

The Stay-at-Home Paradox
Narratives of Domestic Violence in Urban Honduras during the
COVID-19 Pandemic

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All the words in this manuscript are meant to unravel our mestiza history. It is a glimpse into the pandemic experiences that women in the peri-urban areas had to endure. I write with women in mind, with no intention of erasing other stories that fall outside of this dichotomous identity. However, I do so because my own identification has allowed me to connect with these stories, stories that have been loaned to me for an indefinite period of time by women like and unlike me. Women whose bodies have been sacrificed for the benefit of many.

Today I write in their name.

Their stories have quickly become mine, and with that in mind, they will eventually become our stories. Stories that are so often erased and misinterpreted. Because south of the imperial borders we inhabit an infinitely diverse space. Often ignored and reduced to statistical interpretations of our lives. Yet our lives cannot be quantified by dominant epistemologies because resilience and community build our truths. Only by using our bodies and voices as vessels can our stories be described.

This manuscript aims to contribute to development studies by using the knowledge rooted in feminist thought to properly guide the questions that the work itself untangles. Feminism was born in our homes, in our noisy streets, in the silence of urban nights and in the darkest of alleyways. It was born out of the silences we were forced to carry and the voices we refused to bury. It was born out of the weight of political instability and the persistence of economic inequality. It took shape in the everyday acts of resistance that hold our lives together. Feminism is not a borrowed theory for us, it is a lived legacy, woven into the fabric of our own survival. Feminism is present in every single moment that we resist the patriarchal systems that continue to dominate our land.

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relationships I share with women remain the most authentic expression of feminist advocacy in my daily life.

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And to all of you, thank you. For carrying, for loving, for fighting, for screaming.

This pandemic may be over, but the violence we faced demands that we begin to heal.

I asked the pandemic
for a few traces of my sanity

but it forgot to leave them behind

we were too busy
hanging the remnants
of what was left in our bags

trying to adapt
to a madness
that still hasn't ended

because chaos
did not leave with the headlines
it stayed
to live within us.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BMC	Banco Mundial [see also BMC Public Health]
CDM	Centro de Derechos de Mujeres
CEDAW	Convención sobre la Eliminación de Todas las Formas de Discriminación contra la Mujer
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe
CIM	Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres
CODEL	Comités de Emergencia Local
CODEMUH	Colectiva de Mujeres Hondureñas
CONADE	Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos
COPECO	Comisión Permanente de Contingencias
FAFH	Federation of Women's Associations of Honduras
FEHMUC	Federación Hondureña de Mujeres del Campo
GIS	geographic information systems
HALAC	Historia Ambiental Latinoamericana y Caribeña
IPV	intimate partner violence
JASS	Just Associates
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersexual, and Asexual
ME	Marco Estratégico
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
OAS	Organization of American States

OCCO	Observatorio Colombiano de Crimen Organizado
OIM	Organización Internacional para las Migraciones
OMM	Oficina Municipal de la Mujer
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PNUD	Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
UDIMUF	Unidad de Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer y la Familia
UNAH	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras
UNFPA	Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas
UNITEC	Universidad Tecnológica Centroamericana
US	United States
USAC	Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala
USAID	Agencia de los Estados Unidos para el Desarrollo Internacional
WHO	World Health Organization
ZEF	Centro de Investigación para el Desarrollo, Universidad de Bonn

1 INTRODUCTION

In the pandemic year of 2020, a woman was abused every hour in Honduras (UNFPA Honduras, 2021). Centuries of discrimination and historical violence against women all resulted in the exacerbated and violent experiences resisted by many during the COVID-19 pandemic (Parkinson, 2022). The Honduran urban and peri-urban landscape transformed into a scenario of increased domestic, family, and sexual violence with reduced alternatives for protection (CARE y ONU Mujeres, 2020). Illustrated throughout this research are stories of resistance, focusing on people who identify as women. While acknowledging and respecting the diverse experiences of individuals who may not fit into the dichotomous categorization imposed on female bodies, my goal is to support, raise awareness, and ensure the proper documentation, discovery, and thoughtful reflection of women's unique stories. I intend to include my analysis of women's narratives within a framework that responds to women's studies, which is undeniably connected to the gendered notions that attempt to define us (Lauve-Moon et al., 2020).

In the study, 67 phone and video interviews were conducted from March 1 to July 10 of the pandemic year 2020. The study highlights the voices of women who struggled within precarious conditions due to the loss of income resulting from the measures established to reduce the spread of the virus. Their stories include their lived experiences regarding exacerbated situations of food inaccessibility, water shortages, and heightened domestic responsibilities, with most involving caregiving and motherhood. I refer to them as residents.

During the time the interviews were collected, all residents lived in either the La Era or the Los Pinos peri-urban settlement located in the Central District of Honduras, which encompasses the capital and largest city Tegucigalpa, as well as Comayagüela, located in the south-central

department of Francisco Morazán. Tegucigalpa and Comayagüela are separated by the Choluteca River, yet share the same jurisdiction and challenges regarding violence and gender equality (García-Fernández et al., 2023a; Navarette Cálix, 2012). Both settlements, La Era and Los Pinos, are intrinsic to making visible the precarious situation of women living in the peripheries of the city. They are also characterized by extreme poverty, overcrowding, lack of basic services, high unemployment rates, and urban violence (Ackermann, 2016; TECHO, 2018). Within these areas, women are often reduced to statistics and are barely provided with space to voice their challenges and lived experiences.

In addition, the research is anchored in the experiences of those women who have survived domestic violence, referred to as survivors. I argue the importance of addressing the experiences of those who have resisted it all. This is to start to understand the entirety of women's stories, as well as the complexity of the phenomenon. Survivor narratives were addressed through two feminist organizations, Asociación de Calidad de Vida, which constitutes the only domestic violence shelter in the Central District, and Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla. The women survivors of domestic violence are in different locations from the rest of the respondents, yet all reside within the urban landscape. Their various locations are undisclosed for anonymity and safety concerns.

The work also includes my interpretations of their stories, which are guided by the experiences of those whose work is based on protecting the rights of the most impoverished and discriminated populations. The stories include the opinions of domestic violence frontline workers, as well as violence prevention specialists; I refer to them as experts.

The study adopted an open and flexible narrative approach, where the interviewees had the opportunity to provide anecdotes, examples, and stories and share their lived experiences. The diverse experiences of women in Honduras result in the valuable knowledge that unfolds throughout this entire work. In parallel, I include the implications of social characteristics like gender, class, age, and to a lesser extent sexuality and race, referred to as social categories, highlighting experiences that derive from the diversity of the women interviewed. I do this taking into consideration their dynamic and above-mentioned social categories.

Finally, I take refuge in our colonial history and the colonial legacy that continues to shape societal interactions. Following that understanding, I borrow the concepts that emerge from feminist theory and advocacy, using themes and narratives associated with domestic violence. A common thread that interlaces this dissertation is that of denouncing domestic violence as a result of gender subordination (R. L. Segato, 2003). I highlight the fact that the current inequality that persists within the binary (men and women) is a product of our contemporary patriarchal societies, which are well structured in our colonial legacy. That is to say, after the violent and colonial process imposed on both Honduran territories and its bodies, formerly colonized territories progressed into societies sustained by a colonality of gender that persists (Quijano, 2000).

The research is guided by the following central objective.

1.1 Main objective of the study

The primary objective of the study is to examine and explore the lived experiences and conditions that put women at greater risk of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in the urban and peri-urban areas of the Central District of Honduras.

The data were collected from March 2020 to July 2020, during the initial 5 months of the official and stringent lockdown. This period was selected to capture the immediate reactions and direct consequences the lockdown measures had on women living in peri-urban areas. The study aims to grasp their first impressions and understand how these unprecedented measures impacted their daily lives and well-being.

Central research question:

How did Honduran urban households transform into unsafe spaces for those who are women during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Main research questions

- 1) What were the living conditions of women residents and women survivors of domestic violence in the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) What were the factors that increased violence against women residents and women survivors of domestic violence in the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 3) What were the protective alternatives for women residents and women survivors of domestic violence during the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.2 Conceptual considerations

I propose to tell the stories that emerge from the lived experiences of women who are commonly viewed and detailed via an “outside gaze.” I write their stories, understanding that they quickly started becoming Honduran stories, trying to lean into Honduran voices and truths. I also write within an understanding that all of women’s lived experiences unfold within several patriarchal¹ systems: systems that are in fact dynamic, and different from those imposed by outside mandates (Paredes, 2010). In other words, the patriarchal system survived, transformed even. This one thought invites us to create strategies to overcome what emerged into such oppressions. Therefore, I focus on understanding what emerged from the fracture that occurred during colonization, while centering on the gendered structures currently inhabited.

To facilitate a discussion and understanding of “gender relations” for analytical purposes, the work includes the findings of intersectional and decolonial analysis that expose diverse terminologies. It also aims to historize it, while accentuating the ongoing critiques. Finally, I expose and use “gender” through the points of coalition that exist within the different feminisms,

¹ Patriarchy: stems from *patriarkhēs* in Greek, which literally translates to “a man who rules a family.” There is no single meaning, yet some interpretations of patriarchy include the overt subordination of women by men. Patriarchy also refers to a system of social organization in which the key political, economic, religious, and military positions of power are made, directed, and replicated for masculine populations exclusively. Likewise, the patriarchal system serves as a system of oppression for women or the “female,” which is constructed by social and cultural interactions and beliefs that are reinforced politically and economically. The CEDAW Committee used the word “patriarchy” in 2006 to signify women’s position regarding their state of inequality and violence. Since then, the term has evolved into an analytical tool for feminist approaches to understand the situation of women worldwide. It is consistently used to illustrate harmful traditional practices. It refers to overt subordination of women including female genital mutilation, femicides, sexual initiation practices, abduction of girls, child marriage, forced marriage, polygamy, widow inheritance, subordination of women to their husbands and other male relatives, domestic and sexual violence, and violence against women generally, maternity limitations, the prominent gender gap, and catcalling and harassment. Through an intersectional feminist approach, “patriarchy” will be experienced according to and depending on other distinctions such as wealth, class, race, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

solidifying a framework that sustains the work. I intend to express my findings by both an intersectional and a decolonial feminist approach, or what I define as a “unified” approach of theorizing oppression. This is to find the ways in which all the categories and experiences intertwine through our bodies and to start understanding ourselves from the complexity of living through them.

To better structure and present the results, I embed the intersectional and decolonial analysis (unified approach) in the theory of gender regimes developed by British sociologist Sylvia Walby (Walby, 1989). The theory serves to assemble the stories collected by addressing the alternative forms of gender relations on a macro level. Thus, the unified approach of all in-depth narratives is inserted into the existing theory, helping the reader consume the complexity of the stories in a systematized manner. Following her findings, I identify patriarchy as embedded in the various systems that shaped women’s lives during the pandemic. Walby proves how patriarchal thinking and acting is often inserted into the different systems women transit, which she divides into economic, political, civil society, and violence regimes. For her, structures of patriarchy and gender regimes are used interchangeably (Walby, 2020). For the purposes of this manuscript, the regimes, or *patriarcados*,² serve as the main themes of the empirical chapters, demonstrating the different sides of the valuable stories collected throughout the entire research process.

I divide the findings as follows: 1) economic, 2) political, and 3) societal and cultural implications lived by women during the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic in the

² *Patriarcados* directly translates into “patriarchies” in English. I incorporate Spanish in some themes throughout this dissertation to situate and make visible the advancements made by native Spanish feminisms through language.

country. They all came together, impacting the increased risk of domestic violence. In other words, presented through these regimes, their stories help the reader unravel how these patriarchados, or economic, political, and socio-cultural regimes, often interlace and result in the fourth regime identified by Walby: violence. I argue that violence is a result of the first three regimes more than a regime itself; more on this will be dealt with further. Additionally, gender regimes also acknowledge diversity, not simply of class, ethnicity, and other social categories, but diversity as a result of transformations and changes that occur within the different and further oppressive gender regimes.

Finally, feminisms are extremely significant to this study, in a twofold way: 1) to analyze the ways gender regimes are resisted, and 2) for the purpose of historizing the different gendered experiences. Thus, I take refuge in Abya Yalan³ feminisms; specifically, I intend to build on the thinking that has shaped Honduran feminism, which coincidentally serves as this research's key guiding paradigm. Their work is meant to illustrate the diverse dimensions of violence that continue to be encountered in the country. It also serves to enhance visibility of the ways patriarchy is resisted, which says much about what is being resisted (Celentani, 2022).

³ Abya Yala: a term that is used to refer to Latin America and the Caribbean with origins in the Indigenous populations. It is the name the Kuna people gave to what is presently known as the "American" continent. It has transformed into a decolonial term to refer to Latin America and the Caribbean, fostered by feminist organizations, collectives, and people in Abya Yala as a political project and practice, and an emerging way of thinking. In this piece of research, as in many others, Abya Yala replaces the concept of Latin America.

Consequently, through this work, I intend to illustrate the realities that persist in the present Honduran territories.

1.3 Main arguments of the dissertation

Anchored in the body of feminist theory and advocacy, I first recognize that Honduran society is intrinsically linked to colonial history. More importantly, the societies and cultures constructed south of hegemonic and imperial borders have been settled within patriarchal and external domination. Yet they are now to be comprehended within the cultural, political, and violent hybridization processes that bring power to a very specific narrative (Lagarde, 2016, 2018): a narrative that can only be evaluated by the ongoing stories sustained within these territories and the voices that emerge.

I work under the understanding that patriarchal societies have been configured by the separation of gendered bodies into gender-dimorphous categories (masculine or feminine) (Rosenbury, 2013), each with assigned roles and responsibilities. Consequently, in this separation a hierarchy is implied, and later imposed, with unequal valuations of men and women. Feminist theory acknowledges these as gender and power dynamics—in particular, as power imbalance, through the emphasis on the patriarchal system to explain the structural differences that often separate men and women (Bartky, 2020; Walkerdine, 1989). A common thread that weaves thoughts untangling throughout this body of work is to denounce domestic violence as a result of the various patriarchal systems and the female subordination that they produce.

The study uncovers substantial evidence indicating that the preexisting disadvantage and vulnerability experienced by women in urban Honduras were exacerbated by the introduction of

the COVID-19 virus into the country (United Nations, 2020; Usta et al., 2021). The findings highlight the increased hardships these women faced, including heightened economic instability and limited mobility, all resulting in:

- 1) food inaccessibility
- 2) reduced access to basic resources such as water and sanitation services, as well as increased debts to the state
- 3) lack of information and limited access to sexual and reproductive rights and reduced social rights such as access to domestic violence shelters
- 4) exacerbated productive and reproductive work, as well as community work
- 5) governmental measures based on confinement and social distancing
- 6) precarious judicial structures with weak and underfunded institutions that are not equipped to adequately respond to the conditions arising as a result of the pandemic

This paved the way for:

- additional pressures on mental health and well-being
- financial pressures due to loss of income
- increased family tensions arising as a result of confinement, exposing women to increased risk of abuse
- dynamics of financial and relational dependency, increasing risks of psychological, physical, and sexual coercion and abuse

Finally, constructed within patriarchal systems, as well as the body of thoughts that are both imposed and replicated today, our understandings of Honduran women ought to be diverse.

