of any crime responsible for their actions. In reaction to the possibility of losing this valuable resource, bishops Domingo Buezo Leiva and Gonzalo de Villa y Vasquez publicly explained that corruption "is a decisive factor in the process of dehumanization in which our people have fallen...Therefore, the fight against corruption should be maintained."²¹² Antonio Calderón added to their promotion of this anti-impunity program by reminding Guatemalans that "the recent years of CICIG have had important achievements in the destruction and prosecution of criminal structures that were untouchable."²¹³ Since "femicide in Guatemala has its roots in authorities' failure to prevent and punish all violence against women (not just homicide) as early as the turn of the century,"²¹⁴ these bishops avoid perpetuating femicide through their distinct opposition to impunity, even though they also do not work to combat it themselves.

²⁰⁹ Sofia Menchu, "Guatemala Not Renewing Mandate of U.N. Anti-Corruption Body," Reuters, August 31, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-guatemala-corruption/guatemala-says-wont-renew-mandate-of-u-n-anti-corruption-body-idUSKCN1LG2KC>.

²¹⁰ Renard Sexton, "How Guatemala Achieved What Was Once Thought Impossible: Major Reductions in Homicides," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/11/13/central-americans-are-fleeing-violence-guatemalas-judicial-reform-model-could-help/?utm_term=.4b8973e4821f.

²¹¹ "International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala."

²¹² Tulio Juárez, "Obispos Sobre La CICIG: 'Todo Intento Por Debeilitarla Favorecerá La Impunidad...,'" *El Periódico*, February 23, 2019, <https://elperiodico.com.gt/nacion/2017/10/18/obispos-sobre-la-cicig-todo-intento-por-debeilitarla-favorecera-la-impunidad/>.

Original: "es un factor decisivo en el proceso de deshumanización en el que nuestro pueblo ha caído...Por ello la lucha contra la corrupción debe mantenerse"

²¹³ "Mensaje de La Diócesis de Juitapa Ante La Situación Que Vive Guatemala," Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, October 8, 2018, <http://www.celam.org/mensaje-de-la-diocesis-de-jutiapa-ante-la-situacion-que-vive-guatemala-2660.html>.

Original: "los últimos años la CICIG, ha tenido importantes logros en desarticulación y enjuiciamiento de estructuras criminales que eran intocables"

²¹⁴ Carey Jr. and Torres, "Precursors to Femicide," 143.

Similarly focused on criminal justice, Pablo Vizcaino Prado promoted removing the death penalty from the list of possible legal sanctions in Guatemala. In his mind, “it is almost impossible to justify the use of the death penalty as a means of protecting society from aggressors. [He specifically agreed that] ‘this is not about renouncing the legitimate defense of society from criminal aggression, but rather about resorting to unbloody means to conduct this defense. Opposition to the death penalty does not mean yes to impunity.’”²¹⁵ By primarily trying to push for what he believes are more humane punishments, Vizcaino Prado condemned one of Guatemala’s current laws and avoided approaching a discussion about femicide. However, despite his evasion of the topic, he, like Domingo Buezo Leiva and Gonzalo de Villa y Vasquez, remained definitively and publicly opposed to impunity in Guatemala, ensuring his actions do not negatively influence the country’s femicide rate.

5.2b Bishops Whose Work Only Slightly Addresses Femicide

While the aforementioned bishops center their work around alleviating distinct social ills that do not include femicide, additional Catholic leaders demonstrate a capacity to push back against more closely related issues. For instance, during the civil war, “bishop Eduardo Ernesto Fuentes Duarte and local parishioners persuaded [multiple female missionaries] to leave [Guatemala],...fearing for the sisters’ lives” and revealing this bishop’s understanding of the dangers of gender-based violence at the time.²¹⁶ However, in this instance, the lack of clarity or additional information about why he took this precaution suggests his contribution to efforts to

²¹⁵“Church in Guatemala Calls on Congress to Abolish Death Penalty,” Catholic News Agency, November 19, 2010, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/church-in-guatemala-calls-on-congress-to-abolish-death-penalty>.

²¹⁶ Joyce Meyer, “Founded amid War in Guatemala, Missionaries of the Eucharist Persevere,” Global Sisters Report, September 13, 2018, <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/ministry/founded-amid-war-guatemala-missionaries-eucharist-persevere-55372>.

protect women from harm in general, with no specific mention of femicide, may have not extended much beyond this incident.

Sharing in this bishops' desire to help others, Próspero Penados del Barrio took a clear stance against violence, "denouncing the numerous human rights violations perpetrated by Guatemala's military regime."²¹⁷ In 1995, as a supporter of women's causes, he declared, "He [God] created man and woman with equal dignity and with a common purpose to reach full participation in the divine life...Because of this, everything that can marginalize or discriminate against women or impede the full recognition and promotion of their dignity threatens the creative project of God."²¹⁸ By validating the fact that women are mistreated and devalued by society at large, bishop Penados del Barrio demonstrated to his followers that they have a responsibility to avoid furthering gender-based injustices. However, since he did not mention femicide in these statements, this bishop's contribution to efforts to combat the crime remains limited. By not calling out femicide, Próspero Penados del Barrio, like other individuals and groups who do the same, seems to somewhat obscure how the crime has been deemed serious enough to merit between 25-50 years in prison, instead of 5-12 years which is the punishment for "physical, sexual or psychological" violence against women.²¹⁹ Because of this, his work neither assists with combatting femicide, nor definitively worsens the issue.

²¹⁷ Isaac Ramírez Urbina, "Penados Del Barrio, Pastor de Almas de Gran Humilidad," *Prensa Libre*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.prensalibre.com/hemeroteca/penados-del-barrio-un-pastor-de-almas-humilde-y-sincero/>. Original: "denunciando numerosas violaciones de derechos humanos perpetrados por los regimenes militares de Guatemala"

²¹⁸ "Monseñor Próspero Penados Del Barrio," Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala, n.d., <https://www.odhag.org.gt/05biogfia.htm>.

Original: "El creó al hombre y a la mujer con igual dignidad y con la común vocación de alcanzar la plena participación en la vida divina...Por ello, todo lo que pueda marginar o discriminar a la mujer o impida el pleno reconocimiento y promoción de su dignidad atenta contra el proyecto creador de Dios"

²¹⁹ "Ley Contra El Femicidio y Otras Formas de Violencia Contra La Mujer: Decreto Número 22-2008" (Centro Nacional de Análisis y Documentación Judicial, 2008),

http://www.sipi.siteal.iipe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sipi_normativa/decreto_nde_22_de_2008_-_ley_contra_el_femicidio_y_otras_formas_de_violencia_contra_la_mujer_-_guatemala.pdf.

Original: violencia física, sexual o psicológica

Also amidst the civil war, bishop Oscar Garcia Urizar helped establish a multilingual radio station, the Guatemalan Federation of Radio Schools, which includes “the life and dignity of Guatemalan women” as one of its major discussion topics.²²⁰ The available information on the station’s website suggests femicide is not singled out as a systemic issue to watch, but that does not discount its important contribution to the promotion of women’s protections and care in general. Since the lack of explicit references to femicide only indicates that it may remain outside the project’s radar while related injustices are not, this bishop, similarly to Próspero Penados del Barrio does not work to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala but also does not act in ways that distinctly facilitate the existence of the crime.