Thus, this work is intended as a space to collect and narrate the lived and diverse pandemic

experiences of women living in the urban and peri-urban households of the Central District of Honduras.

1.4 Research significance and contributions

Embedded in the voices and stories of Honduran women themselves, this body of work makes valuable empirical and conceptual contributions to the limited yet valuable knowledge of Honduras's violence epidemic against women and girls (Espinoza Turcios et al., 2023; Mendoza, 1996; Menjívar, 2020; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017; Sebert Kuhlmann et al., 2017). It also aims to contribute to the essential body of work released by grassroots and state organizations during the legacy of the health crises (A. Y. Coello, 2020; Ecuménicas por el Derecho a Decidir, 2020; Iniciativa Spotlight Infosegura, 2020; Iniciativa Spotlight, 2020b; Iniciativa Spotlight y UDIMUF y Mariposas Libres del Corozal, 2020).

The work acknowledges the multiple and differentiated experiences women endure and that were exacerbated during the measures established to reduce the spread of the virus. Within this crisis scenario, women's financial, political, and socio-emotional dependencies rose, serving as fertile grounds for increased risks of domestic violence (Sediri et al., 2020). The narratives chosen to illustrate these realities unravel these complicated relationships, as much as women's autonomy and power of survival.

By illustrating the different gender regimes resisted by Honduran women during the COVID-19 pandemic from a decolonial and intersectional perspective, the work unknots an important revelation: rather than being a safe space, urban and peri-urban households in the Central District

transformed into life-threatening spaces for women. In fact, women's lives in Honduras were systematically put at risk from domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most importantly, the entire body of work is rooted in the inclusion, production, and validation of knowledge anchored in the experiences of women who have historically been overlooked and continue to live within injustice and oppression (Lugones, 2012a; Ortiz Ocaña & Arias López, 2019). The few studies that have touched on these populations and themes (Bustillo, 2005; Hansen-Nord et al., 2014, 2016; Menjívar, 2023; Stein, 2019; Wolseth, 2011a) are enriched by the contributions of the dissertation's view on pandemic experiences within the urban and peri-urban landscape.

I argue that although the social implications of the pandemic and its consequences for violence against women are a universal phenomenon, there are factors in the country—structural foundations, even—that make the problem more visible, allowing researchers to dig into those differentiated conditions for what is both a deeper and much-needed reflection (Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017). The stories that unfold are complemented by various historical, cultural, educational, social, and judicial factors that all contribute to the invisibility of and particular resistance to domestic violence (Menjívar, 2023). This could potentially have an impact on public health structures, as well as informing and advising institutions on how to better protect women and girls, especially in crisis scenarios. The work is useful for women's rights advocates and domestic violence policy research. It highlights the role of established policies, decision-makers, and frontline practitioners, providing a lens through which inadequacies can be seen to have devastating consequences.

Additionally, whereas most studies on domestic violence in Honduras normally focus on reporting figures and trends (Becerra, 1983; Ford, 2022), while trying to pinpoint additional factors for the reasons domestic violence occurs, this study is an updated review of the situation, highlighting women's entire experiences, putting the women, in their own narratives, at the forefront. It also narrows the reasons for domestic violence to female subordination. Furthermore, by considering specific conditions such as poverty, inequality, and social aspects as differentiated backgrounds, researchers like me can examine the phenomenon in greater detail. Looking at women's stories as holistically as possible allows researchers to go beyond the binary view of victims and perpetrators as the sole actors of the story. In fact, the study presents the problem as a systemic result with several key players (Espinoza Turcios et al., 2023; Menjívar, 2020; Menjívar, 2023). Therefore, the work itself serves as evidence of women's increased risks of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban Honduras. Lastly, conceived as a storyline, the work is presented as several narratives that come together as a collective one.

1.5 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is composed of nine chapters.

The first chapter, which is the current introduction, is meant to set the scene and provide a condensed version of the entire body of work.

The second chapter is a background chapter that provides a historically tailored overview of Honduras, including general information regarding the country and an overall introduction to the main economic, political, and societal and cultural aspects that are important for the work that later unfolds. Following that, the chapter is categorized into five main influential periods: a) the

precolonial era, b) the colonization period, c) postcolonial patriarchy, d) the emergence of the city and its repercussions for women; this part includes a recollection on Honduran feminist history, and leads to e) the current state of inequality in Honduras. By chronologically describing Honduras's socioeconomic and political "crisis," which continues to threaten the lives of women (Madrid Rossel, 2020), I start painting a backdrop to properly locate and understand the challenges faced by women's gendered bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Complementing the background is a literature review section, where I engage with the body of scholarship addressing domestic violence in the region, particularly addressing the systematic nature of what unfolds in Honduran territory. I also incorporate the works of grassroots organizations and the Honduran feminist movement during the COVID-19 pandemic. I highlight the academic findings that have unraveled several findings on the topics of domestic violence in the country.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to explaining the conceptual considerations that frame this research. It aims to provide a quick synopsis of the evolution of feminism, where the term "gender" develops (Butler & Lourties, 1998; Lagarde, 2018). It also signifies the origin of the present intersectional and decolonial ways of theorizing and advocating for domestic violence. First, I recall the works of first- and second-wave feminists and their advancements in establishing definitions and impositions carried into our sexed bodies (De Beauvoir, 1997). Second, I introduce the concepts that identify the differentiated experiences endured by women of color by presenting the concept of intersectionality (K. Crenshaw, 2015). Third, I pave the way for the analytical discoveries derived from a decolonial gaze, suggesting a much-needed reflection on intersectional viewpoints, and presenting a decolonial approach to consider, reflect on, and weave together important notions and ways of thinking about gender that are rooted in our colonial past (Thomas, 2020). Fourth, I introduce my "unified" approach of theorizing oppression, which is

birthed in identifying diverse social conditions while extracting insight from colonial history and its living legacy. Fifth, and finally, the conceptual discussion is embedded in the theory of gender regimes (Walby, 1989, 2020), which is used to structure the results and shape the extensive knowledge that is presented in the three empirical chapters: 1) “The Economy,” 2) “The Polity,” and 3) “The Socio-culture.”

Chapter 4 presents the methodology, providing an overview of how this research was designed, mapped, executed, and analyzed. After establishing the main objective of the research, I continue to address the methods utilized and the reasons behind their implementation. I also narrate my motivations, and, following a decolonial and feminist framework, I share a deep reflection regarding my positionality in this research. I also include how field entry was enabled, the sampling criteria, the data collection procedure, ethical considerations, and the limitations that arose when collecting data during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter concludes by addressing the data analysis process, detailing the methods and techniques used to interpret the collected data, and outlining the key findings derived from the analysis,

Chapter 5 marks the start of the empirical findings and reflections, where I engage with the collected narratives that support the arguments of my work. The first empirical chapter, entitled “The Economy,” illustrates the economic structure and setting that shaped the experiences of women residents and women survivors for the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing the inequality that undoubtedly shapes the stories of domestic violence in the urban and peri-urban spaces. Based on Sylvia Walby’s economic regime, the chapter sheds light on the occupational segregation that occurs and forces women into limited roles for economic provision (Walby, 2020). It also helps us understand the traditional gender roles and conditions that persist

within the peripheries. The economic regime cannot be comprehended outside the relations within the capitalist system (Walby, 2005). The chapter draws on the in-depth narratives of women who endured several struggles, including loss of income as the primary challenge. This resulted in limited access to food and basic services, compounded by an increased burden in their productive and reproductive responsibilities, emphasizing their roles as caregivers and mothers—all this while faced with mobility restrictions and limitations. The chapter reveals themes related to the peri-urban landscape and domestic violence, as well as the existing impoverished conditions that were exacerbated by the measures and ultimately triggered family tensions.

Chapter 6, “The Polity,” is built around women’s experiences regarding state resources. Following Sylvia Walby’s theory (Walby, 2005, 2020), it analyzes the legal implications and alternatives available in current Honduran policies, and how they shape representation of women’s interests and lives, covering political decision-making and the role of feminist movements. Also important are the laws that ought to protect women, including access to safety, income, education, health, and overall human rights. The polity chapter aims to reveal the state’s influence and presence regarding women’s lives and citizenship during the COVID-19 pandemic. The institution of marriage also serves as a good example, and in particular, the imposition of marriage and / or heteronormative partnership as an opportunity for women to access better livelihoods. Closely related to that, I deal with how domestic violence is handled—or, in the case of Honduras, not handled, establishing a state of impunity for violence against women, and forcing women to fend for themselves. The regime includes the way the law operates as much as how these encounters persist throughout women’s lives. More importantly, the chapter aims to disclose how women survive such consequences, exposing their autonomy.

Chapter 7, entitled “The Socio-culture,” is the final empirical chapter, and it aims to analyze social and cultural practices that shape violence toward women and simultaneously encourage them to continue to live in abusive relationships. To illustrate this in the Honduran context, I expose Judeo-Christian moral and double standards that surround women on topics of family and motherhood. I expose the role of religious institutions in the peripheries, as well as their impact on women survivors. I argue that women’s value in society is relegated to their ability to establish heterosexual partnerships. This is compounded by the limited access to social alternatives and spaces for recreation and freedom. Based on Sylvia Walby’s civil society regime (Walby, 2020; Walby & Myhill, 2001). The chapter includes all sets of discourses and patriarchal practices, including social narratives as well as interactions.

Lastly, chapters 8 and 9 together serve as a concluding section for the research.

Chapter 8, “Broadening the discussion: Factors, causes, correlations, and associations with domestic violence,” delves into the complex web of elements and factors that surround domestic violence stories, ultimately pinpointing female subordination—understood here as the systemic relegation of women to lower social, political, and economic positions within patriarchal structures—as its root cause (Ade, 2021).

Through extensive analysis, this chapter highlights how various factors identified in the academic literature merely serve as accompanying characteristics to the underlying narrative of violence against women.

In Chapter 9, “Conclusions and Policy Recommendations,” the dissertation reaches its culmination by capturing the entire research journey. It not only reinforces the arguments

presented in the empirical chapters but also provides a comprehensive analysis of the empirical, conceptual, and policy implications derived from the findings. By untangling the multifaceted manifestations of violence and interpreting the interconnectedness of all gender regimes, this chapter exposes domestic violence as a manifestation of women's systemic subordination. Furthermore, this final chapter aims to deepen the understanding of domestic violence by shedding light on the diverse institutions that perpetrate, regulate, normalize, and reproduce violence against women. In doing so, it offers invaluable insights into the dynamics of violence during the pandemic, ultimately contributing to the discourse on gender equality and social justice in urban Honduras (Bucheli & Rossi, 2019; Rollero, 2020; Wheeler et al., 2021).

2 HONDURAS—A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To begin to portray the city means recognizing the accumulated conflicts that have yet to be resolved. To do this we must retrace our steps. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a tailored and historical background that helps to introduce the current gender-unequal social dynamics that persist in the country. The chapter is a result of a triangulation of information provided by 1) the available literature and historical documentation, 2) direct consultation with Honduran historians and experts, and 3) archives, data, and narratives provided by residents in the research area that better explain their own history. The chapter contains a brief overview of Honduras, including general information regarding population and territorial characteristics. It also serves as an introduction to the main economic, political, and societal foundations that are important for the work that later unfolds.

Figure 1: Reference map of Honduras (developed by the author)



Following that, the chapter is categorized by five main influential periods: a) the precolonial era, b) the colonization period, c) postcolonial patriarchy, d) the emergence of the city and its repercussions for women; this part includes a recollection of Honduran feminist history, and, lastly, e) the current state of inequality in Honduras. Finally, to support the introduction of the upcoming framework chapter, I complement the background by introducing the available literature on domestic violence in Central America and Honduras. This chapter also reviews relevant literature on the phenomenon of domestic violence, which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1 Overview of Honduras from economic, political, and societal perspectives

2.1.1 Economic Honduras

Located in middle America, right in the heart of Central America, Honduras is equidistant from the Pacific and Atlantic oceans (see Figure 1). Existing within a piece of land of 112,492 km² with a population exceeding 10 million inhabitants (World Bank, 2021), Honduras is bordered by Guatemala to the west, El Salvador to the southwest, and Nicaragua to the southeast. It is the second-largest country in Central America. It is divided into 18 departments within four distinct regions: central highlands, Pacific lowlands, eastern Caribbean lowlands, and northern coastal plains and mountains. Mountains characterize Honduras, with peaks as high as 2,849 meters (Amaya & Guillermo, 1996; Fonseca, 2019; National Geographic, 2023).

Although populated since before 10,000 BC, it was named by the Spanish conquerors, due to its irregular topography, as Honduras⁴ (which means “depths” in Spanish), in an era often romanticized as a phase of “discovery” (Amaya & Guillermo, 1996; Becerra, 1983; Fonseca, n.d.). However, prior to colonization, the territory served as home for a multiethnic population, defined mostly by the great Maya civilization, which is often recalled for its great economic advancements and multiple legacies in math, astronomy, science, art, and culture (L. Aguilar, 2014; Euraque, 2002).

Rich in natural resources, it is home to extensive flora and fauna, with tropical forests and a sunny climate (Ngo Bieng et al., 2022). Honduras’s economy is sustained by the results of its natural abundance, depending on agricultural goods for exportation. Coffee serves as a leading product, followed by bananas, shrimp, lobster, olive oil, and clothes. Honduras’s main export destination is the United States, which accounts for 41% of total exports (Chang, 2022; World Bank, 2023).

Honduras is commonly described by global indexes and statistics as having high levels of poverty. It is one of the poorest countries in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. In 2019, roughly half of the Honduran population (49.5%) lived on less than US\$6.85 per day, with 12.7% of the population forced to live in extreme poverty (US\$2.15 per day) (World Bank Group, 2023). Traditionally an agrarian country, Honduras is facing rapid rates of urban growth.

⁴ Honduras: the term derives from the Spanish word *ondura*, which directly translates as “depth” or “deepness,” and it refers to the distance between the lowest part of the land and the highest point in the area. Honduras was named by the Spanish after the irregularity that characterized this territory in Abya Yala.

Climate change and poverty are forcing rural dwellers and small farmers to migrate to the main urban areas, which encompass the cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, all in search of economic opportunities (de Sherbinin et al., 2021). Although urban areas exhibit a lower percentage of impoverished citizens, they remain extremely poor when compared to global standards. The urban and peri-urban landscape represent the main research area of this work. Highly characterized by inequality, the urban Central District of Honduras, composed of the capital and largest city Tegucigalpa as well as Comayagüela, is located in the south-central department of Francisco Morazán. Surrounded by valleys and mountains, Tegucigalpa and Comayagüela are separated by the Choluteca River (García-Fernández et al., 2023b; Noorani, 2022).

Both rural and urban Hondurans constitute a migrant population. In fact, Honduras is a country of origin, return, and transit for migrants, although the real numbers are unknown due to the irregular flow of migration. In 2021, an estimated 12,130 migrants left the country in search of better opportunities (International Organization for Migration (IOM), n.d.). Since 2022, the country has seen a sharp increase in the number of irregular migrants passing through. In 2023 alone, more than 500,000 people entered Honduras on their way to North America. Another important aspect is the number of migrants returning to Honduras. According to official figures, 56,172 people returned to the country in 2023, of whom 70.05% came from the United States and 26.90% from Mexico (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2023). Entire crowds of Hondurans, referred to as caravans of migrants, keep making global headlines due to their collective migration decisions and processes (Phillips, 2022; V. Y. Rocha, 2023). Most head to the US in search of remittances, which are transfers of money by someone who has migrated and is a member of a diaspora community with access to employment abroad. In fact, Honduras is

the Latin American country that depends most on remittances, which make up almost 29% of the country's GDP.⁵

Urban life in the Central District serves as evidence of the economic inequality that persists in the country. Honduras is the most unequal country in Latin America and the sixth-most-unequal country in the world. Between 2010 and 2021, Honduras's income distribution, based on the Gini⁶ coefficient, reached 48.2 (World Bank Group, 2023). Thus, life in the urban landscape is divided by this very fact. Class defines living, where the rich minority live a significantly different life from that of the predominantly poor population. With a middle class on the verge of extinction, the economy, and almost everything else, is controlled by the wealthiest inhabitants. These few yet powerful rich live in the center of the city, mostly in gated neighborhoods that are actively surveilled by paid security companies (Handal & Irazábal, 2022). As business owners, investors, and proprietors with secured resources, they can afford private goods and services, including bilingual and higher education, health, and private vehicles to transit the city (García-Fernández et al., 2023b; Loperena, 2022).

On the other hand, the majority of the population, significantly composed of rural migrants, has settled in the peripheries of the city, surrounding the center with what was intended as temporary

⁵ GDP stands for gross domestic product, and it refers to the measures of monetary value of final goods and services produced in a country in a given period of time (International Monetary Fund, 2023).

housing. Originally referred to as invasions, and popularly known as barrios,⁷ they inhabit inadequate spaces characterized by overcrowding and limited access to basic services and sewerage systems, as well as poor-quality public education and health services (Bustillo, 2005; Menjívar, 2023). Residents in the peripheries commonly live in small houses and / or cuarterías (standard rooms) with families of five to 10 members. These substandard rooms and housing arrangements are generally constructed of wood, scrap wood, cardboard boxes, and dirt floors. Extended families adapt to the available living spaces, with most living with or close to their families. Families represent an accepted source of socioeconomic support for Hondurans, important for care and intrinsic to food availability, especially in crisis scenarios. Most peri-urban residents transit the city by walking, and have access to public transport such as buses, rapiditos,⁸ taxis, and moto taxis, locally referred to as tuk tuks, inside their peri-urban communities, which have become alarmingly unsafe over the years, as a result of assaults, robberies, and high surveillance from gangs. For women especially, catcalling and sexual harassment are a common occurrence (J. H. Carter, 2022; Suárez Vázquez, 2022).

Survival for peri-urban residents is highly dependent on daily and informal work. Most adhere to traditional gender roles that often separate work for men as construction workers, taxi and truck drivers, electricians, gardeners, plumbers, and security guards for gated neighborhoods. Meanwhile, women stick to their domestic roles for work, with fewer opportunities as cooks,

⁷ “Barrio” translates as neighborhood, ward, quarter, or district in English.

⁸ “*Rapiditos*” translates as “rapidity” in English, and it refers to smaller buses, like vans, that have specific routes and are more expensive than local buses.

food vendors, and nannies, either in their own homes and / or serving in higher-income households (Allen et al., 2006; Hogrewe et al., 1993).

2.1.2 Political Honduras

Moving toward polity: constituted as the Republic of Honduras, the country is established within a democratic framework. The executive power is represented by the president, who is elected for a 4-year term, which is not subject to reelection. A legislative power, represented by the 128-member Congress, is elected for a 4-year term, and an independent judiciary power, headed by a 15-member Supreme Court, is elected for a 7-year term by Congress (Ginsburg, 2022).

The country has a long history of military rule as well as political instability, characterized by a deep and structural corruption problem (Salomón, 2022). With a global ranking of 157 out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index (Corruption Perceptions Index, 2022), the issue is widespread and almost epistemic. Successive governments of Honduras, especially right-wing parties with militaristic approaches, such as the National Party, consistently support U.S. efforts to control revolutionary movements. Their attempts to curb military and conservative rule have been minimal and largely unsuccessful (Portillo & Romero, 2020).

By the 21st century, Honduras had entered a deep political and financial crisis, triggered by a coup d'état in June 2009, resulting in the removal from power of Manuel Zelaya Rosales, a Liberal Party president who initiated left-wing discussions and interventions, endorsed by former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez (Portillo & Romero, 2020). What has followed the coup is an accumulated series of severe human rights violations led by a military dictatorship that refuses to be named as such (Fonseca, 2019; Salomón, 2009). Nevertheless, the coup also marks a significant moment in Honduran history, particularly for the organization and consolidation of

left-wing movements. Hondurans, including Indigenous peoples, Black communities, and feminists, began mobilizing against state policies and advocating for a more inclusive democracy through La Resistencia (Portillo & Romero, 2020).

In this sense, resistance began to grow and strengthen, fueled by the abuse of power and numerous corruption scandals involving the National Party (Miller, 2023), including the \$330 million embezzlement from the Social Security Institute, which cost many Honduran lives. Regrettably, the situation worsened: in 2017, the unconstitutional reelection of former National Party president Juan Orlando Hernández, backed by the US, reinforced imperial mandates, bipartisanship, and conservative reforms. These developments further widened the already significant economic and gender gaps (Fonseca, 2019; Guzmán Padilla & León Araya, 2019).

In 2022, Juan Orlando Hernández faced a series of severe legal repercussions due to his involvement in drug trafficking. He was charged, arrested, and detained by U.S. authorities, who submitted a formal extradition and incarceration request. Hernández was found guilty of playing a leading role in the importation of cocaine into the US, a significant charge that highlighted the extent of his criminal activities. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2022), Hernández used his position of power to facilitate and protect drug shipments, receiving bribes from drug traffickers in exchange for political protection and safe passage of their narcotics. His conviction underscored the deep-rooted issues of corruption and criminality within the highest levels of the Honduran government, casting a long shadow over the country's political landscape (Lee, 2021).

That same year, the Liberty and Refoundation Party (commonly known as Libre), which evolved from La Resistencia, was officially elected. Founded in 2011 as a movement against the 2009 coup d'état, the party's historical significance was highlighted when Xiomara Castro, the wife of

the deposed President Zelaya and the first woman to be elected president of Honduras, took office. Despite the historic nature of her election (Freeman & Perelló, 2022; Spring, 2022), the early years of Libre's governance largely mirrored the conservative power structures it aimed to replace. The party's rule has yet to address Honduras's deep fiscal deficit and entrenched political corruption. The country's political landscape remains shaped by weak and corrupt institutions (Spring, 2022).

Tied to political turmoil, Honduras was christened as the murder capital of the world, reaching the highest per capita homicide rates in the world by 2010 with almost 75 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (Carasik, 2013; Méndez, 2019; Rodgers & Baird, 2015). By 2022, Honduras's homicide rate had dropped to 35.8 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (World Population Review, 2022). Yet the perception of violence and the reality of rampant crimes against women remain. Honduras has repeatedly been reported as the deadliest country in which to be a woman, with 6.2 cases of femicide per 100,000 inhabitants. In other words, a woman in Honduras is violently murdered every 27 hours and 33 minutes (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2019).

Crime, violence, corruption, extortion, coercion, and drug smuggling are rampant throughout Honduran territories, preventing the country from making political progress. These pervasive issues create an environment of instability and fear, hindering investment and development.

Corruption and extortion undermine the rule of law and erode public trust in institutions, while violence, including violence against women, disrupt daily life and economic activities. Coercion and drug smuggling further exacerbate these problems, leading to a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity that obstructs any efforts toward meaningful democracy (J. L. Rocha et al., 2023; Solar & Ricart, 2022).

In Honduras, crime and violence are mainly attributed to gang presence and control, as well as to the country's strategic location as a drug corridor (Berg, 2022). Gangs, particularly the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the 18th Street Gang (Barrio 18), are considered largely responsible for Honduras's murder rate and the high levels of extortion and violent dynamics that shape the urban environment. Gangs also exert territorial control over the peri-urban barrios. They recruit children, establish curfews, restrict mobility, and replicate patriarchal norms against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ members. The estimated number of active gang members in the Central District ranges from 5,000 to 40,000, with several implications for urban life. Most of the urban population is tied to the daily risk of crime and violence, transiting the city with fear in mind (Kalsi, 2018; Van Damme, 2021).

2.1.2.1 Inside the violent acts against women in urban Honduras

In Honduras, violence against women is widespread and systematic, it impacts women and girls in numerous ways. The climate of fear, in both the public and private spheres, and the lack of accountability for violations of human rights of women, is the norm rather than the exception.

Rashida Manjoo, Former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women
(Manjoo, n.d.)

Gender inequalities in the country affect many more aspects than access to employment (economic regime) and education and healthcare (polity), as well as access to social rights (Socio-cultural regime). Inequalities are manifested in the epistemic violence that is revealed

through women's bodies and the unequal citizenship rights and protective alternatives they can access to resist it.

Violence in Honduras is structural, historical, and extensive; it is also diverse. Women in Honduras constitute a population constantly exposed to a systematic onslaught of 1) violent death and / or femicide, 2) disappearances and / or abduction, 3) stupefaction, sexual violence, and / or acts of lust, 4) displacement due to violence, and 5) domestic violence. All these are framed within a broader context of violence against women, with serious implications for our entire societies as violence against women continues to increase in the country, and perpetrators are neither identified nor punished. The state response to violence against women is weak, and impunity persists (Jokela-Pansini, 2020).

First, as the most extreme means of violence against women, the femicides⁹ in the country serve as a significant example. In Honduras, a woman is violently murdered every 27 hours and 33 minutes (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2019). Honduras has the highest femicide rate in the Abya Yalan region, with 6.2 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. In the pandemic year of 2020, over 278 women were murdered in the country (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2021). Although men still suffer the highest levels of homicide, most men are killed in

⁹ *Femicide* refers to the intentional and often brutal killing of women, usually by current or former partners. Though widely used, the term remains contested within feminist and academic circles. Its political relevance, however, has been affirmed in public discourse, highlighting structural gender violence. Marcela Lagarde defines *feminicidio* as the culmination of systemic gender violence, where various forms—gendered, class-based, ethnic, ideological, and political—intersect, leading to women's violent deaths. She stresses that femicide includes not only the fatal outcome but also the broader spectrum of violence endured by survivors (Lagarde, 2006).

conflicts related to gang disputes and organized crime, often by other men. Women, on the other hand, are typically killed by men they know, with cruelty and hatred, reinforced by a culture of violent machismo that is accepted and reinforced within Honduran society (Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017).

Second, women accounted for 62.14% of missing persons from 2011 to 2020. Young women alone accounted for more than 35% of missing persons reported: according to the National Police of Honduras, 35.25% of the women who disappeared between 2011 and 2020 were between 18 and 30 years old. There is limited information regarding victims' whereabouts and investigation protocols are poorly executed, with limited resources and attention. The only available information points toward women missing due to crimes related to human trafficking and kidnapping for commercial and sexual exploitation (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, Red Nacional de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos de Honduras, Foro de Mujeres por la Vida, JASS-Honduras, 2014; Herrera, 2020).

Third, although sexual offenses and sexual violence constitute underreported crimes, Honduras has some of the highest official rates of sexual violence in the world, where victims are mainly women. Sexual offenses comprise any unwanted sexual act or attempted sexual act, or unwanted sexual comments, advances, or actions through coercion by another person (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2018). Sexual threats in Honduras are exponentially exacerbated by Honduras's restrictive reproductive health laws and policies (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2019). In addition, impunity rates in sexual violence cases are alarmingly high. According to the records of the Department of Forensic Medicine, in 2018, 2,972 legal medical evaluations were carried out for girls and women who were victims of sexual violence. Of those,

87.4 percent were underreported. In 2017, of the 682 cases of rape that were resolved in court, only 102 resulted in a penalty against the perpetrator. In addition, the penalty for rape dropped from 10–15 years in jail to a sentence of 9–13 years. The reformed Criminal Code dropped special rape, where the perpetrator was punished with 15–20 years in prison if the victim was under 12 or over 70 years old. Currently, there is no additional legal repercussion for this crime (Herrmannsdorfer, 2020; National Autonomous University of Honduras, 2018).

Fourth, although men continue to represent the highest population of migrants in the country, women tend to be displaced from their homes due to gender-based violence. Women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people are forced to flee their residences due to domestic and family violence, as well as for reasons related to violence inflicted by members of gangs or security forces. Male minors and male young adults are the target of gang recruitment strategies, while women are more exposed to gender violence and structural conditions of inequality between men and women, both inside and outside gang groups. Women are subjected to systemic state and societal practices that perpetuate their marginalization. Institutional weaknesses, such as failing to investigate and prosecute crimes against women, further reinforce impunity and contribute to their ongoing displacement and vulnerability. (Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (ACNUR), 2021; Comisión Interinstitucional para la Protección de las Personas Desplazadas Internamente por la Violencia (CIPPDV), 2019).

Fifth—moving toward the focus of this research—domestic violence is the main form of violence against women in Honduras (Asociadas por lo Justo (JASS), Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), Centro de Estudios de la Mujer-Honduras (CEMH) 2014). According to the United Nations, only 10% of cases of domestic violence are reported by victims worldwide, yet

in the country an average of 58 complaints are filed daily. During the pandemic those complaints rose to 241 a day, all characterized by an absence of resolution for the victims. Only 22% of the complaints resulted in favorable responses for women victims and survivors of domestic violence (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM) 2019). Domestic violence is influenced by individual, community, political, and societal factors, which include the inability of the state to provide alternatives as much as the prevalence and acceptance of violence against women in the country (Menjívar & Walsh, 2019; Wheeler et al., 2021).

2.1.3 Socio-cultural Honduras

In terms of society and culture, Honduras is a Spanish-speaking territory where the population is often classified in a pattern of power learned from colonization. It is currently composed of a predominantly mestizo population, which refers to people of mixed race from European, predominantly Spanish, and Indigenous descent: mestizos, mestizas, and mestizes account for approximately 90% of the population (Loperena, 2022; S. G. P. Villeda, 2021), the remainder

including people from native tribes such as Lencas¹⁰, Chortis¹¹, Tolupanes¹², Pechs¹³

Tawahkas,¹⁴ Miskitos¹⁵, and Garifunas¹⁶. Non-coincidentally, these minority groups correspond

¹⁰ The Lenca are the largest Indigenous group in Honduras, with an estimated population of approximately 131,000 individuals. They are primarily located in southwestern Honduras and eastern El Salvador, living in dispersed rural communities across mountainous regions.