Later on in 2002, Guatemala officially became a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, confirming the country maintains a commitment to the protection of women.²²¹ In that same year, bishops Gerardo Humberto Flores Reyes and Julio Edgar Cabrera Ovalle acted as witnesses for a court case investigating an internationally condemned account of femicide. Flores Reyes’ testimony revealed how government-sanctioned officers exercised power through violence and intimidation in the region where the victim was working,²²² and Cabrera Ovalle confirmed that the woman was targeted by “surveillance and monitoring” before her death.²²³ After the case closed, neither

²²⁰ “Por La Vida y Dignidad de Las Mujeres Guatemalteca,” Federación Guatemalteca de Escuelas Radiofónica, n.d., <http://fger.org/seprem/>.

Original: Federación Guatemalteca de Escuelas Radiofónicas
Original: “Por la Vida y Dignidad de las Mujeres Guatemalteca”

²²¹ “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women,” United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d., https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8-b&chapter=4&lang=en.

²²² “Declaración de Mons. Gerardo Humberto Flores Reyes, En Calidad de Testigo, Ante El Tribunal Tercero de Sentencia Penal,” Derechos, September 11, 2002, <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/guatemala/myrna/monsflores.html>.

²²³ “Declaración de Monseñor Julio Edgar Cabrera Ovalle, En Calidad de Testigo, Ante El Tribunal Tercero de Sentencia Penal,” Derechos, September 5, 2002, <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/guatemala/myrna/cabrera.html>.
Original: “la vigilancia y seguimiento”

bishop displayed any further commitment to combating femicide, implying their support of the case was strictly based on court rules. Even though their statements helped lead to a conviction, indicating they do not act in ways that perpetuate the crime, these bishops cannot be classified as working to reduce rates of femicide, because their participation was compulsory and not visibly continued.

Within this changing context, Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, a bishop best known for his work “as a member of the National Commission of Reconciliation” and as a facilitator of dialogue between civil war adversaries,²²⁴ was invited to participate in an event dedicated to “the search to unite Guatemalan women that want the end of [femicidal] violence” in the early 2000s.²²⁵ Whether or not he actually attended is not clear. However, the Association of Medical Women’s desire to have him connect with those at risk of death and those affected by the deaths of others positively indicates that he is seen as an approachable resource for support. As a result, this bishop does not appear to distinctly work to combat femicide, but also does not seem to perpetuate the crime. Furthermore, even if he did not attend this event, his ability to help alleviate a “deep sense of insecurity for women” also indicates he does not act in passively harmful ways.²²⁶

Over the following ten years, rates of violence against women in Guatemala changed dramatically. In 2000, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA estimated 213 women were killed, and by 2008, that number increased to 722.²²⁷ The transcript of a discussion between

²²⁴ J.L. Celada, “Obituario: Rodolfo Quezada, Cardenal de Guatemala: Un Hombre de Paz,” *Vida Nueva Digital España*, 2012, <https://www.vidanuevadigital.com/2012/06/07/obituario-rodolfo-quezada-cardenal-de-guatemala-un-hombre-de-paz/>.

Original: “como miembro de la Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación”

²²⁵ Olga Villalta, “Asesinatos En Guatemala: Suma y Sigue,” *Rebelión*, July 14, 2004, <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=1921&titular=asesinatos-en-guatemala:-suma-y-sigue->.

Original: “la búsqueda de unir a las mujeres guatemaltecas en pro del cese de la violencia [del femicidio]”

²²⁶ Ogrodnik and Borzutzky, “Women under Attack: Violence and Poverty in Guatemala,” 59.

²²⁷ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 6.

scholars from El Salvador's Central American University and bishop Álvaro Leonel Ramazzini Imeri about gendered issues within this time period reveals he brushed aside the topic of femicide to focus on concerns about intra-familial violence.²²⁸ Even though this Catholic leader positively advocates in favor of women's rights, his decision to alter the direction of the conversation indicates he is not working to specifically combat femicide.

Violence against women in general was again addressed by Jorge Mario Avila del Aguila who included the issue as a listed concern in his 2015 "Pastoral Missionary Project" plan for Jalapa.²²⁹ However, the dedication of less than a page to this general topic in an over one-hundred-page document suggests that Avila de Aguila's recognition of the problem did not lead to his prioritization of it, nor of femicide. Following suit, a newsletter co-authored by Rodolfo Valenzuela Núñez and Bernabé de Jesús Sagastume Lemus briefly states that women faced disproportionate levels of violence but does not condemn the issue or prescribe additional means of combating it.²³⁰ Instead, these bishops vaguely remind participants to "continue carrying forward a renewed and vigorous family pastoral that responds to the difficult situations of many."²³¹ Similar to Avila de Aguila, Valenzuela Núñez and Sagastume Lemus do not work to specifically combat femicide and avoid facilitating the problem by bringing closely related concerns into the public's view.

²²⁸ "Obispos Profetas En Medio de Graves Problemas," Universidad Centroamericana: Revista del MES, n.d., 1, http://www.uca.edu.sv/publica/cartas/media/archivo/12b1bc_pags.1013obisposprofetas.pdf.

Original: "Universidad Centroamericana"

²²⁹ "Proyecto Pastoral Misionero de La Diócesis de Jalapa" (Diócesis de Jalapa, October 11, 2015), 52, https://issuu.com/diocesisdejalapa/docs/proyecto_pastoral_misionero_de_la_d.

Original: "Proyecto Pastoral Misionero"

²³⁰ Rodolfo Valenzuela Núñez and Bernabé de J. Sagastume Lemus, "Comunicado de La Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala," Prensa CELAM, June 5, 2012, <http://www.celam.org/noticelam/detalle.php?id=MjQ1>.

²³¹ Ibid.

Original: "seguir llevando adelante una pastoral familiar renovada y vigorosa, que responda a las situaciones difíciles de tantas"

Despite national initiatives to address femicide, such as the establishment of the specialized courts equipped to fight violence against women,²³² the issue still runs rampant throughout Guatemala. Indicating this unfortunate reality, the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean estimated that in 2017, around 221 femicides took place.²³³ One of the events likely accounted for by this figure was the murder of 40 young girls in a devastating fire at an orphanage in Guatemala City which was deemed a result of endemic neglect.²³⁴ In response to this incident, bishop Raúl Antonio Martínez Paredes declared that “this type of event ‘under no circumstances can be accepted in our society.’”²³⁵ Even though Martínez Paredes’ response definitively denounces the crime and importantly bolsters the work of advocates by bringing attention to the seriousness of the incident, the absence of any reference to the word femicide suggests he does not work to specifically combat this issue. However, by not leaving room for an excuse to justify the killing of these young girls, this bishop avoids perpetuating the existence of the problem as well.