¹¹ The Ch'orti', also known as Chortis, are an Indigenous Maya people primarily located in southeastern Guatemala, northwestern Honduras, and northeastern El Salvador. Their estimated population ranges from 55,000 to 85,000 individuals, with the majority residing in Guatemala. Estimates in Guatemala vary between 46,833 and 85,000, while Honduras is home to approximately 4,000 Ch'orti', and El Salvador has a smaller population (Rivas, 1993)

¹² The Tolupan, also known as Xicaques, are one of the oldest Indigenous groups in Honduras, with an estimated population of approximately 20,000 individuals. They primarily reside in the department of Yoro—including the municipalities of Morazán, El Negrito, Victoria, Yorito, Yoro, and Olanchito—and in Francisco Morazán, particularly in the Montaña de la Flor region and the municipalities of Marale and Orica (Rivas, 1993)

¹³ The Pech, also known as Paya, are an Indigenous group in northeastern Honduras, with a population ranging from 1,500 to over 6,000 individuals. Historically the original inhabitants of the Bay Island of Roatán, they were displaced to mainland Honduras—especially to mining regions—by Spanish colonizers during the colonial era. Today, approximately 6,024 Pech live in small, dispersed communities in the departments of Olanchito, Colón, and Gracias a Dios. The Pech are known for their unique language (Pech) and their ongoing efforts to preserve their cultural identity and reclaim ancestral lands (Rivas, 1993)

¹⁴ The Tawahka are the smallest Indigenous community in Honduras, with an estimated population of approximately 2,690 people. They reside in a 233-hectare rainforest area in the central part of *La Mosquitia*. Currently, the Tawahka are advocating for their territory to be officially declared an Indigenous reservation and recognized as one of the most ecologically significant zones in Mesoamerica, due to its rich biodiversity and environmental value (Rivas, 1993)

¹⁵ The Miskito are the second-largest Indigenous group in Honduras, with a population of over 80,000 individuals. They primarily inhabit the southeastern region of the country, in an area traditionally known as *La Mosquitia*. The Miskito have long fought for the recognition of their ancestral territories and land rights, which have been historically contested. They maintain a distinct language (Miskito) and a wide array of cultural practices, closely tied to their natural environment through fishing, subsistence farming, and traditional governance structures.

¹⁶ Garifuna refers to the Afro-Indigenous communities that trace their origins to the intermarriage between escaped African slaves and the Indigenous Kalinago people on the island of St. Vincent in the 17th century. Following colonial conflict, they were later exiled to the Caribbean coast of Central America (Rivas, 1993)

to the highest poverty rates in the country, while most criollos¹⁷ continue in positions of privilege and power (Moreira & Da Costa, 2020).

Nonetheless, the mixture of identities and historical events influences culture, music, customs, practices, foods, ways of dressing, and overall socio-cultural dynamics. Most of the population primarily relies on corn, beans, rice, and other staples, while on the coast food is mainly composed of cassava (tapioca), seafood, and chili peppers. Food is somewhat modified through the four different regions (González, n.d.). Furthermore, soccer is as important as family in the country, with inhabitants coming together when following the national team and celebrating holidays within extended family structures (Duran, 2023; National Geographic, 2023). There is a deeply rooted duty to maintain traditional family structures, to marry, to have children (McCutchen, 2011).

On my latest visit, after having lived in Germany for some years, I could not ignore the loud Latin music in the streets. The latest salsa and bachata hits covered several areas of the city, including supermarkets, stores, and entire neighborhoods, as well as means of transportation. Moreover, despite the economic and political struggles, Hondurans are welcoming, resilient, and joyful. In addition, Hondurans are highly religious, and it is not uncommon for strangers to bless visitors. Roman Catholics represent approximately 80% of the population, with an increasing minority adhering to Protestantism and other small religions (World Bank Group, 2023). Religious belief and practice are intrinsically linked to social dynamics, whereby practice

¹⁷ “Criollo” is a term used originally to describe people of full Spanish descent born in the viceroyalties. It often signifies predominantly White-looking mestizos (Mendoza, 2001).

influences individuals, moral criteria, and collective judgment (Crahan, 2019). I would argue that Honduras is a conservative society with engrained traditional gender roles. Men are often perceived as breadwinners and strong, and women as natural homemakers and delicate. This is highly visible in the ways the population dresses, acts, and speaks (Pacheco-Montoya et al., 2022). The situation for people living outside the binary is challenging. Honduras has one of the world's highest rates of homicides of transgender people. In fact, a transgender woman does not tend to live past 35 years of age (S. P. Villeda, 2012). Conservative elements typically impede the ongoing process of change in Honduras, although not entirely. Honduras is also characterized by resistance, where sociopolitical tales can be found in the graffiti of old and historic walls around the city center. Civil society is evident, with several collectives, unions, organized women's and feminist groups, grassroots organizations, and barrios being represented by patronatos, or community boards (Villars, 2001; S. G. P. Villeda, 2021).

Honduras is categorized today as a developing nation, often defined by environmental threats, and commonly placed under violent and extreme poverty headlines, as well as gender-unequal statistics. The country represents an ongoing process tied to economic and political dominance, relegated from colonial to imperial hegemony. Honduras continues to pawn political freedom for an imperial dependency that directly affects its economic status, and with that the life of all its citizens (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Ronderos, 2011). Ultimately, the goal of this research is to unravel the consequences of these historical oppressions, spotlighting women as the central figures in the urban landscape.

2.2 The precolonial era: Evidence of gender as a social construct

Honduras is part of the Mesoamerican region, a historical stretch of land and populations spanning from southern North America to the Pacific coast of Central America, including central and southern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Mesoamerica was inhabited by diverse civilizations such as the Olmec, Zapotec, Maya, Toltec, Lenca, and Aztec, characterized by common cultural traits such as maize cultivation and similar architectural styles. Mesoamerica's rich cultural and linguistic heritage, including ancient writing systems, provides valuable insights into human history and civilization. In fact, Mesoamerica has profoundly influenced what is now modern North America, with aspects of daily life such as food, architecture, and language all deriving from Mesoamerican origins (Carmack, 2007).

During the period prior to colonization, several peoples lived within the area we now call Honduras, with the Maya being the most well-known, perhaps due to their complex architectural flair and world-renowned hieroglyphic texts, which continuously elevate Maya culture. However, the Maya settled in the western area of the country only, centering their control on what is the present-day city of Copán (J. Barahona, personal communication, 2024; Hasemann et al., 1996). The first human settlements in Copán's history predate 1,000 BCE, exposing an agriculturally based society. Excavations of Maya sites uncovered grand cities with plazas, palaces, and temples, while unraveling their beliefs through stories told in textiles and ceramics. Evidence depicts a civilization that carried out blood rituals and human sacrifices to strengthen their connection to their deities (Aoyama, 2001).

On the other hand, the Lenca covered a greater territory, spreading out in the western and central parts of the country. The cultural history of the central zone provides solid evidence of human

occupation after 1,000 BC, long after the original migratory hunter bands from Asia crossed the Bering Strait. Lenca society itself comprised various ethnicities and groups, such as Lenca, Potón, Care, and Cerquín (Mejía López, 2019). Honduras is a hinge region, where Mesoamerica and the central zone come together (J. Barahona, personal communication, 2024; Mejía López, 2019). Scholars have attempted to define Mesoamerica as a region in which many of the cultural traits intertwine smoothly, and in which regional similarities persist as dominant features (Carmack, 2007).

Mesoamerica, in this case, is better comprehended as a cultural area defined more by a southern boundary and a set of cultural traits than by a set of culturally segregated states: its main historical and cultural roots intertwine (Neff, 2011). Thus, from this point forward we will refer to all native populations of Abya Yala as Mesoamerican populations, focusing on their socio-cultural and economic dynamics. To do this, I look back on the works of Rosemary A. Joyce, which allow us to grasp the precolonial concepts the Mesoamerican population had of women, and to a no lesser extent of gender—a concept that was built historically, with several influences. Gender in precolonial societies proves to be nothing more than a construct derived from social and cultural processes that deeply intertwine with age, work, and social status (Joyce, 2001).

Within Mesoamerican societies, gender was not determined solely by biological factors; it was also built through spiritual practices and social roles. Women, for instance, played significant roles in domestic and ritual spheres, contributing to the social and economic well-being of entire communities, while men's activities were more public (Briseño, 2000). In Lenca society, for example, gender roles were clearly defined, with men primarily engaged in agriculture and construction, while women focused on domestic tasks including weaving practices (Mejía López,

2019). The production of textiles, primarily led by women in Mesoamerica, held deep symbolic significance. Textiles were not only practical items but also symbols of femininity, creativity, and even social status. The intricate designs and patterns woven into textiles often carried religious and cultural meanings. Clothing served as a means of marking transitions in life stages. In some ways, our ancestors' textiles contributed to the assertion of gender identity and social status (Joyce, 1992).

Gender norms were also enforced through rituals and socialization practices. Mesoamerican cosmology often includes female deities associated with fertility, creation, and nurturing. For instance, Tonantzin among the Aztecs, and Coatlicue the earth goddess, were revered figures symbolizing the life-giving and nurturing aspects of femininity. Activities such as cooking, weaving, and childcare were imbued with spiritual significance and tied to the broader cultural understanding of female roles (Briseño, 2000).

Deeply influenced by cosmological beliefs and mythological narratives, our modern concepts of gender complementarity and duality appear to have been central concepts in Mesoamerican history, reflected in deities and creation myths. In Aztec tradition, for example, Ometéotl, the primordial and dual creator deity, identifies opposite sexes as complementary (Terci, n.d.). For the Maya, the value given to the female is highlighted in the diverse depictions of them as powerful. This is best represented in the *Popol Vuh*,¹⁸ a sacred text depicting the origin of life

¹⁸ The *Popol Vuh* is a text recounting the mythology and history of the K'iche' people.

according to Maya mythology. The Popol Vuh details the earth as female, while highlighting the importance of females due to their strong connection to nature (Tedlock, 2013).

Throughout Mesoamerican populations a common principle is sustained: there were no gods without goddesses, as they were believed to balance each other. A constant presence of the female and male is depicted, as well as the representation of both in one (L. Aguilar, 2014). Females were later noted as “wives” by the Spanish conquerors, yet the reality for our ancient populations reveals an equal complementarity instead of a hierarchical notion of the deities (Joyce, 2001). Furthermore, Mesoamerican culture hints, in effect, at an ambiguity of gender roles. Within cyclical phenomena such as maize cultivation or lunar phases, for example, there was gender ambiguity, as neither can be characterized as masculine or feminine. Both examples depend on their growth or stage, revealing a more nuanced idea of the genders as solely dichotomic (Tate, 2012).

In some Mesoamerican cultures, women played crucial roles in agriculture, commerce, and religion. For example, among the Aztecs, women were involved in various economic activities such as weaving and selling goods in markets (Berdan, 1980). Additionally, in societies like that of the Maya, women could hold positions of political and religious authority, such as being rulers or priestesses. An important example is the Red Queen, whose remains were discovered in 1994. She was found wearing grand jade necklaces and seashells and was buried with much of her

wealth. This discovery reveals a woman buried in approximately 672 CE and believed to have migrated to present-day Mexico to marry a king named Pakal, with the purpose of uniting both kingdoms. This finding also contributes to researchers' hypotheses regarding the smallness of the difference between males and females regarding power and wealth (González Cruz et al., 2012).

Moreover, Mesoamerican societies evidence matrilineal elements, where descent and inheritance were traced through the female line. This indicates that women may have had substantial influence within familial and kinship structures (Carmack, 2007). However, it is essential to recognize that Mesoamerican societies were diverse, shaped by their varied environments, languages, and social structures. The Aztecs, for example, had a centralized, militaristic society with grand architecture, while the Maya had fragmented city-states and unique pyramids. Languages ranged from Nahuatl to several Maya tongues. Religious practices differed, with the Aztecs focusing on a broad pantheon, while the Maya had their own set of deities. Economically, the Maya engaged in extensive trade, whereas the Aztecs used a tribute system. This diversity highlights the adaptability and distinctiveness of these ancient civilizations (Coe & Houston, 2023). It is also important to acknowledge that our understanding of precolonial dynamics is often limited by the biases and perspectives of the historical records available to us, as well as our own preconceptions regarding fixed ideas of gender (Joyce, 2001).

Overall, Mesoamerican societies often emphasized the complementary roles of men and women in religious and social contexts. A balance between male and female energies was believed to be necessary for the maintenance of cosmic order and fertility. These examples illustrate how beliefs centered on the female as creator of life, a notion that permeated various aspects of life in

pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, shaping religious practices, social norms, and overall cultural expressions (Martínez-Cruz, 2011).

2.3 The colonization mandate over gendered bodies

In Abya Yala, the Indigenous populations encountered the Spanish in 1502, as the Spanish searched for mild climates, fertile land, and precious metals. Honduras represented an area of conflict due to its irregular topography, viewed as inhospitable by the conquerors for many years. They founded many cities in what is now known as South and North America, yet it was not until 1522, a quarter of a century later, that colonization really began in the country (Becerra, 1983; A.Ramírez, personal communication, 2021).

After having spotted silver, metals, and extensive rivers, they began to exploit the mines, forcing the natives, through intimidation and violence, into manual labor. They found strategic points in the ports located right on the Caribbean coast, serving as dispatch points for silver ingots with a destination of Spain. In an age often romanticized as one of “discovery,” this led to an increased demand for Black slaves. This was to facilitate colonization and economic exploitation for colonial rule, thus also facilitating the slave trade to the Americas. By 1540, Black African slaves were brought to the country to work in the mines and on the land, to replace the declining population of Indigenous slaves, who continued to be exploited (Leiva Vivas, 1982).

This stage is often referred to in literature as the African contribution. Their introduction to our territories led to the emergence of an important process of “mestizaje,”¹⁹ resulting in a mixed-race population of zambes²⁰ and mestizes.²¹ Many African slaves were mixed in, resulting in a wide range of race-based ethnicities, including ladinos, mestizos, mulattos, and zambes, who were hired as muleteers, plantation workers, farmers, and cattle-herders and in other positions that placed them on the margins of colonial dominance (England & Anderson, 1998; Lao-Montes, 2007). This can also be identified today throughout Honduran society, where phenotypes that are more Indigenous and Black-looking continue at the margins of progress and access (Menjívar, 2023).