5.2c A Bishop More Distinctly Pushing Back Against Femicide

Of the thirty-one bishops researched, only one explicitly demonstrated a desire and willingness to help reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala. Archbishop Oscar Julio Vian Morales, as a leader of “the Guatemalan Archbishops’ Office of Human Rights,” signed off on a 2012-2013 report publicizing femicide as a major focus of new government-run “taskforces”

²³² “Organos Jurisdiccionales Especializados de Delitos de Femicidio y Otras Formas de Violencia Contra La Mujer,” Organism Judicial Guatemala, C.A., n.d., <http://ww2.oj.gob.gt/estadisticafemicidio/>.

²³³ “Femicide, the Most Extreme Expression of Violence against Women,” 1.

Original: la Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe

²³⁴ Francisco Goldman, “The Story Behind The Fire That Killed Forty Teenage Girls in a Guatemalan Children’s Home,” *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-story-behind-the-fire-that-killed-forty-teen-age-girls-in-a-guatemalan-childrens-home>.

²³⁵ Eduardo Berdejo, “Iglesia En Guatemala Lamenta Incendio Que Dejó Decenas de Niñas Muertas En Albergue,” ACIPrensa, March 9, 2017, <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/iglesia-en-guatemala-lamenta-incendio-que-dejo-decenas-de-ninas-muertas-en-casa-hogar-24747>.

Original: “este tipo de hechos ‘bajo ninguna circunstancia pueden ser aceptados en nuestra sociedad’”

fighting various crimes.²³⁶ By taking this action in a year when 312 women were killed,²³⁷ Vian Morales augmented the visibility of the issue, which Celia Valiente²³⁸ and Edward Gibson's²³⁹ analysis papers suggests benefits anti-femicide endeavors in the long run. The following year, Vian Morales further addressed violence against women in general by promoting "the appointment of Thelma Aldana ["known as a champion of women's rights"²⁴⁰] as Attorney General of Guatemala,"...[and he] "condemned acts of violence against women and made a call to men to respect women, of all ages."²⁴¹ This bishop's effort to increase the public's understanding of the overall issue is what Marianne Tierney FitzGerald's dissertation prescribes as a means through which a religiously affiliated individual can effectively facilitate crusades for social justice.²⁴² In contrast with the previously discussed bishops, Vian Morales appears to maintain a stronger commitment to reducing rates of femicide, even if his efforts are not as determined as one might hope.

5.2d Bishops Whose Actions Perpetuate Femicide

Alongside the fairly promising actions of archbishop Oscar Julio Vian Morales, there are a couple Catholic leaders who took actions that enable cycles of femicide to continue. In an

²³⁶ "Situación de La Niñez Guatemalteca" (Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala, 2013), 29-30, <https://www.odhag.org.gt/pdf/Informeninez20122013.pdf>.

Original: la Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala

Original: "fuerzas de tarea"

²³⁷ "Violencia En Contra de La Mujer 2008-2013" (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, October 2014), 8, <https://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2014/11/25/ggH7sQso5HbIWZSesco9OUeZqAcHPHYz.pdf>.

²³⁸ Valiente, "Male Allies of Women's Movements: Women's Organizing within the Catholic Church in Franco's Spain," 49.

²³⁹ Gibson, "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," 126-27.

²⁴⁰ "Take Five: 'A Feminist in Decision-Making Roles Makes a Difference,'" UN Women | Americas and the Caribbean, May 3, 2018, <http://lac.unwomen.org/en/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2018/5/take-five-thelma-aldana>.

²⁴¹ Sergio Morales and Claudia Palma, "Aldana Toma Revelo Para Dirigir El MP" (Prensa Libre, May 2014), 14-15, http://www.sejust.gob.gt/sites/default/files/Noticias-120514_0.pdf.

Original: "al nombramiento de Thelma Aldana como Fiscal General de Guatemala"

Original: "repudió los actos de violencia contra las mujeres y hizo un llamado a los hombres a respetar a las mujeres, desde niñas, jovencitas, señoras y ancianas."

²⁴² Tierney FitzGerald, "Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence," 208.

interview with journalists from *Prensa Libre*, Mario Alberto Molina Palma stated, “the promotion of women does not consist of executing things that men do...the dignity of [women] is not achieved as long as they assume masculine roles, but when they open spaces to develop their feminine potential.”²⁴³ By adhering to the idea that women should not try to take on roles previously held by men, this bishop leaves in place male-centric systems of power and control. Scholar Carlos Aldana Mendoza’s report about violence against women in Guatemala demonstrates that when the Catholic Church emphasizes these and similar ideas, it facilitates and creates additional problems by teaching followers that it is acceptable to treat women as inferior.²⁴⁴ Thus, the dissemination of gender-based biases by a respected religious leader damages the authority, validity and strength of campaigns to combat femicide.

When advocating for the need to improve Guatemala’s healthcare services, bishop Gabriel Peñate Rodríguez criticized a Guatemalan law with a provision that would increase women’s access to contraceptives,²⁴⁵ similarly sending the public negative messages about women’s social roles and fomenting the continuation of the femicide. Since in the eyes of the Church “every woman who is not a Mary [a figure representing virginity, purity²⁴⁶ and “obedient receptivity”²⁴⁷] is an Eve, an unclean temptress who leads man to sin,”²⁴⁸ Peñate Rodríguez’s disapproval of non-reproductive sexual activity validates male “distaste for women’s growing

²⁴³ Roberto Villalobos Viato, “Nos Hemos Dejado Llevar Por La Inercia,” *Prensa Libre*, November 17, 2013, <https://www.prensalibre.com/revista-d/arzobispo-de-los-altos-mario-molina-palma-iglesia-catolica-0-1028297341/>. Original: “la promoción de la mujer no consiste en que ejecute cosas que hacen los hombres...la dignidad de ellas no se logra en la medida en que asuma papeles masculinos, sino en que se le abran espacios para desarrollar su potencial femenino.”

²⁴⁴ Aldana Mendoza, “Churches and Faith Communities in the Face of Oppression and Violence Against Indigenous and Mestiza Women in Guatemala,” 36–37.

²⁴⁵ Gabriel Peñate Rodríguez and Carolina de Magalhães, “Mensaje de La Comisión Nacional de Salud” (La conferencia episcopal de Guatemala, October 21, 2010), 1, <http://www.iglesiaticatolica.org.gt/cns/comcns02.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ “The Spiritual Meaning of the Virgin Mary’s Name,” *Aleteia*, September 2017, <https://aleteia.org/2017/09/12/the-spiritual-meaning-of-the-virgin-marys-name/>.

²⁴⁷ Coblenz and Jacobs, “Mary Daly’s The Church and the Second Sex after Fifty Years of US Catholic Feminist Theology,” 549.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 551.

independence.”²⁴⁹ Unfortunately, scholar Michelle Bellino finds this feeling is sometimes expressed through femicide, indicating this bishop protects the longevity of harmful attitudes about gender roles that place women at risk of death.

Aside from this, Rosolino Bianchetti Boffelli problematically acted as though neither femicide nor related issues deserve much attention. Even though it appears that he was once concerned that indigenous women disproportionately face problems with “a lack of security and impunity,”²⁵⁰ as recently as 2018, he instead focused on protecting inter-personal and religious connections between Church members who migrated out of Guatemala.²⁵¹ Sonia Alvarez’s article discussing perceptions of women in Catholic and other Christian spaces in Brazil suggests Bianchetti Boffelli’s avoidance of the topic of femicide and violence against women, despite his previous recognition of the general problem, possibly stems from the Church’s inclination to maintain traditional norms.²⁵² Unfortunately, this combination of recognizing and then ignoring violence against women, and not even femicide specifically, indicates Bianchetti Boffelli not only does not work to combat the crime but also passively permits it to continue. By changing his course of action, this bishop teaches Church followers that violence against women is a phenomenon that they can and should tolerate.

The actions of the thirty-one bishops who signed the collective pastoral letters discussed in Chapter 4 indicate my hypothesis that the Catholic Church is not working to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala and may perpetuate the issue is partially inaccurate. While a select few

²⁴⁹ Bellino, “Femicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 7.

²⁵⁰ “PIM - Paquete de Información Mensual Sobre Guatemala, Numero 107” (Brigadas Internacionales de Paz - Proyecto Guatemala, August 2012), 4- 5, https://peacebrigades.org.uk/fileadmin/user_files/projects/guatemala/files/spanish/PIM_No.107.pdf. “una falta de seguridad e impunidad”

²⁵¹ “Sínodo Sobre Jóvenes: Obispos Proponen Formar Mejor En La Fe e Impulsar Unidad Familiar,” Rome Reports, October 20, 2018, <https://www.romereports.com/2018/10/20/sinodo-sobre-jovenes-obispos-proponen-formar-mejor-en-la-fe-e-impulsar-unidad-familiar/>.

²⁵² Alvarez, “Women’s Participation in the Brazilian ‘People’s Church’” A Critical Appraisal,” 385.

bishops act as outliers by either rejecting or facilitating the existence of femicide, for the most part, the institution does not seem to conduct endeavors that directly address femicide nor passively foment the continuation of the crime. I now turn to a study of various Catholic affiliated social organizations in the country to see if their work contradicts or aligns with these findings.

5.3 The (In)Action of Guatemala's Catholic Social Organizations

In Guatemala, as in many other countries around the world, religious leaders have acted as a vital source of support for civilians in the face of crisis. However, apart from these respected individuals, various social organizations with the power to distribute social welfare benefits participated in these efforts as well. The forthcoming exposition of the on-the-ground work of six currently active Catholic groups in Guatemala further demonstrates the Church does not work to reduce the country's femicide rate but at the same time, does not make the issue worse.

For this portion of my research, I chose which organizations to study based on whether or not each one generally promotes social justice causes alongside its missionary endeavors. For example, the Agustino Recoletos' activities include both spreading the reach of Catholicism throughout the country²⁵³ and maintaining a school for ages 3-17 in Guatemala City.²⁵⁴ This organization's Facebook posts suggest instructors at this school teach students the importance of non-violence and human rights. However, their lessons appear to be based on fairly ambiguous declarations about the need to act "as defenders of peace and understanding between people of different backgrounds and ways of thinking."²⁵⁵ Scholar Michelle Bellino promotes the

²⁵³ "Quiénes Somos," Agustinos recoletos, accessed February 5, 2019, <http://www.agustinosrecoletos.com.co/es/quienes-somos/organizacion>.

²⁵⁴ "Colegio Agustiniano Guatemala," Agustinos recoletos, accessed February 5, 2019, <http://www.agustinosrecoletos.com.co/es/2-features/135-colegio-agustiniano-guatemala>.

²⁵⁵ "Colegio Agustiniano Guatemala," Facebook, January 30, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/agustinianogt/photos/a.465557396860238/2240737449342215/?type=3&theater>. Original: "como defensores de la paz y entendimiento entre personas de distinta procedencia y modos de pensar"

importance of this kind of endeavor through her argument that “formal education is the critical, national site where the state’s accountability for protecting human rights is communicated – and where young people can develop into informed citizens who engage with social and political issues.”²⁵⁶ As a result, it seems that although Agustino Recoletos does not work to specifically combat femicide, its work helps create a safer school and local community environment in Guatemala, ensuring their work does not worsen cycles of the crime either.

The work of four additional Catholic affiliated social organizations comes closer to addressing femicide by dealing with violence against women in general but still does not indicate these groups push back against it. On a more positive note, however, these groups, like Agustino Recoletos, also do not perpetuate the problem. For instance, even though C  ritas Guatemala’s Facebook highlights femicide-related topics including impunity²⁵⁷ and female empowerment,²⁵⁸ the organization focuses its attention on programs that help adults gain marketable skills²⁵⁹ and learn how to protect their families from “the diverse forms of violence that threaten the life and dignity of children.”²⁶⁰ Similarly, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) sets, among others, the fairly general goals of fomenting Guatemala’s “institutional development” as well as the establishment of stable and reliable homes for children and their families.²⁶¹ An optimistic Facebook post from CRS demonstrates the organization takes a small additional step

²⁵⁶ Bellino, “Femicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 9.

²⁵⁷ Rodolfo Valenzuela Nu  ez et al., “Mensaje Pastoral En El Mes Patrio” (Facebook, September 12, 2018), 2, <https://www.facebook.com/ComunicacionCatolicaCEG/photos/pcb.1889926271063332/1889925881063371/?type=3&theater>.

²⁵⁸ “Caritas de Guatemala,” Facebook, October 11, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/caritas.gt/photos/a.489941861094216/2030352667053120/?type=3&theater>.

²⁵⁹ “Programa de Centros Comunitarios de Formaci  n Femenina | C  ritas Arquidiocesana de Guatemala,” C  ritas de Arquidiocesana Guatemala, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://caritasarquidiocesana.org/nuestro-trabajo/programas/programa-formacion-femenina/>.

²⁶⁰ “Campa  as,” C  ritas Guatemala, accessed February 5, 2019, https://caritas.gt/portfolio_page/campanas/. Original: “las diversas formas de violencia que atentan contra la vida y la dignidad de los ni  os y ni  as”

²⁶¹ “Guatemala,” Catholic Relief Services, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/where-we-work/guatemala>.

to help women when in comparison with *Cáritas Guatemala*. By recounting the story of a young Guatemalan woman who gained financial and social independence as a result of CRS' support,²⁶² this group even more clearly indicates it has the ability and desire to help women find safe and empowered social positions, despite its inaction in specific regard to femicide.

Meanwhile, *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM)*, a member of the Catholic advocacy network *Pax Christi International*, takes on tasks including helping families understand and cope with the unjust loss of loved ones,²⁶³ criticizing continued violence²⁶⁴ and corruption,²⁶⁵ monitoring deaths of males and females,²⁶⁶ and “strengthen[ing] women’s leadership through education.”²⁶⁷ Lastly, on a more local level, the Women’s Pastoral of the Archdiocese of Los Altos organizes “training processes about civic and political themes for women...training processes for young people,...[and] counseling and accompaniment in cases of intrafamilial violence and violence against a woman” that aim to “eradicate the different forms of violence against women” and “eliminate sexist stereotypes.”²⁶⁸ In sum, the endeavors taken on by these four Catholic affiliated social organizations reveal that each one wants to assist women and

²⁶² “Catholic Relief Services,” Facebook, January 24, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/CatholicReliefServices/photos/a.158223639544/10156343350479545/?type=3&theater>.