Furthermore, our Lenca ancestors are renowned for their resistance against the Spanish conquest, notably led by Chief Lempira in 1537 (Mejía López, 2019). This resistance was a pivotal moment in Honduran history—so emblematic, in fact, that our currency continues to be named

¹⁹ *Mestizaje*: the “mixing” of racial bodies. It refers to the mixing of ethnic and cultural groups in Mesoamerican history. The concept has evolved to incorporate social, political, and philosophical ideas about national identity.

²⁰ “*Zambo*” is a racial term historically used to refer to people of mixed Indigenous and African ancestry. *Zambe* is used in this research to incorporate both masculine and feminine terms as well as those who do not identify with either. This practice of feminist origins is being used in Latin American advocacy and academic spaces, with the aim of including a larger spectrum of humanity.

²¹ *Mestizo*: a racial term used both for racial classification and to refer to a person of combined European and Indigenous ancestry. *Mestize* is used here to incorporate both masculine and feminine terms as well as those who do not identify with either. This practice of feminist origins is being used in Latin American advocacy and academic spaces, with the aim of including a larger spectrum of humanity.

after him. This era is often depicted as an encounter between the old and the new worlds, and it fundamentally changed Mesoamerica, leading to the ascendancy of Spain and Portugal and contributing to globalization under European hegemony. The Spanish colonization led to the institutionalization of colonialism, with Mesoamerica serving as a prototype of colonized peoples. This period saw the establishment of fundamental Western ideas and practices, shaping social, economic, and political systems (Carmack, 2007).

The period also shows a clear division of labor between the bodies of women and men (Carías, 1998). Men were assigned to fishing and hunting while the woman were relegated to domestic work, a historical role that has persisted over centuries. Local historians and experts agree that colonization in Honduras happened in three phases: 1) territorial-economic, 2) socio-cultural, and 3) ideological-spiritual (A. Ramírez, personal communication, 2021; Salgado, 2013; A. Vellez, personal communication, 2021).

The first phase was marked by the entire transformation of the region, shifting control over the lands to the conquerors, while changing the modes of production to mining and livestock, incorporating the concepts of administration, and introducing an “enlightened” vision of the state, where property ownership prevailed. This era also constitutes a commercialization of Indigenous people. In turn, the territory was reduced not only in population but also in economic production due to the exploitation of fertile lands (Salgado, 2013; Valle, 1953). Early interaction between Mesoamerica and North America dates back to ancient trade networks and was continued through exploration and colonization by Spain. This interaction persists today, with millions of Mexican and Central American immigrants contributing to U.S. society, and with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other, similar agreements reflecting

increasing economic integration between North America and Mesoamerica, shaping shared economic interests and opportunities in the 21st century.

The second phase is better illustrated through the most important way culture is transmitted, which is language (Guilherme & de Souza, 2019). Our native tongues transformed without question into Spanish, while native epistemologies were eradicated. Sixteenth-century Spanish scholars produced major works on Mesoamerican languages and cultures, contributing to the dawn of modern social science and cultural studies. The latter was accompanied by a stricter imposition of gender roles, as evidence suggests that the Spanish conquerors restricted women's roles exclusively to the domestic realm. This marked out a distinctive role that continued to place women as mainly responsible for reproductive duties. For example, many Spanish men interacted with Indigenous women, but kept their wives in Spain, while relegating Indigenous women to domestic and reproductive work (Newson, 1992; Villars, 2001).

Third, the ideological-spiritual colonization of women's bodies is probably the most prominent of all, as it intertwines with the first and second phases, and it better illustrates the colonization mandate. Religious doctrine served as an appropriate "excuse" for the colonizers, while eradicating the strong spirituality that strengthened Indigenous populations. Transformation, in this sense, was radical, eliminating the plurality of the deities and introducing the Judeo-Christian mandate of one God. When Catholicism was imposed, Indigenous people were afraid to enter churches, as precolonial rituals were done only in public spaces. This forced most Indigenous people to stay outside for the mass rituals, further segregating them from the European populations (McCutchen, 2011; A. Ramírez, personal communication, 2021). This, among many violent actions, fostered the imposed concept that Indigenous bodies were

“different” or, in the terms established by Edward Said, “the others.”²² This otherness continues to be internalized in all the mixed bodies inhabiting Honduran territory (Kennedy, 2013; Said, 2014). The colonial influence permeates the religious blend evident in the Honduran western territory to date, which is still inhabited by the Lenca population: religion reflects a combination of pre-Hispanic and Catholic elements, evidenced by rituals, beliefs, and deities. Practices like the Guancasco and Corn Composure in the region highlight this syncretism (Mejía López, 2019).

The colonial and religious mandate also served as a prominent tool for the unequal value accorded to the bodies of women. The Catholic imposition changed the concept of women completely, explaining women’s existence as derived from Adam’s rib. This contradicted the original myths established by our Mesoamerican ancestors. Thus, the condition of Indigenous girls and young women during this period was one of total subjugation, from the imposed obligation of Indigenous women to cater for Spanish women, their children, and their households to the commodification of Indigenous girls to serve as slaves and prostitutes. Indigenous women were treated with brutality and experienced constant sexual intimidation and abuse. Additionally, Catholics established the term “homosexuality” and condemned it as a sin, reducing the possibility of diversity in human existence (McCutchen, 2011).

²² “Othering” is a term that refers to the exclusion of a person / population, based on the perceived notions and knowledge of another person / population as the accepted or right way of being.

The emerging criticism woven through this research is that the colonization of our territories occurred parallel to the colonization of Indigenous bodies, and with it a colonization of thought and overall colonization of life (Lugones, 2012a; Mignolo, 2007).

2.4 From colonization to a postcolonial patriarchy: The road to imperialist independence

Having long exploited the local silver and gold, complemented by encounters with diseases and resistance, external dominance started to undergo a transformation. The 18th century and early 19th century mark the road to independence, which was led by European / Spanish descendants already born in the territory, who were referred to as criollos. In terms of privilege, criollos were treated as inferior compared to those born in Spain, who were referred to as peninsulares. Consequently, criollos could not aspire to positions of power under colonial rule. Thus, an ideology of self-governance started gaining traction, ultimately paving the way for independence. Criollo men, and their wives, criollas, started advocating for liberty, justice, education, and freedom of speech to liberate them from their royal ties (J. Barahona, personal communication, 2024; Webre, 2020). Traditional historical narratives have highlighted the political and economic dissatisfaction of the Criollo elite as central to their leadership role in colonial resistance. However, there are no clear records of Indigenous people being part of this process (J. Barahona, personal communication, 2024). According to local historian and current Minister of Culture, Art, and Sports, Anarella Vélez, women played crucial roles in the path to independence by challenging the authority of the Spanish empire. Criollas defended husbands who had been imprisoned. Some women, often referred to as the wives of the independence fighters, were instrumental in sustaining the struggle for independence and later for the establishment of a federation (A. Vélez, personal communication, 2021). It is important to

recognize that these same leaders who fought for independence were later driven by the vision of a United Federation. This federation encompassed the territories now known as Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Chiapas, a southern state of Mexico (Slade, 1917).

Consequently, independence from Spain was achieved in 1821 and then from Mexico in 1823: Honduras was part of the Federal Republic of Central America from July 1823 to February 1841. In 1824, liberal Manuel José Arce became the first president, residing in the capital city, in the territory of present-day Guatemala. Soon after his election, Arce started supporting conservative ideals, defending a strong central government and strong unification with the church (Gudmundson & Lindo-Fuentes, 1995).

Much like today, the period was overshadowed by constant conflict between liberals and conservatives, with no great difference made to the treatment and exclusion of women. During this time, liberals favored free trade, reduced government intervention, and the separation of the Catholic Church and the state; meanwhile, conservatives supported the clergy and continued to defend the monarchy, while promoting traditional Spanish social norms (Paxton, 1976).

Decolonial feminist scholars such as María Lugones have also denounced the imposition during this period of gender dimorphism, which refers to the rigid categorization of gender into two distinct and opposing categories—male and female (Lugones, 2007). Conservatives predominated in the territory, exerting substantial influence over social, political, and cultural life. During this period, the colonial administration, in alignment with the Catholic Church, reinforced traditional gender roles by confining women to domestic and reproductive duties and restricting their access to education. This imposition of rigid roles and norms frequently

marginalized Indigenous and African-descendant communities, further entrenching social inequalities and suppressing diverse cultural practices (Lugones, 2016).

This was the case until 1830, when Honduran liberal Francisco Morazán became president and promoted liberal policies that curtailed the traditional power and privileges of the clergy, while promoting freedom of speech and press. After a decade of this leadership, conservative and popular opposition led to the collapse of the federation and to the declaration of absolute independence in 1838 (Romero Gómez et al., 2014). From 1838 to 1840, the federation fell into civil war. Notwithstanding the collapse, leaders continued to hope for reunification, a narrative that persisted through various attempts to reunite Central America, yet none succeeded (Dym, 2006).

Following this was the Liberal Reform from 1876 to 1881. Honduras was governed during this period by Marco Aurelio Soto, then by Luis Bográn from 1881 to 1891. The reform spurred the development of mining operations, primarily in the cities of Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, and Juticalpa. Gold and silver were extracted, marking a notable phase in Honduras's economic history. This phase is well-known for the emergence of the mining enclave, which left a lasting impact on Honduran society and its economic structure (Romero Gómez et al., 2014). The state played a pivotal role in facilitating foreign capital inflows by granting military exemptions and tax breaks to farmers, while also regulating the circulation of precious metals (Barahona, 2005).

The development of the mining enclave further solidified dependence on foreign investment, with foreign investors flocking to Honduras, coinciding with the establishment of the Rosario Mining Company in what is now known as San Juancito, located in the department of Francisco Morazán (Bermúdez-Valverde, 2009). The Liberal Reform also enacted crucial institutional

changes, separating church and state, safeguarding private property rights, and fostering individual free enterprise (Romero Gómez et al., 2014).

This period of the Liberal Reform also witnessed the birth of the country's first newspapers, *La Gaceta* and *La Paz*. Moreover, the industrialization brought about by mineral extraction ushered in modernization processes, leading to the dynamic involvement of society, including women, in small-scale industries producing everyday goods and services (Amaya, 2011). The Liberal Reform period includes women's involvement beyond their traditional reproductive roles, becoming part of the mining work. This shift was driven by the increased demand for labor in the mining industry, which often involved tasks such as grinding and processing minerals. Although these jobs were low-wage and typically less skilled compared to other mining positions, they represented a critical step toward broader economic participation for women (M. Barahona, 2005).

Following the mining enclave era, Honduras entered the banana enclave phase. This phase began roughly in the early 1900s and continued into the mid-20th century (Iyo & Cocom, 2018). It was an era that significantly shaped the country's socioeconomic and political landscape, encompassing the administrations of Manuel Bonilla, Paz Barahona, and Tiburcio Carías Andino, and lasted from 1891 to 1948. The influx of US-owned banana companies significantly altered the Honduran economic landscape, with concessions obtained from the government in exchange for investment, including land and tax exemptions. By 1929, the United Fruit Company, a U.S. conglomerate, held dominion over vast swathes of Honduran land, controlling all productivity in the coastal areas. This era marked a shift from colonial to imperial domination, with U.S.

companies shaping the socioeconomic fabric of postcolonial Honduras through infrastructural developments and economic control (Laínez & Meza, 1974).

The period from 1948 to 1957 was marked by an oligarchal liberal government that initiated significant modernization processes (J. Barahona, personal communication, 2024; M. Barahona, 2005). From 1957 to 1980, Honduras was governed by developmentalist regimes marked by significant military involvement in public affairs. Following this, in 1980, the country transitioned to neoliberal administrations, which attained their peak influence in the 1990s and early 21st century (M. Barahona, 2005).

With limited local resistance, the American government trained the Honduran army to protect banana companies, establishing Palmerola, the largest U.S. military base in Central America (Laínez & Meza, 1974). The trend of economic transformation, as well as women's participation, gained momentum with the emergence of the banana companies in the early 20th century, particularly in the northern region of the country (Arancibia, 2001).

This period inspires the term “Banana Republic,” which is a pejorative term that refers to Honduran territory and holds meaning for all impoverished economies and populations that depend on low-value-added products such as bananas. There are several characteristics that applied to Honduras at this stage, including the small size of the country and its control by foreign interests (Banegas, n.d.). Banana producers in the territory battled several repressions, such as low wages, exploitative terms, and extended working hours, and when confronted with tropical banana diseases, U.S. companies abandoned the decimated plantations and destroyed the railroads as well as the other utilities they had delivered in exchange for services (Laínez & Meza, 1974). Yet this era also contains one of the most prominent moments for Honduran civil

society: the 1954 strike, resulting in triumphs that are present even today in Honduran law, including the Honduran Code of Work first published in 1959, securing better wages and the right to unionize (Fenner, 2014; S. G. P. Villeda, 2021).

In the following years, from the 1980s onwards, there was a significant increase of almost 75% in the urban population of Honduras. In the following decade, the increase rose to more than 80% (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM), 2020; World Bank, 2017). The beginning of a transformation of the city is evidenced by the rapid process that occurred of internal migration to its peripheries (Euraque, 1990).

2.5 From private to public: The feminist movement in Honduras²³

Women's organizing in the country dates back to the 20th century. Most notably, in 1926 a group of organized women was founded in the country, called Cultura Femenina.²⁴ This organization was responsible for the first night school for adults that included women and favored educational actions for domestic workers, and street and market vendors, as well as housewives (Villars, 2001). Nonetheless, other associations preceded it, such as the Red Cross, the Women's Anti-Alcohol League, the federated society of Honduran Woman, the female union Fraternity, and the society Beautiful Honduras (J. Barahona, personal communication, 2024). The history of

²³ "From private to public," or "what is private is public," is a common concept of feminist origin that is often used to engage on women's rights in public platforms. This stems from the second wave of feminism, which represented a social rebellion that made visible the struggles of women who were discontented with their roles, rights, and access within society. Taking place at the same time as the civil rights movement, this allowed women of all ages and circumstances to place debates about gender, discrimination, and the nature of equality within public awareness.

²⁴ "Cultura Femenina" means "Feminine Culture" in English and it refers to the first official representation of women's organization in Honduras, founded by teacher Visitación Padilla.

feminism in Honduras can be traced through women's efforts to improve their lives and access equal opportunities (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM) & Centro de Estudios de la Mujer, 1998).

However, it was women's efforts to achieve political visibility and participation in electoral politics in the 1940s that began to make women's organization notable. *Cultura Femenina* served as a solid structure from which women won the right to vote in 1953. The women's movement strengthened over the years, especially during the military dictatorship led by General Tiburcio Carías Andino, an era characterized by a diversity of violations of human rights, and the eradication of community-based organizations and leftist movements (Becerra, 1987; Marín, 2020). In 1944, a series of protests led by women who were aligned with liberal political ideals, advocating for reforms related to democracy, human rights, and social justice, sparked an era of female resistance. Women started demanding freedom for political prisoners and disappeared persons, most seeking justice for their spouses, siblings, parents, and family members (Villars, 2001).