²⁶³ “Quiénes Somos,” GAM - Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, accessed February 5, 2019, <http://grupodeapoyomutuo.org.gt/quienes-somos/>.

²⁶⁴ “Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo-GAM,” Facebook, January 15, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/GAMGuatemala/photos/a.1706562872891887/2226317070916462/?type=3&theater>.

²⁶⁵ “Denuncian Al Presidente Jimmy Morales y Al Ministro de La Defensa,” *Prensa Libre*, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/justicia/denuncian-al-presidente-jimmy-morales-y-al-ministro-de-defensa-williams-mansilla-por-bono-de-riesgo/>.

²⁶⁶ “Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo - GAM,” Facebook, July 26, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/GAMGuatemala/photos/a.1706562872891887/2114538938760943/?type=3&theater>.

²⁶⁷ “Dignificación,” GAM - Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, accessed February 5, 2019, <http://grupodeapoyomutuo.org.gt/dignificacion-2/>.

Original: “fortalecimiento de liderazgos de mujeres a través de la educación”

²⁶⁸ “Pastoral de La Mujer,” Pastoral Social Arquidiócesis de Los Altos, accessed February 5, 2019, <http://www.psocialxela.com/i/index.php/pastoral-de-la-mujer>.

Original “procesos formativos en temáticas cívico político para las mujeres...procesos formativos y de capacitación para jóvenes, ... [y] asesoría y acompañamiento en casos de violencia intrafamiliar y violencia contra la mujer”

Original: “erradicar las diferentes formas de violencia contra la mujer”

Original: “eliminar estereotipos machistas”

vulnerable populations in some fashion, but I find their attempts to do so indicate the Catholic Church does not work to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala. However, at the same time, some portions of their work do valuably address root causes of crime in general and illustrate some of ongoing issues women face which indicates the Catholic Church does somewhat help to combat the existing “deep sense of insecurity for women.”²⁶⁹ As a result, these groups in total also appear to avoid acting in ways that enable this pervasive social ill to continue.

Finally, the one Catholic affiliated social organization that does specifically address femicide in any way is Sisters of Mercy, which works mainly in rural areas of the country.²⁷⁰ In 2014, Guatemala’s chapter of this international group, “call[ed] on [the United States’] Congress [to] conduct a full analysis of the root causes of [the influx of “unaccompanied migrant children” from Central America] and how U.S. foreign aid, U.S. trade policy and the War on Drugs are impacting the region.”²⁷¹ Within this letter, the group does not explicitly state femicide is a problem, but briefly characterizes the phenomenon of the systematic killing of women as in need of a solution. By increasing awareness about women’s particular vulnerability to death in Guatemala’s region of the world, Sisters of Mercy, as suggested by scholars Celia Valiente²⁷² and Edward Gibson,²⁷³ plays at least a small role in compelling authoritative individuals to take action to help combat femicide in Guatemala.

²⁶⁹ Ogrodnik and Borzutzky, “Women under Attack: Violence and Poverty in Guatemala,” 59.

²⁷⁰ “Caribe, Centroamérica, Sudamérica,” Hermanas de la Misericordia, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.sistersofmercy.org/caribe-centroamerica-sudamerica/historia/guatemala/>.

²⁷¹ Patricia McDermott, June 23, 2014, <https://www.sistersofmercy.org/files/Institute-News/2014/6.23.14-ltr-from-ILT-to-Congress---Unaccompanied-Migrant-Children.pdf>.

²⁷² Valiente, “Male Allies of Women’s Movements: Women’s Organizing within the Catholic Church in Franco’s Spain,” 49.

²⁷³ Gibson, “Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries,” 126–27.

5.4 Takeaways

The children's story, *Horton Hears A Who!* valuably teaches young readers about their moral responsibility to protect the interests of others when they are in need of help. Based on the academic case studies reviewed in section 5.1, it is evident that faith-based leaders and social organizations have the power to turn this responsibility into action. Unfortunately, in regard to the issue of femicide in Guatemala, the Catholic Church cannot be classified as an entity that contributes to efforts to combat the crime. Unlike Horton the elephant, who determinedly protects Who-Ville from arguably hostile characters, the Guatemalan Catholic bishops and social organizations that I researched act in ways that indicate the Catholic Church does not help to reduce rates of femicide nor cause the issue to worsen.

Chapter 6: The Catholic Church's Potentially Vital Role in Reducing Femicide Rates in Guatemala

Even though this thesis bleakly demonstrates the Catholic Church does not work to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala, I do not at all intend to suggest the institution does not care about civilians. Faith is an inherent part of many individuals' identity, and there is definitely value in feeling ties to spiritual communities of any kind. By investigating the Guatemalan Catholic Church's involvement in anti-femicide endeavors, I simply hoped to uncover instances of success, improvements that still need to be made, and hopefully, with this section, promote a social space in which to make positive changes.

In Guatemala, there are multiple social organizations that take on femicide as one of their major concerns. However, many of these groups are not officially affiliated with the Catholic Church. In an effort to understand why overtly religious and non-religious entities provide targeted anti-femicide social assistance in different ways, I place various ideas from the dissertation of scholar Marianne Tierney FitzGerald in conversation with those of Robert Putnam and Marsin Alshamary. As a result, this chapter suggests that the Catholic Church is acting as a basis for civil society, which enables the institution to compel individuals to participate in, support and create non-religious groups that conduct anti-femicide campaigns in the ways Tierney FitzGerald discusses.²⁷⁴ Even though she does not specifically use the terminology of "civil society" to demonstrate that the Catholic Church is taking on this role, the social space she identifies that can be created by the Catholic Church²⁷⁵ may be where efforts to reduce femicide rates can succeed in the future.

²⁷⁴ Tierney FitzGerald, "Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence," 63–68, 71–72, 75, 195.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 63-68, 71-72, 75, 195.

6.1 Existing Efforts to Combat Femicide in Guatemala

MuJER, Mujeres Iniciando en las Américas and Fundación Sobrevivientes are three of the major non-religious groups that openly provide social welfare services intended to help combat femicide in Guatemala. Founded in 2005, MuJER began by attempting to help female sex workers gain the opportunity “to learn to read.”²⁷⁶ Overtime, the group’s work evolved to include a project solely focused on femicide where members “testified and worked closely with the International Human Rights Commission in order to bring awareness to the daily violence that plagues women and to bring justice to the families of the victims.”²⁷⁷ Fundación Sobrevivientes similarly works in the field of “criminal law” to assist with “cases of femicide, intent of femicide, sexual violence and violence against women.”²⁷⁸ On a daily basis, the group also responds to insecurity by “run[ning] a crisis shelter which can accommodate up to 20 women, adolescents and children.”²⁷⁹ By providing a safe house and specifically working to combat “investigators’ inability [and] unwillingness to protect women’s rights and conduct comprehensive investigations,”²⁸⁰ Fundación Sobrevivientes and MuJER act as valuable sources of immediate aid for women at risk of death and those searching for justice.

Meanwhile, Mujeres Iniciando en las Américas hosts a program called “Men Against Femicide,”²⁸¹ which aims to teach men of all ages and backgrounds “powerful insights about

²⁷⁶ “Our Story,” MuJER: Mujeres por la Justicia, Educación y el Reconocimiento, n.d., <http://mujerguatemala.org/about-us/our-story/>.

²⁷⁷ “Femicide/Feminicide,” MuJER: Mujeres por la Justicia, Educación y el Reconocimiento, n.d., <http://mujerguatemala.org/?portfolio=femicide-feminicide>.

²⁷⁸ “Nuestros Servicios,” Fundación Sobrevivientes, n.d., <http://sobrevivientes.org/>.

Original: “jurídica penal”

Original: “casos de femicidio, intento de femicidio, violencia sexual, violencia contra la mujer”

²⁷⁹ “Guatemala: Norma Cruz” (Amnesty International USA, n.d.), https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/SummerSolidarity_GUATEMALA.pdf.

²⁸⁰ Bellino, “Feminicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 6.

²⁸¹ “MIA’s Programs: MIA’s White Ribbon Campaign,” Mujeres Iniciando en la Américas, n.d., http://miamericas.org/?page_id=232.

Original: “Hombres Contra Femicidio”

their own role in perpetuating gender inequality.” Through various learning sessions entitled “gender stereotyping in the media, sexual harassment – what is it?, abusive behavior – a wide range of degrees,” etc,²⁸² this group seems to try to alter ““machista””²⁸³ mindsets. In doing so, *Mujeres Iniciando en las Américas* pointedly addresses femicide in Guatemala and enables men to understand that “killing women to forcefully communicate their distaste for women’s growing independence” is inexcusable.²⁸⁴ Altogether, these three non-Catholic affiliated social organizations work to reduce femicide rates by providing varied types of social welfare to women, expressing solidarity for their struggles and establishing a program geared towards combatting the roots of this specific crime.

6.2 The Catholic Church as Antithetical to Collective Action

A comparison of these groups’ projects with those overtly tied to the Catholic Church suggests religious and non-religious leaders and organizations connect differently with the women they are trying to help. In general, the work of the latter seems to bring activists into closer contact with the individuals who are most vulnerable to femicide and those who are likely to commit it. As a result, each one also appears to be better able to understand and address women’s daily challenges.

To help explain why this might be occurring, I turn to Robert Putnam’s book *Making Democracy Work* which analyzes the power of civic engagement to improve “institutional performance,”²⁸⁵ or foment the development of an institution that “actually gets things done,”²⁸⁶ in the context of Italy in the 1970s and 80s.²⁸⁷ According to Putnam, the difference in success of

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 5.

²⁸⁴ Bellino, “Femicide and Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 7.

²⁸⁵ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, 15.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 63.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 13.

social welfare providing institutions in North versus South Italy is ultimately rooted in the existence of civil society, a non-political space where individuals gain social capital.²⁸⁸ Simultaneously, this social capital, which is defined as “trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions,”²⁸⁹ depends on the “civic character of social and political life,”²⁹⁰ or the extent of the public’s civic engagement.²⁹¹ In Putnam’s mind, participation and membership in non-political associations like “choral societies” or “bird-watching groups”²⁹² and “newspaper readership”²⁹³ embody the existence of this civic engagement and thus civil society, while political actions such as voting and involvement in “patron-client networks” do not.²⁹⁴

Within his discussion about how civil society is created, Putnam presents the idea that the Catholic Church “is an alternative to the civic community”²⁹⁵ and thus, cannot provide welfare benefits in the way non-religious entities can. Since he posits an organization’s ability to provide social services relies on the existence of “horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation,”²⁹⁶ he argues the Catholic Church, which he views as defined by hierarchical relationships, is unable to distribute social welfare.²⁹⁷ Even though Putnam’s study aimed “to explore the origins of effective government” in Italy,²⁹⁸ his ideas can still help clarify why Guatemalan Church leaders and affiliated social organizations do not seem to contribute to anti-femicide efforts. Indeed, the Church is not officially a part of government, but since Guatemala remains about 50%

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 87-92, 98.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 167.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 99.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 87-91.

²⁹² Ibid., 91.

²⁹³ Ibid., 92.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 93-94.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 107.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 88.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 107.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 15.

Catholic,²⁹⁹ the institution still serves as a respected aspect of many communities, which gives it the opportunity to act as a leader in social justice endeavors. This suggests that similar factors influence its work and that the lessons taken away from Putnam's study apply.

Therefore, the inaction of Guatemala's Catholic Church in relation to the endemic issue of femicide can be understood as partially a result of Church leaders' inability to move past the institution's hierarchical structure to create strong relationships with the public. Without the establishment of inherently more "helpful, respectful, and trustful" relationships,³⁰⁰ efforts to combat femicide likely cannot be created. Since "femicide in Guatemala has its roots in authorities' failure to prevent and punish all violence against women (not just homicide),"³⁰¹ any attempts to increase protections for women must be able to make them feel safe, in control and supported. Otherwise, women may not know how to ask or feel comfortable asking for assistance when needed, which would make it hard for an organization to know who or how to help.

Feminist theologian Ivone Gebara further describes how "one of the deepest problems of Roman Catholicism today is its promotion of the struggle for democracy for many groups and within nations but its refusal to allow such struggle within its own institutional life. Our Church is considered by 'God's right' to be a hierarchical society, a kind of absolute oligarchy in which only a male caste has the right to think and teach, whereas the millions of others have only the 'right' to obey and repeat the same thoughts."³⁰² In making this statement, Gebara reaffirms the validity of Putnam's harsh characterization of the Catholic Church as unable to beneficially connect with all individuals and as an actor that perpetuates some individual's inferior social status. Similarly, the messages put forth by the collective pastoral letters discussed in Chapter 4

²⁹⁹ "Religion in Latin America | Pew Research Center."

³⁰⁰ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, 88.

³⁰¹ Carey Jr. and Torres, "Precursors to Femicide," 143.

³⁰² Gebara, "The Abortion Debate in Brazil: A Report from an Ecofeminist Philosopher Under Siege," 134.

illustrate how the Guatemalan Catholic bishops generally sanction an inequitable social order and promote static understandings of gender roles. As a result, the ideas contained in these documents demonstrate how the “vertical bonds of authority”³⁰³ and lack of “horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation”³⁰⁴ in the Guatemalan Catholic Church can prohibit it from acting as the basis for civil society or a provider of social welfare targeted towards women’s causes. Together, these observations again clarify one reason why this religious institution does not work to combat femicide in Guatemala.