In 1949, after pressure from civil unrest and overall discontent with the authoritarian regime, Manuel Galvéz was chosen as president, representing a new era for the Honduran population, ending the dictatorship and obliging the military president to step down (Fenner, 2014).

Economic organization followed in the country with the establishment of the Central Bank of Honduras in the early 1950s. Subsequently, in 1954, a general strike sparked civil unrest to improve the conditions of workers of the United Fruit Company. The movement quickly spread to the Central District, bringing the banana sector to a halt, and establishing important reforms including the first workers' trade unions and peasants' associations, and the incorporation of paid

vacations and pension and retirement deals for all workers, including banana company employees (Mining & Fruit, 2021).

The women's movement remained active during the strike as they controlled entrances to towns and markets. They were also responsible for closing bars to reduce men's abuse of alcohol, while implementing collective kitchens, where women gathered to share food for all families affected by the events (Posas & Fontaine, 1980; S. G. P. Villeda, 2021). Suyapa Portillo Villeda, a Honduran academic, narrates through extensive oral histories the erased stories of female food preparers, vendors, and sex workers who participated in and supported the strike, including the stories of women who freed male banana workers and US-owned companies from the concerns of workers' food preparation. Portillo also signals how the 1954 strike was crucial for a new generation of activists (S. G. P. Villeda, 2021).

Following the strike, in the 1950s and 1960s, the establishment of the Federation of Women's Associations of Honduras (FAFH) consolidated women's representation in the country. The work linked international organizations to critical human and causes. Their aim was to achieve legal changes to improve Honduran women's and human rights. FAFH saw the mobilization of middle-class women, catalyzing a movement that aimed to integrate women into all levels of political engagement. Their active work with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), a subordinate entity of the Organization of American States (OAS), ensured an intergovernmental presence that allowed the recognition of women's civil and political rights. Consequently, The CIM and the FAFH collaborated with the United Nations, enabling a period of modernization of the state where international organizations led several actions to enhance the protection of workers, citizens, and women's rights (Escobar, 2001; Villars, 2001).

Drawing on an important work by Rina Villars, *Para la casa más que para el mundo: Sufragismo y feminismos en la historia de Honduras*,²⁵ in rural areas women asserted their demands for inclusion by forming crucial grassroots networks such as the Clubes de Amas de Casa, literally translated as clubs for housewives, aimed at enhancing household economies. These efforts coalesced into groups like the Federación Hondureña de Mujeres del Campo (FEHMUC) (Honduran Women Farmers' Federation). Meanwhile, in the northern regions of the country, the proliferation of free trade zones spurred the organization of women, given that a significant portion of maquila²⁶ workers were female. Notably, organizations like the Comité de Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CODEMUH) (Committee for the Defense of Women's rights) emerged as vital platforms for the exchange of experiences and advocacy for women's rights, particularly in formal employment sectors (Villars, 2001).

In urban areas, women also self-organized within their barrios, or neighborhoods. According to Villars's compilation of Honduran history, urban women increasingly engaged in their "patronatos" or community boards throughout the years. In 1989, an important example emerged, both in peri-urban and urban areas, called Bloque Coordinador de Patronatos de

²⁵ The book *Para la casa más que para el mundo: Sufragismo y feminismos en la historia de Honduras* (2001) [For the home more than for the world: Suffragism and feminisms in the history of Honduras] constitutes one of the most important works, compiling the history of ideas, attitudes, and values regarding the role of women in Honduran society.

²⁶ A *maquila* is a manufacturing facility, commonly known as a sweatshop. In Honduras, particularly in the northern areas, there are numerous companies benefiting from the free trade laws offered to them, in return for international investment and employment. Materials and equipment are imported duty-free for assembly or processing and then exported again. These facilities are commonly used for the production of goods, especially in industries like textiles, electronics, and automotive components. *Maquiladoras* often represent lower labor costs.

Honduras, or Block of Coordinating Community Boards of Honduras, which convened the inaugural congress of the Board of Communal Women.

In addition, significant bodies began to emerge within these barrios, such as the Comité Hondureño de Mujeres por la Paz, or Committee of Women for Peace, led by Visitación Padilla, which focused on cultural promotion within these spheres. Concurrently, the Centro de Derechos de la Mujer (CDM) began championing the defense and promotion of women's legal rights, collaborating with urban and peri-urban residents to establish a status of legal citizenship within these barrios (Villars, 2001).

Overall, the experiences of women from impoverished backgrounds, striving for political and social equality, continue to be marked by their involvement in advocacy activities aimed at improving their neighborhoods and households. In addition, anything that belongs to women's daily life is then advocated for within these self-organized spaces, including freedom from the violence that is often endured.

Although diverse, feminists in Honduras quickly understood that the events unfolding over women's bodies, in personal and professional relations, were evidently a matter of public policy (Madrid Rossel, 2020; S. G. P. Villeda, 2021). The latter helped transform Honduran feminism from a movement into women's political representation in the country (Representatives of the Feminist Movement in Honduras, 2021). Honduran feminists continue to play an active role in resisting all types of patriarchal violence. In fact, the violent reality forced Honduran feminists to concentrate their efforts on this very issue, using the "gendered" notions that have been used to define women to push political practices and agendas (Mendoza, 2001, 2022; Ponce Mendoza, 2013). In addition, the contemporary feminist movement in Honduras tackles the different

necessities that continue to emerge, building a present-day narrative by claiming women's professional, sexual, and reproductive rights as well as continuously fighting for a life free of violence.

Feminist collectives in the country have taken on the duties that correspond to the state, drafting, promoting, and advocating for laws that protect women's lives and advance their political journeys. Feminist collectives are also the only institutions that are denouncing violent acts against women, through strikes, campaigns, advocacy, and legal advisory, and throughout lengthy processes that allow women to leave violent cycles. Feminist organizations monitor violent acts against women and the LGBTQIA+ population, serving as the country's trusted gendered violence observatories. Honduran feminism has transformed into an essential academic resource (Representatives of the Feminist Movement in Honduras, 2021). For this, and other reasons that I discuss in the methodology, feminist collectives and I chose to work together and investigate the phenomenon of domestic violence in urban Honduras during the first months of lockdown.

An important strategy that characterizes feminism in Honduras is the use of personal narratives. Violence against women in Honduras is commonly discussed by talking (yelling) about it. Narrating life ethnographies has allowed the exposure of hidden information regarding mestiza women. Yet this strategy has not only gained them political visibility and, on some platforms, recognition, but has also become a source of a great backlash. While women expose their suffering to society to create awareness, feminists in the country are commonly perceived as "loud" and "savage" (Celentani, 2022; Mendoza, 2022; Vijil, 2021). During my time in the field, I had the opportunity to work actively with and next to many feminist advocates. I was rapidly

made aware by many respondents, friends, and even family members that feminists—often called “feminazis,” in one of the many boorish examples—are not perceived positively.

According to Villars, there is clear disregard and hostility toward various feminist practices, particularly evident in the mid-1980s but still present today (Villars, 2001).

Like many other critical social solutions, Honduran feminism has few spaces of power. It is also segregated by class, where women who continue to ask for help and services are commonly women from socioeconomically disadvantaged positions, while middle- and upper-class women tend to actively refuse reporting, shelters, or access to public solutions. Additionally, Honduran feminism, much like Honduran women themselves, is also diverse. It includes a variety of organizations that mostly sprang from civil society and try to work together with government entities to advance our political and social rights (M. Eguigure, personal communication, 2020).

Interestingly, Honduras’s religiosity also serves both as an example of the colonial legacy and as a notable characteristic of how patriarchy is distinctively resisted in the country. A clear example of this statement is evidenced in the narratives provided by victims, survivors, and overall respondents of this research, the great majority of whom conveyed a highly religious discourse, giving it great weight in their life experiences: both as a detrimental factor in their position in violent relationships, and as a source of great strength to leave the cycles of violence they were forced into.

Although there is a relationship between religious doctrines and patriarchy, evidenced in the influence of the Catholic Church on traditional gender roles, involving continuous subordination of women in family and society that dates back to the colonial period, feminism in Honduras has proven to integrate such faith.

Ninety-five percent of the population identifies as Christian, and thus it is no surprise that religious solutions have also emerged from within the feminist movement (Cárcamo, 2020). Honduras was originally a predominantly Catholic country, but the rise of Protestantism, particularly the evangelical and Pentecostal movements, has significantly transformed its Christian landscape. These movements, though still patriarchal in many ways, often provide alternative spaces where women can assume leadership roles, for example as pastors or spiritual leaders, which were traditionally denied to them in Catholicism. This is particularly important for the feminist movement in Honduras as it shows that women are finding ways to reinterpret religious teachings to advocate for gender equality and challenge patriarchal structures. Contrary to the first formations of mainstreamed feminism, in Honduras, feminism and Christian values are not mutually exclusive. This fact supports the idea that political and social representation can be conveyed through religious doctrines (Iglesia Cristiana Luterana El Señor Es Nuestro Pastor, 2020; Smiet, 2015). In my time in Honduras, I had the opportunity to meet evangelical feminist priests and priestesses who were advocating for and protecting women's rights, as well as non-political and non-religious advocates.

After my conversations with Pastor Ana Ruth García Cárcamo, founder of *Ecuménicas por el Derecho a Decidir* (Ecumenicals for the Right to Choose), it became clear that this fusion of feminist ideals with Christian values allows faith to be drawn on as a source of strength and activism. In a broader sense, the movement exemplifies a faith-based approach to feminist advocacy, engaging women from religious denominations and addressing a wide range of feminist and female concerns while remaining grounded in spiritual values (A. R. García Cárcamo, personal communication, April 12, 2022).

Feminism is not a monolithic movement; it encompasses different branches with varying priorities. This is particularly true of Honduras. For instance, groups such as Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla, which served as gatekeepers for this research, focus on women's rights within the framework of existing laws, emphasizing equal access to justice and combating epistemic violence, often separated from faith-based discourse. They are also well-known for denying funds and intervention from the US, remaining true to their initial principles, which condemn imperial rule (Villars, 2001). Yet there is also movement-based or grassroots feminism, which often emerges from the lived experiences of women in local communities. They focus on immediate and practical issues such as violence, poverty, and social justice.

Also, while some feminist grassroots initiatives stem directly from larger feminist movements like Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla and its work in the barrios, others emerge independently (Villars, 2001). A notable example is the work of a priestess from a small Lutheran Christian church located in a peri-urban barrio, who has successfully raised funds within her congregation to create a safe space for women affected by domestic violence. The name of the church is withheld to protect their safety and privacy. Her efforts, rooted in community care rather than formal feminist advocacy, illustrate how grassroots feminism can respond to pressing local needs and reflect activism shaped by daily realities, often blending practical support with community-based initiatives (Anonymous, personal communication, April 2022).

In addition to the different ways that feminism manifests in Honduras, I argue, the transformation of the Christian landscape within the movement is introducing both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, the traditional patriarchal values of the religious institutions

remain influential, often limiting women's rights, particularly in areas such as reproductive rights and family law. On the other hand, there is an emergence of more progressive, feminist interpretations of Christianity, which seem to be very integrated in social discourse and interactions (Conway & Lebon, 2021).

Interestingly, there is a new wave of political feminism, exemplified by the establishment of *Somos Muchas por la Libertad y la Vida de las Mujeres* ²⁷, founded in 2016. This coalition, which includes various organizations, collectives, networks, and independent feminist allies, was formed in response to discussions about the new Penal Code. Their goal is to influence the National Congress of Honduras to decriminalize abortion in three specific circumstances: when the pregnancy results from sexual violence, when it poses a risk to the health or life of the pregnant woman, or when there are severe congenital malformations incompatible with life. Although this coalition represents a broad spectrum of feminist organizations, not all feminist groups in Honduras align with this agenda. Nonetheless, these examples highlight a growing feminist movement in the country (SomosMuchas.hn, 2024).

²⁷ Since its founding in 2016, *Somos Muchas* has brought together more than 20 feminist and human rights organizations across Honduras, including: Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), Centro de Estudios de la Mujer Honduras (CEM-H), Centro de Promoción de la Salud y Asistencia Familiar (CEPROSAF), Colectiva de Mujeres Hondureñas (CODEMUH), Colectivo D'Botas, Colectivo Feminista Libertario, Comité Latinoamericano y del Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (CLADEM-Honduras), Foro de Mujeres por la Vida, GoJoven Honduras, Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz Visitación Padilla, Plataforma Ampliada de Mujeres Sindicalistas, Red Lésbica Cattrachas, Red Contra la Violencia de Choluteca, Red contra la Violencia del Distrito Central, Red de Mujeres Jóvenes Feministas de Honduras, Red de Trabajadoras Sexuales de Honduras, Red Nacional de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en Honduras, Unidad de Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer y la Familia (UDIMUF), JASS Honduras (Asociadas por lo Justo), Las Ecuménicas por el Derecho a Decidir, Asociación de Apoyo Mutuo Entre Mujeres Honduras (APOMUH), and Organización Intibucana de Mujeres Las Hormigas. Source: Somos Muchas. (n.d.). *Mission and history*. Retrieved May 21, 2025, from <https://somosmuchas.hn/mision-e-historia/>

Furthermore, a feminist movement has emerged within the Libertad y Refundación (Libre) party that seeks to integrate feminist political principles into governance. Luchemos which first convened in 2016, has evolved into an internal party movement that challenges traditional structures by advocating for gender parity, feminist policymaking, and the active inclusion of women's perspectives in decision-making processes. Their presence demonstrates that feminist agendas are compatible with and essential to the transformation of political institutions. (Luchemos Honduras, n.d.).

The question of whether all feminist groups collaborate in Honduras is a complex one. Feminism is not a monolith; rather, it encompasses a spectrum of ideologies, including liberal, radical, evangelical, community-based, and decolonial feminisms, each with distinct agendas, strategies, and boundaries of engagement. While many of these groups may share broad concerns—such as addressing gender-based violence, advocating for reproductive rights, or promoting comprehensive sexual education—their approaches and interpretations of feminism can diverge sharply. During the course of this research, conducted over four visits to Honduras between 2020 and 2025, I immersed myself in feminist activities as much as possible. A particularly illustrative moment was the activity marking International Women's Day (March 8) in 2024 and 2025, which showcased the most visible feminist mobilization in the country. Notably, while all major feminist collectives participated actively, they did not do so in unison—marching separately, along different routes, and under distinct banners. Nonetheless, collaboration was evident in more tactical forms: concerts, workshops, and shared demands. Certain groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ collectives, Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz and Asociación Calidad de Vida, consistently converged at the National Congress, advocating together for legislative reforms on issues like domestic violence. As Giorgi (2021) suggests, while ideological differences often

limit full integration, partial and strategic alliances do occur, particularly around shared sociopolitical objectives.