6.3. The Catholic Church as a Hidden Driver of Anti-Femicide Activism

In contrast with Putnam, Marianne Tierney FitzGerald blurs the line between what can be defined as Catholic and non-Catholic by promoting the idea that religious beliefs drive social justice work regardless of whether or not faith is officially connected to activism.³⁰⁵ After analyzing Catholic Jesuit priest Jon Sobrino’s “scholarship [which] illustrates the relationship between theology and social ethics”³⁰⁶ and the writing of female theologians who bring gender to the forefront of religious concerns, Tierney FitzGerald argues “theological ideas play an important role in Latin American social engagement.”³⁰⁷ She subsequently explains that “activism in which [Guatemalan, Mexican and Honduran] women are participating is imbued with theological themes,”³⁰⁸ in part, because “women engaged in activism understand themselves as living in the light of the resurrection.”³⁰⁹ (The resurrection refers to the biblical story where

³⁰³ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, 107.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁰⁵ Tierney FitzGerald, “Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence,” 63–68, 71–72, 75, 195.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

Jesus rises from the dead after having been crucified,³¹⁰ which can be interpreted as representing “justice proclaimed in the midst of an unjust situation.”³¹¹)

As evidence for her argument, Tierney FitzGerald discusses how Nancy Pineda-Madrid finds “the women of Ciudad Juárez [another place facing high rates of femicide³¹²] are using Christian religious symbols to demand that the killing of women...end, and to affirm that only through community can we create a more humane, sacred world and can we realize the reign of God.”³¹³ Unfortunately, it is possible that signs of the influence of the Catholic Church on similar efforts in Guatemala may not be easily found through a study of the work conducted by Church leaders and affiliated organizations, which would explain why my research indicates the institution is not working to reduce rates of femicide nor making the issue worse. Furthermore, Tierney FitzGerald turns to the work of feminist theologian Jeanette Rodríguez who also reveals this “grey” space in which a religious institution can covertly participate in social justice endeavors. She finds that “although many [female leaders from the US’ National Hispanic Leadership Institute who] were raised, educated, and/or supported by their churches...[were] disillusioned by the perceived lack of commitment to the poor or to sustained indigenous leadership on the part of the church, ...[they still] credit their churches, primarily Roman Catholic, as being instrumental in identifying them as leaders, calling them to work in their communities, and offering them an opportunity to step into leadership roles.”³¹⁴ Therefore, as Tierney FitzGerald and the additional scholarship that she draws on indicates, even if the

³¹⁰ “Easter - the Resurrection of Jesus,” Christian Bible Reference Site, n.d., https://www.christianbiblereference.org/story_Easter.htm.

³¹¹ Tierney FitzGerald, “Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence,” 99.

³¹² “En 25 años van 1,779 feminicidios en Ciudad Juárez,” *El Heraldo de Mexico*, February 15, 2018, <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/estados/en-25-anos-van-1775-feminicidios-en-ciudad-juarez/>.

³¹³ Pineda-Madrid, “Chapter 10: Redemption, Latinas, and the Contribution of Rosemary Radford Ruether,” 169.

³¹⁴ Rodríguez, “Chapter 6: Latina Activists Toward an Inclusive Spirituality of Being in the World,” 115–16.

Catholic Church does not host or organize its own programs to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala, it can still beneficially influence efforts to combat the issue by prompting its followers to participate.³¹⁵

6.4 The Positive Implications of a Religious Institution Acting as a Basis for Civil Society

Marsin Alshamary's recent study about how a community's involvement in religious activities positively affects the creation of and popular involvement in civil society organizations (CSOs) affirms the ideas presented by Marianne Tierney FitzGerald. Then, on an even more hopeful note, Alshamary's findings lead me to further suggest the Catholic Church is currently acting as a basis for civil society, and that the social space it creates when doing so, which is identified by the research of Tierney FitzGerald,³¹⁶ may be where anti-femicide activism efforts can be most successful in future Guatemala.

Alshamary observes that participation in religiously-centered events in Iraq inspired "increased entrepreneurship,"³¹⁷ caused "a constant reinforcement of positive values *on the local community*,"³¹⁸ and helped "locals to invest in organizational skills that they can later utilize."³¹⁹ As a result, she finds "religious institutions [which in this case are "annual pilgrimages"] ... provide both the motives and means for the development of associational life,"³²⁰ an indicator of the existence of civil society according to Robert Putnam.³²¹ Even though Guatemala is not a site of religious pilgrimage, like the Iraqi cities studied by Alshamary are, inclusive gatherings and events organized by the Catholic Church can similarly emphasize "kindness, cooperation

³¹⁵ Tierney FitzGerald, "Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence," 63-68, 71-72, 75, 195.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-68, 71-72, 75, 195.

³¹⁷ Marsin Alshamary, "Religious Capital: Religious Pilgrimages and the Development of Civil Society in Southern Iraq," 26.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

³²¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, 91-92.

and charity,”³²² which, as illustrated by Tierney FitzGerald, can prompt those involved to create and support groups able to host social welfare programs specifically targeting femicide.³²³ Therefore, it appears that based on the evidence provided by Tierney FitzGerald the Catholic Church in Guatemala currently acts as a basis for civil society.

Aside from this, Alshamary importantly notes that she found “religious institutions are not central to the management and organization of CSOs” created when religion acts as a basis for civil society.³²⁴ After finding that a significant amount of the CSOs that she researched are not officially associated with Islam,³²⁵ she points out, as Tierney FitzGerald describes,³²⁶ that involvement in religiously-driven activities can spark desires to support both religiously and non-religiously affiliated groups. Since those involved in religious communities are taught “to be more open to helping others, learning from them and cooperating with them” through their participation in religious events,³²⁷ these values can deeply resonate with them in a way that dictated messages of specific religious leaders are not always able to. As a result, Alshamary confirms that religious institutions can drive the creation and expansion of inclusive, non-religious anti-femicide social welfare projects, as indicated by Tierney FitzGerald,³²⁸ to benefit diverse populations of women in Guatemala.

³²² Alshamary, “Religious Capital: Religious Pilgrimages and the Development of Civil Society in Southern Iraq,” 12.

³²³ Tierney FitzGerald, “Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence,” 63–68, 71–72, 75, 195.

³²⁴ Alshamary, “Religious Capital: Religious Pilgrimages and the Development of Civil Society in Southern Iraq,” 33.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

³²⁶ Tierney FitzGerald, “Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence,” 63–68, 71–72, 75, 195.

³²⁷ Alshamary, “Religious Capital: Religious Pilgrimages and the Development of Civil Society in Southern Iraq,” 12.

³²⁸ Tierney FitzGerald, “Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence,” 63–68, 71–72, 75, 195.

Lastly, the groups studied by Alshamary developed in a way, such that, they are not under the control of the Iraqi government nor an organized religion. Instead, they are “more organic locally-financed CSOs.”³²⁹ Because these groups not only do not have to follow government demands but also can take actions that might be questionable in the eyes of religious leaders, they are likely able to act more freely than religiously tied groups. In Guatemala, organizations formed in this way may also be able to more easily identify and attend to the needs of women at risk of femicide than religiously tied groups can. Therefore, based on this and the ideas presented by Tierney FitzGerald, I suggest that groups created when the Catholic Church acts as a basis for civil society create an ideal space in which anti-femicide projects may be best able to succeed.

6.5 Takeaways

In Chapter 5, my research creates a fairly bleak vision of the Catholic Church’s involvement in efforts to combat femicide in Guatemala. However, a consideration of Marianne Tierney FitzGerald and Marsin Alshamary’s research creates a more positive atmosphere. It turns out, according to Tierney FitzGerald, the Catholic Church can help to reduce femicide rates without officially spearheading anti-femicide social welfare services. Instead, she observes this religious institution spreads morals, values and ideologies that help compel civilians to join and even kickstart efforts to push back against the crime.³³⁰ By drawing on the results of Marsin Alshamary’s research, I elaborate on Tierney FitzGerald’s ideas to more explicitly classify the Catholic Church as, in this case, acting as a basis for civil society. Then, based on this, I suggest her and Alshamary’s findings indicate that when the Church takes on this

³²⁹Alshamary, “Religious Capital: Religious Pilgrimages and the Development of Civil Society in Southern Iraq,” 26.

³³⁰ Tierney FitzGerald, “Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence,” 63–68, 71–72, 75, 195.

role, it creates a valuable social space in which efforts to reduce rates of femicide may be best able to flourish in the future.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The crime of femicide, the “systematic”³³¹ “killing of females by males because they are female,”³³² is not confined to Guatemala nor Latin America, leaving women everywhere at risk of encountering life-threatening violence. While gender-based injustices have become the focus of many activists’ work, there remains much that can be done to further eliminate this and related issues. In an attempt to make a small contribution to these efforts, this thesis aims to remind readers of the need to support anti-femicide social welfare programs and to provide a positive vision of how the Guatemalan Catholic Church can better help to do so.

Chapter 1 starts by characterizing the diverse causes of violence against women in Guatemala, including a “‘machista’ attitude,”³³³ the normalization of violence³³⁴ and impunity.³³⁵ Once the cyclical nature of this issue is established, the chapter’s focus turns to the peace process and more recent events where the Catholic Church acted as a major protector of civilians’ best interests. To conclude, I connect my desire to study femicide in Guatemala with this religious institution’s previous concern for public welfare through my overarching research question: *Is the Catholic Church working to reduce rates of femicide in post-civil war Guatemala? And, if so, how?*

Chapter 2 contains a literature review providing evidence of how the Catholic Church can have positive, negative and neutral effects on efforts to combat social ills, and Chapter 3 outlines my methodology for investigating my chosen topic further. In the past, this religious institution assisted welfare projects in multiple ways. For instance, in Spain, the support of members of the

³³¹ Tierney FitzGerald, 2.

³³² Russell, “Defining Femicide and Related Concepts,” 13.

³³³ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 5.

³³⁴ Carey Jr. and Torres, “Precursors to Femicide,” 156, 160.

³³⁵ “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?,” 6.

Catholic Church provided women with limited yet still vital “access to mass media from where to press for their claims.”³³⁶ Unfortunately, at the same time, the Catholic Church has also hindered similar efforts’ success by promoting ideologies, attitudes, and actions that treat women as subordinate and inferior in relation to men.³³⁷

The culmination of this literature review leads into Chapter 4, where I employ these and other mixed arguments to build a hypothesis based on an analysis of the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s nine post-war cartas collective pastoral letters. These documents detail the primary “social concerns” of Catholic leadership at their time of publication and provide guidelines for lower down parishes to follow when crafting speeches and ideologies.³³⁸ Disappointingly, none of these letters points out femicide as an issue that merits specific attention, and many seem to suggest the institution facilitates the continuation of the crime. As a result, my original prediction is that the Catholic Church does not work to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala and may act in ways that passively worsen the issue.

Chapter 5 begins with another brief literature review highlighting that religious institutions can participate in social justice crusades by acting as providers of social welfare, which leads into my search for explicitly anti-femicide projects of the Guatemalan Catholic Church. I find the country’s Catholic bishops and social organizations obviously care about vulnerable populations, but they do not, for the most part, contribute to efforts to combat femicide. While some Church leaders avoided the topic of violence against women entirely, others slightly addressed it, but without much conviction. Likewise, the Catholic social

³³⁶ Valiente, “Male Allies of Women’s Movements: Women’s Organizing within the Catholic Church in Franco’s Spain,” 46.

³³⁷ Aldana Mendoza, “Churches and Faith Communities in the Face of Oppression and Violence Against Indigenous and Mestiza Women in Guatemala,” 36–37.

³³⁸ “Pastoral Letters.”

organizations researched for this project did not center any of their programs around femicide, even if they addressed some topics related to violence against women. As a result, this thesis argues the Catholic Church neither works to reduce rates of femicide in Guatemala nor takes actions that perpetuate the problem.

Finally, I turn to Chapter 6 where I try to understand a possible reason behind and implication of my results. After considering the ideas of multiple scholars, I proceed to affirm and expand on the argument and evidence presented by Marianne Tierney FitzGerald. She observes the Catholic Church spreads ideologies that compel civilians to construct and support non-religiously affiliated social organizations with the capacity to run anti-femicide campaigns.³³⁹ When placed alongside the research of Marsin Alshamary, it becomes clear the Catholic Church can and is acting as a basis for civil society in Guatemala, and the groups created as a result can gain highly motivated participants without being tied a specific set of rules or regulations. Therefore, the social space, originally identified by Tierney FitzGerald, may be where efforts to combat femicide are best able to succeed in the future.

7.1 Future Research Possibilities

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the depth of this study was limited by my inability to travel to Guatemala for extensive on-the-ground research. However, since my literature review suggests the Catholic Church can contribute to anti-femicide campaigns in explicitly focused ways, I worked around this hinderance by looking online for distinguishable, Catholic Church-driven social welfare efforts targeted towards alleviating this specific issue. While this strategy allowed me to investigate my chosen topic of interest, in the future, scholars conducting similar research should expand their methodology to include a plan for collecting information on a more local

³³⁹ Tierney FitzGerald, "Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence," 63–68, 71–72, 75, 195.

and individual scale. By centering their work around in-country interactions, future researchers could add to the vision I have already created about how the Church pushes back against femicide, substantiating or even contradicting my results.

In contemporary Latin American, many countries, like Guatemala, also face high rates of violence against women.³⁴⁰ To heighten the generalizability of my Guatemala-based argument, future research teams could study how the Catholic Church addresses femicide in these and other places as well. Any patterns of behavior that are found would create better images of how the Catholic Church can improve its involvement in this type of work and point out other possible reasons why it might be struggling to do so. As a result, the academic scholars involved would be able to play an even larger role in the international struggle to understand how to protect the lives of women today.

7.2 Final Thoughts

The story recounted at the beginning of this paper about the loss of Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz distinctly illustrates the heartbreaking violence that Guatemalan women face on a daily basis. While her death brought tragedy to the lives of her family members, her case, unlike many others, was eventually brought to the attention of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Surprisingly, over 10 years after Claudina's death, the Guatemalan State was found guilty of breaking multiple articles of the American Convention on Human Rights and the Inter-American Convention of the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women.³⁴¹ Although no amount of money or positive judicial verdicts can make up for losing a child, the Velásquez Paiz family was fortunate that Claudina's death was recognized and

³⁴⁰ "Femicide, the Most Extreme Expression of Violence against Women," 1.

³⁴¹ Claudina Isabel Velásquez Paiz et al. v. Guatemala, Vol. 41, Issue 4 Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review at 1119.

condemned on an international stage. This case currently remains an anomaly, but since most others do not see similarly positive results,³⁴² its outcome, alongside the ideas contained in this thesis, reveals that there is hope that efforts to eradicate femicide and attain justice can prevail in the future.

³⁴² “Why Does Guatemala Have One of the Highest Rates of Femicide in the World?,” Amnesty International, n.d., <https://www.amnestyusa.org/why-does-guatemala-have-one-of-the-highest-rates-of-femicide-in-the-world/>.

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