Despite the differences, they all experience retaliation from society, yet feminism in the country persists, saving the lives of multiple women. The movement continues to represent the only source of protection for many women from impoverished backgrounds. More importantly, feminism is responsible for telling overlooked stories. In this context, the work, which aims to spark reflection about “rethinking gender,” involves integrating these frequently ignored narratives, addressing the intersections of class, and acknowledging the layers of experience shaped by epistemological, legal, economic, and scientific practices rooted in colonial legacies, including academia and the research itself (Cárcamo, 2020).

2.6 The emergence of the city: The urban settlements and violence in the peripheries of the Central District

Since the 1970s, the Central District of Honduras has undergone significant spatial expansion. It has shifted from a centralized, cohesive city to one characterized by fragmentation. This transformation is marked by the rise of gated communities and infrastructure that increasingly separates affluent areas from low-income neighborhoods. As the city has sprawled outward, new residential, commercial, and industrial developments have encroached on what was once rural or uninhabited land. This has limited access to public spaces and amenities and fostered social exclusion. This expansion has been accompanied by a sharp increase in population: from about 300,000 in the 1970s to more than 1.57 million people (World Population Review, 2022). This has strained urban planning and resources and exacerbated problems of urban segregation. Rapid population growth has led to unregulated construction, particularly in informal settlements,

deepening spatial segregation as wealthier areas become more isolated from lower-income communities. Overall, with clear physical and social boundaries separating affluent and peri-urban populations, urban development patterns now reflect growing social divisions (Ochoa, 2015).

Almost half of the urban area consists of informal peri-urban settlements. These are popularly referred to as asentamientos humanos, or human settlements, and / or invasiones. These settlements were originally inhabited by peasants and their families who came from the countryside in search of economic opportunities and settled on the periphery of the Central District. They are currently referred to as barrios or colonias, and / or barrios marginales. The settlers on the periphery adapted to the opportunities available, inhabiting areas of extreme poverty and a general lack of services provided by the state. The urban and peri-urban landscape, marked by public dissatisfaction, embodies great challenges in terms of universal access. These include access to food security and basic services such as water and electricity (Peters et al., 2022).

An important factor that shaped Honduran history and cannot be dismissed, as it potentially changed the urban area as we know it, is Hurricane Mitch. This occurred in 1998 and was the area's biggest natural disaster of the century, impacting around 20,000 victims in the Central American region (Alcántara-Ayala, 2009). In Honduras, approximately 70% of the country's surface was deeply affected, with over 6,000 deaths and 11,000 missing persons, leaving more than half a million people without a place to live. Over 80 bridges and the seven main roads of the country were destroyed. In the Central District, the natural disaster swept away more than 30% of homes and 25% of public services (Enríquez Villacorta, 1998).

The impact of Hurricane Mitch on the Honduran population extends beyond the devastating damage to the central infrastructure; human suffering from the episode continues to the present day (Pareja, 2022). Much like with the COVID-19 pandemic, women faced increased vulnerabilities due to their roles as caregivers and primary household caretakers. Many were displaced from their homes, leading to homelessness and exposure to exploitation. The destruction of livelihoods, particularly in agriculture, left women facing poverty and food insecurity. Limited access to healthcare increased health risks, while breakdowns in social structures led to an increase in gender-based violence. In this case, women also turned to the women's and feminist movements, which took on the task of guidance and protection. Of those who had lost parts of their lives in the devastation, women were disproportionately affected (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM) & Centro de Estudios de la Mujer, 1998; W. Smith, 2013). Despite the generous humanitarian assistance mobilized in the country and the reconstruction efforts, the reality of the damage is still palpable; indeed, it is still visible (Enríquez Villacorta, 1998).

However, in recent years, public spaces in Latin American countries like Honduras have undergone a process of physical deterioration, in many cases reaching abandonment. This situation, coupled with the social issues in cities, contributes to the increase in violence and urban insecurity in public spaces, negatively influencing not only the urban image of the city but also the traditional meaning and use of these spaces (Zelaya Ochoa, 2010).

The informal settlements are characterized by this very abandonment. Poverty infrastructure is the most visible of characteristics within this landscape. The problem of housing is perhaps the most evident due to the visibly impoverished conditions (Comisión Interinstitucional para la

Protección de las Personas Desplazadas Internamente por la Violencia (CIPPDV), 2019; TECHO, 2018). Currently, the Central District suffers from water shortages, which forces the population to live with water cuts. Water is only available twice a week in most neighborhoods, and in the peripheries it is more limited (TECHO, 2018; World Bank, 2017). Peri-urban residents also experience more struggles to access employment, compared to the residents of the center of the city.

Lack of solid economic opportunities confronts peri-urban settlers with several challenges, including impoverished housing conditions. Housing represents the only form of property to which urban and peri-urban settlers can aspire, yet the living conditions in these areas are often overcrowded and necessitate great creativity to survive. Residents lack access to quality education and health facilities while experiencing inequities in accessing basic services, such as water and electricity, as well as lacking attention from state operators. Additionally, only 60% of families in the settlements possess legal documents that prove land ownership. According to local experts, most property titles have been obtained through community initiatives or by the families themselves. In addition, urban and peri-urban households contain several generations, each one with ideas to improve their predecessors' conditions, as only 6% of urban settlers move out of their families' households. Therefore, grandparents' houses are divided to become homes for their children, followed by homes for their grandchildren (Handal & Irazábal, 2022; Urtecho-Osorto et al., n.d.).

The peri-urban population is dependent on the informal sector (Ham, 2020a). In the attempt to access daily commodities, a clear division of roles is exposed as men often access employment as painters, construction helpers, carpenters, shoe shiners, electricians, cab drivers, and drivers of

heavy transport, among the other, limited options characterized by daily wages. On the other hand, women, especially those who are single mothers or widows, or who are for some other reason the sole providers in their urban households, are often reduced to domestic work in middle- and upper-class homes, or working as food vendors, hairdressers, and / or seamstresses (Alvarado Pineda, 2016).

Yet the characteristic way of life of peri-urban settlers is best acknowledged by the complex social relationships that are undeniably shaped by violence. Violence in urban settlements is attributed to criminal groups, referred to as *maras* or *pandillas*, or youth gangs. Gang culture originates in Los Angeles, and after a drastic change in U.S. immigration policy²⁸ during the 1990s, massive deportations were implemented. Analysts assert that increasing U.S. deportations of individuals with criminal records, complemented by the lack of information concerning their backgrounds and financial resources given to the Honduran authorities to deal with the large number of returnees, contributed to the current gang problem in the region (Kalsi, 2018; Miguel Cruz, 2010; Seelke, 2008).

Youth, predominantly male, were sent back to the urban settlements, or jails, with little to no opportunities for employment or reintegration. Facing constant discrimination and socioeconomic challenges, they replicated learned behaviors and are held responsible for

²⁸ The Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996 expanded the categories of undocumented immigrants subject to deportation. Following the IIRIRA, any “alien” who served a sentence of longer than a year became subject to removal from the US after completion of their prison term. As a result, gang members were sent directly from U.S. jails to Central American jails. Most deportees who had criminal records and criminal careers were born in U.S. urban cities.

founding the two major gangs in the Central District: the Mara Salvatrucha, known as MS-13, and the Barrio18 or 18th Street Gang (Méndez, 2019; Rodgers & Baird, 2015; Sullivan, 2016).

Lack of economic and social opportunities, rooted in precarious conditions, permits the emergence and growth of gang activity. Over the years, these groups evolved from youth groups participating in minor crimes, such as theft, to gain widespread jurisdiction over poor settlements. MS-13 has acquired a reputation for extreme brutality, becoming a transnational organized crime network, mainly focused on drug trafficking, while the 18th Street Gang is a multiethnic transnational criminal organization with a violent reputation (Charles, 2019; Van Damme, 2019).

Gangs have emerged in the city as a new source of organized crime, assuming a role of authority and domination over entire urban settlements (E. F. Rodríguez, 2016). Gangs have claimed dominance over urban spaces, carrying out gatherings for drug and / or gun trafficking. In urban settlements, social dynamics are shaped by gang impositions, such as the establishment of early curfews that settlers silently obey to protect gangs' interests, and invisible borders that are not crossed due to gang territorial disputes. Often, young women and men are used as spies and are responsible for supervising people who enter or leave their settlements daily (Charles, 2019; El Heraldo, 2017; Méndez, 2019; Van Damme, 2018, 2021). Gangs also collect money, either weekly or monthly, from settlers and small business owners. This collection is popularly known as a war tax, meant to protect settlers from violence but in fact constituting extortion. Failure to comply or cooperate with all imposed social rules often results in murder. This distressing situation is forcing urban settlers to migrate, fostering a population increasingly displaced by violence (Pineda Sosa, 2021).

Gangs are also held responsible for reinforcing traditional gender roles, setting up dynamics that shape women's opportunities, mobility, and everyday experiences. This is exemplified by women's absence from public spaces, including playing fields, streets, and alleys. Often, women in urban settlements will limit their mobility due to the continuous threat of sexual violence, as well as harassment (Eko, 2016; O'Neal et al., 2016), and urban violence forces women into daily social restrictions. For example, women will not go out at night and either do not take part in or limit outside activities due to safety concerns (Uteng & Cresswell, 2016; Van Damme, 2019). During the day, they are obliged to be accompanied by someone, preferably male. Women also tend to avoid contact with the authorities, because conflicts arise within gang-controlled settlements when they are confronted with a police presence (Soto Villagrán, 2012).

2.7 The current state of inequality in Honduras after the coup

The emergence of the city, including the center and its peripheries, has produced a space, and spaces, filled with enormous challenges to accessing basic services as well as tackling the evolving violent context. The violent and socioeconomic landscape created the necessity for social movements, which gradually began to rise by the mid-1990s. By the 21st century, regional activist networks, including Indigenous groups, environmental movements, settlement organizations, and women's and LGBTQIA+ collectives started increasing in activity and popularity (D. S. Schulz, 2018).

By the mid-2000s, a popular election presented Manuel Zelaya as the new president. With no desire to engage with women's agendas per se, he proposed a change of reforms that, among other political interests, demanded equal rights and opportunities for women and impoverished populations. This period is credited with populist improvement and the first political space for

leftist resistance. This was quickly contested with a US-supported military coup d'état, after the leftist leader called for a popular assembly to rewrite the Honduran constitution, with hopes for reelection (Fonseca, 2019; Salomón, 2009).

During the 2009 crisis, a series of accumulated events occurred that include severe human rights abuses and brutal responses against protesters, and these are well documented (Middeldorp et al., 2016; Phillips, 2015). Local and international organizations reported daily attacks and violations, including attacks against women who were visible in public protests. Honduran women became especially significant through their participation in forming several feminist collectives against the coup²⁹ (Shipley, 2009). Their resilience was strengthened by their capabilities for community-based organization, their engagement through coordination meetings, training sessions, marches, and rallies, and the preparation and distribution of food for protesters and affected populations (C. Aguilar, 2009; Donato, 2020). Nonetheless, vulnerability also increased for women, resulting in a state of permanent insecurity. Subsequently, the country entered a deep financial, political, and violent crisis (Guzmán Padilla & León Araya, 2019; Ríos, 2010).

The years that follow the 2009 coup evolved into increasing poverty, privatization of public services and social goods, the rise of drug cartels and gang-related violence, and the strengthening of military and security forces. All this had a direct impact on the insecurity that characterizes the Honduran urban landscape, and which reiterates differentiated threats for women. Within 3 years of the coup, Honduras had hit the highest murder rate in its history, and

²⁹ Feministas en Resistencia in the south and central zones of the country, Mujeres en Resistencia de la Zona Norte in the north, and Las Petateras through the Observatorio de Transgresión Feminista.

the highest of any country that was not at war (Fonseca, 2019; Shorack et al., 2020). In addition, there was an increase in femicides of 263.4%, from 175 in 2005 to 636 in 2013 (Asociadas por lo Justo (JASS), Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), Centro de Estudios de la Mujer-Honduras (CEMH), 2014), although men continued to represent the highest level of homicide victims in the country. Most men are killed in conflicts related to gang dispute and organized crime, often by other men, while women are killed by men, reinforced by a culture of violent machismo that is accepted as part of Honduran society (Ambrosius, 2018; Reyes Reinoso, 2018). All this was accompanied by a dramatic increase in forced migration to the US (Pineda Sosa, 2021).

The crisis's aftermath involved a series of human rights violations, corruption, and illegally elected conservative governments (Guzmán Padilla & León Araya, 2019). One illustration of our nation's background during this period is the brutal murder of environmental and Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres.³⁰ Currently, her murder has gained international recognition (Teran, 2021; Vijil, 2021). She was murdered in 2016 at the hands of state and private companies for her role in defending western territories from private exploitation.

Honduras is the world's most violent country, and given this, its institutions remain fragile, and the conditions required to improve women's lives remain threatened. Honduras continues to ban integral sexual education from national syllabi (Burton, 2017; Centroamérica, 2020; Petracci,

³⁰ Berta Cáceres was a prominent environmental and Indigenous activist who was murdered in her home in 2016. To date, her murder has been attributed to several state and private company interests. David Castillo, a former top business executive and US-trained former Honduran army intelligence officer, was found guilty of playing a role in the assassination. He was sentenced to 22 years in prison. He served as president of Desarrollos Energéticos Sociedad Anónima (DESA), which was building the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam in Indigenous Lenca territory in northwestern Honduras.

2007). Additionally, by the pandemic year, besides being hit with COVID-19, Honduras had been affected by two hurricanes. Eta and Iota³¹ devastated the northern region and the advancements made to improve the social and economic conditions of impoverished women (Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), 2020).

By 2020, Honduras reached the highest femicide rate in Latin America, with an estimated 278 women murdered that year. This scenario deepens inequalities and exposes the most overlooked populations to increased violence, poverty, and exclusion from political rights and justice. These populations are often denied equal access to resources and decision-making processes, further isolating them from mainstream society and deepening their vulnerability. Consequently, increased poverty and unemployment leave women and girls in Honduras at greater risk of multiple manifestations of violence, with domestic violence being the most common (Alberto & Chilton, 2019; Obinna, 2021).

The election of the first woman president in 2022, Xiomara Castro, resulted in the end / beginning of complex times, which forces citizens to be hopeful, yet distrustful at the same time. Word of mouth spread quickly, and a general feeling became persistent in urban households, one that I could finally grasp on my return. The 2022 elections were not particularly won by a woman; the opposition to years of dictatorship and disappointments did. Consequently, a woman served as representative against the conservative establishment. Most citizens expressed her

³¹ Hurricanes Eta and Iota struck Central America in quick succession in November 2020, causing widespread devastation—particularly in Honduras—where floods and landslides displaced thousands and compounded the region's ongoing humanitarian challenges (Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), 2020)

victory as being the result of citizens' exhaustion; by this time, Hondurans were urging change and were fed up with the support and impunity gifted to the National Party for its exploitation of the country (Discussion Group Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz Visitación Padilla, 2022).

Although Castro's candidacy did not emerge from a feminist agenda, nor from feminist history and struggles, it certainly benefited from the support shaped by the post-coup generation that has contributed to the awakening of contemporary and more feminist politics in the country (Freidenberg, 2022).

2.8 Literature review and feminist resistance

2.8.1 Domestic violence: An overview

Domestic violence refers to all violent assaults that occur in any relationship among gendered bodies that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner, in which the aggressor is commonly, and in greater statistical significance, represented by men. The term is also used interchangeably in the literature with intimate partner violence (IPV), or violence against women, with the latter involving a more extensive view of the different dimensions of violence endured by women. Domestic violence occurs in an intimate bond created by the relational dynamic between any of the gendered bodies, including the legality of marriage, but not requiring it (Espinosa, 2019; Jaramillo-Bolívar & Canaval-Erazo, 2020; Rollero, 2020).

The word domestic stems from the familial context, and it signifies the intimate tone that is commonly shared within a romantic or sexual relationship yet does not specifically refer to a physical space. This means that although domestic violence often occurs within households, the term also includes violence that occurs outside the home. It primarily refers to an intimate partnership, yet, according to Honduran law, also includes any type of relational connection,

including other family members. This explains why the term “family / intrafamily violence” is also commonly used in the literature (Aprile, 2020; Ley Contra La Violencia Doméstica Reformada, 2006). Nonetheless, for the purposes of this research the focus remains on domestic violence as a social phenomenon that occurs in intimate partner or former partner relationships. This violence is also referred to as abuse. More importantly, as explicitly established by human rights organizations, domestic violence comprises different dimensions of violence, including psychological, sexual, physical, and patrimonial violence (Canet Benavent & Caravantes López de Lerma, 2019; Jaramillo-Bolívar & Canaval-Erazo, 2020).

Domestic violence is a complex economic, political, and social problem. It also constitutes a major imposition on the public health system, affecting budget allocation and actions that foster the development of entire societies. In addition to the immediate problems it encompasses, including trauma and the need for resources to secure safety, domestic violence also has a long-lasting effect on victims. Domestic violence contributes to several chronic health problems, including depression, alcohol and substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and often limits the ability of women to manage other illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension (Walton & Pérez, 2019). It also affects social and political access, as domestic violence victims and survivors tend to be at risk of work instability as well as greater emotional and financial dependency (Zúniga, 2018). Additionally, children who have witnessed domestic violence are likely to grow up and normalize violence against women, serving as either victims or perpetrators, thus replicating the violence cycle (Nash et al., 2021; Obinna, 2021).

Feminist advancements have led to an agreement that points toward patriarchal structures, and the gendered divisions imposed on bodies, to explain domestic violence (Fernández, 2012;

Puleo, 2005). Accepted, replicated, and reinforced by societies, gender has been established as an assumption built on the anatomical differences between the sexes. These differences have been transformed into social, political, and economic differences. Willingly and not, unequal values have been assigned to the actions of dichotomic and categorical bodies, sustaining a clear dominance of men over women. Over time, societies have normalized those values and ideas, designating women and their worth as unequal to men, who predominantly occupy positions of power in business, politics, and government (Lozano & Domínguez, 2021; R. Segato, 2016, 2021a). Ultimately, female bodies have been sacrificed through violence to maintain the current status quo and the structures that benefit from it.

A common thread in this research process is to denounce domestic violence as a form of gender subordination, which refers to the systemic, structural, and often normalized condition in which women are positioned as inferior or subordinate to men in social, political, economic, religious, and cultural spheres. It is not simply about individual acts of inequality, but about deeply rooted societal norms and institutions that define, limit, and control women's roles, behaviors, and access to power (R. P. Rodríguez & Brozovich, 2018; Safa, 1995). I use this line of thinking as it enables an analysis of the emphasis placed on the differences that distinguish women from men, or in the Honduran case “mestiza women” from “mestizo men” (Martínez & Leiva, 2019; R. Segato, 2021a). Consequently, by making a critical reading of the social categories that contribute to the “construction” of the gendered bodies of women in Honduran urban society, the work will unravel many questions regarding domestic violence.

After laying out this general understanding, I turn to the literature on domestic violence in Honduras. I begin by recovering the works of researchers specializing in violence against women

in Latin and Central America, followed by a more precise understanding of the heightened problem of domestic violence in Honduras in particular. Part of the work includes assembling archives, notes, and data that were put together by local voices and institutions, which include Honduran feminist and grassroots organizations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as international reports and available data that help situate domestic violence in the Honduran urban context.

2.8.2 Existing research on domestic violence in Honduras

Scholars from different disciplines, including sociologist Cecilia Menjívar, geographer Mareet Jokela-Pansini, and feminist and political scientist Breny Mendoza, have agreed on the alarming situation of domestic violence in the region as a systematic problem, where global, structural, and institutional violence contribute to the wider context of violence that women experience (Arana Sánchez & Chinchay García, 2021; Jokela-Pansini, 2020; Mendoza, 2015; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017). Within a brief yet broad view of the problem, they ponder the socioeconomic climate that characterizes the country, and how this is tied to global and contemporary politics. This is also clearly stated in the works of anthropologist Rita Segato (R. Segato, 2021b, 2021a). To understand this, we must recall that the Honduran context is characterized by corruption, crime, and a distinctive economic and political dependency on hegemonic powers. The country is extensively named and placed as a catalyst of migration and drugs, as stated in the recent works of political scientists Gutiérrez and Guzmán. The context has unleashed a war against drugs that, if read carefully, can also be interpreted as a war against people suffering from the deepest inequalities that drive drug supply and demand (A. J. G. Gutiérrez & Guzmán, 2021).

This broad context is especially important for historically discriminated areas, as well as for historically disadvantaged groups, which ultimately become the victims of global history. It is also important to mention that the country is characterized by poverty and inequality. In addition, increased militarization and oppression after the US-backed coup in 2009 deteriorated into a prevalence of criminal groups, drug cartels, and human trafficking, which all unfold into a direct correlation with violence against women. This can be fairly concluded from the writings of sociologist Denise Obinna, who narrates the journey of migrant women from Honduras to the US, seeking asylum to escape the multidimensional violence that persists in the country (Obinna, 2021).

Consequently, according to law enforcement scholars and professionals Mathew Charles and Vickie Knox, and socialist Ana Ruth Prado Pérez, gangs are an important contributor to and stabilizer of violence, and one of the main sources of violence in the country. They use violence to communicate their power and territorial domination. Gangs and the violence they employ are deeply rooted in poverty, lack of opportunities, and a state-induced marginalization of the poorer populations. Economic and social exclusion directly affects youth, who then turn to criminal ventures to survive. The effect of gang control on communities is of vast importance and it affects the entire population in different proportions and through different means. In poorer urban and peri-urban settlements, gangs use extortion, drugs, and weapon smuggling, as well as disputes with enemy gangs, to maintain their control (Charles, 2019; Knox, 2019; Prado Pérez, 2018).

With a direct effect on the overall violence that is normalized in the country, gangs establish a day-to-day landscape and language of violent risks. Interestingly, although they are emerging as

a response to the failures of the system, gangs replicate the systematic and patriarchal order, intensifying gender roles, inside gangs as much as outside them, and strengthening violent and masculine mandates. This is especially dangerous for women, who are constantly victimized through a constructed vulnerability of our bodies, and the risks for hate crimes and sexual violence are increasing, as evidenced in the works of scholars Ellen Van Damme and Ana Glenda Tager, and Otto Argueta (Knox, 2019; Rosado & Argueta, 2019; Van Damme, 2018). The available data also show that conditions of political and social order that reiterate male domination through high militarization and / or criminal groups serve as scenarios for higher risks of domestic violence, as well as repressive strategies to silence victims (Guachetá, 2019; Riquer Fernández & Castro Pérez, 2019).

The country is also tied to high levels of impunity regarding overall violence and domestic violence cases. Therefore, its political and judiciary institutions play a key role in exacerbating the domestic violence phenomenon (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2021; S. D. Walsh & Menjívar, 2016). A prominent study entitled “The architecture of femicide: The state, inequalities, and everyday gender violence in Honduras,” written by Cecilia Menjívar and Shannon Drysdale Walsh addresses everyday violence against women and femicides in the country. The study suggests that this type of violence is embedded in the political order. The Honduran state not only lacks the resources and political will to protect women but actively perpetuates and normalizes violence against women through highly militarized “protective” alternatives and police harassment. These acts, which the authors rightfully name as acts of omission and commission, reiterate masculine dominance and relegate women’s bodies to the status of instruments that solidify and maintain male-dominated structures (Menjívar, 2020; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017).

Additional authors, including Vincenzo Malo and Louise Morris, have contributed to our understanding of domestic violence by identifying aggregated factors that contribute to the escalating phenomenon, identifying local community norms and social dynamics as contributing to the justification of violence against women in Honduras. Traditional values of machismo in the country are prevalent and internalized from generation to generation, naturalizing ideas that place women in an unequal position in society. More than a traditional segregation of the gendered bodies where women are placed in the household and deemed mainly responsible for caring and domestic chores, machista norms accord them a lower value, which is evidenced in a demoralizing set of ideas that leave women's lives in the hands of their male counterparts (Kim et al., 2022; Malo, 2019; Morris, 2019).

Women, most commonly from impoverished backgrounds, relinquish complete control of their mobility and social agendas for a false promise of protection. This finding reveals an instrumental characteristic attributed to women in the country, who are perceived as the property of men (Vásquez Hernández, 2020; Villamil & Otavo, 2020; Zhicay et al., 2018). The available literature also unwraps machismo as one of the most prevalent risk factors for domestic violence in Abya Yalan populations (Díaz et al., 2020; Ibarra, 2022; Muñoz, 2020). These values are translated into women's everyday lives, impacting the way they carry themselves, their finances, and their access to social spaces. While exposed to daily risks and threats of violence, such as domestic violence, femicides, and sexual assault, violent practices also include less visible forms of violence such as deprivation, threats, sexualization, fear, humiliation, and constant vulnerability (Menjívar, 2020; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017).

In addition, machismo in Honduras is fed by religiosity. Local and religious leader Ana Ruth Cárcamo has documented how religiosity and religious fundamentalism converge in the characterization of traditional family values, reproducing views of what is possible for women. In this case, religion serves as a tool to enhance traditional gender roles, often valuing women based on their acts of dedication to family life and children.

This complements other findings (M. Barahona, n.d.; Biroli, 2020; Dubón, n.d.) that reveal how we adopt the idea of women's stereotypical role as submissive, patient, and silent. Religious institutions also reject divorce. Consequently, religious leaders advise domestic violence victims to "save" their marriages, which often supports cycles of violence. Deeply religious societies engage in actions that directly affect women, both in the pressure to maintain traditional roles and in the violence that is endured in order to sustain traditional gender relations. Therefore, religious narratives and institutions in the country serve as enablers for domestic violence (Ecuménicas por el Derecho a Decidir, 2020; Seoane, 2019; Torres, 2019). Many researchers, including Segato, argue that religious doctrines, in particular Christianity, embrace a belief system based on women as a product of men, often citing the Adam and Eve story, compounded by compassion and forgiveness narratives that lead to an acceptance of domestic violence within society (Cárcamo, 2020; Carrasco Miró, 2020; Iglesia Cristiana Luterana El Señor Es Nuestro Pastor, 2020; R. L. Segato, 2018).

In a study of domestic violence in urban Honduras, by Ana Elizabeth Sierra, Marianismo³² was identified as a Honduran social construct. Marianismo, which refers to the Virgin Mary as a role model for women, is a set of ideas that replicate gender-specific behaviors and values that are commonly sustained within mestiza populations. This reveals a clear intersection between gender and religious fundamentalism, of which women in Honduras serve as an illustration, because they are encouraged from birth to be spiritual, nurturing, and, more importantly, self-sacrificing. Religion forges a path between domestic violence and the adherence to culturally accepted female roles in the country (Sierra, 2020).

Other studies, including the works of Vanessa Placeres and Ana Carina Ordaz, also contend that religious institutions are important for many women. While religion can become an enabler of domestic violence, it is also a tool for personal growth (Furseth, 2017; Jeandrevin, 2022; Placeres & Ordaz, 2021). Women enduring hardship report personal changes due to religion. In mestiza populations, life experiences and religious ones are intertwined through our bodies. Religious beliefs enhance mental health and allow for new ways of conceptualizing challenges; yet data also showcase religious communities as places of controversy due to their role in domestic violence (Bloom, 2021; Placeres & Ordaz, 2021).

³² *Marianismo* arises from Christian beliefs that cherish the mystery provoked by women's capacity to give birth, highly connected to the biblical story of the Virgin Mary. Assigned as a virtue, *Marianismo* is highly associated with the reproductive powers and womanhood, evolving into an aspect of the female gender role in Hispanic American folk cultures. This social construct is strictly adhered to in machismo and Roman Catholicism (Rojas et al., 2021).

Additional available studies also suggest certain characteristics of victims and survivors of domestic violence, which is the most common form of violence against women in the country. These studies agree on some factors that increase risks. For example, some relevant findings include age as a risk factor: younger women are at greater risk of experiencing domestic violence as well as of accepting reconciliation (Chavarria Mejía et al., 2017; M. Hernández & Eley, 2017; Zhicay et al., 2018).

Although living in urban areas has proved to be a protective factor compared to rural areas, peri-urban and segregated areas within the urban landscape endure high levels of domestic violence. This is highly dependent on perceptions and access to protective alternatives (Cálix et al., n.d.; Forsyth & Ward, 2021). Furthermore, women survivors who are mothers with multiple children, when compared with non-mothers, report more instances of domestic violence, and women who are mothers of one child also report more physical violence compared to non-mothers. In addition, children of mothers who have survived domestic violence tend to replicate and / or accept domestic violence in their adult lives, contributing to the replication of intrafamily violence (Fogarty et al., 2021; Showalter et al., 2019; Zhicay et al., 2018).

Moreover, the existing literature suggests an important relationship between access to sexual and reproductive rights and domestic violence, as they both stem from the same origin: treating the bodies of women as instruments to maintain control (Espinosa, 2019; Waleska & Betancourt, 2017). Honduras is one of three Central American countries that fully criminalize abortion, imposing penalties of imprisonment for women who choose to terminate pregnancies. The morning after pill was made illegal after the 2009 coup d'état, and other forms of sexual and reproductive health services and information are both limited and frowned on (Burton, 2017;

Centroamérica, 2020). Limitations on accessing family planning and reproductive health are a factor in increased domination of women, and therefore contribute to increased domestic violence (Fogarty et al., 2021; Hussein, 2020). Ultimately, poor and racialized women tend to be at greater risk of experiencing domestic violence, indicating an important role of race and class. Women with special needs, such as women with disabilities or women living with HIV/AIDS, are also exposed to higher and compounding risks of domestic violence (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2021; Figueroa & Yezenia, 2016; Velásquez Paguada, 2020).

There is an important body of literature worth mentioning that links domestic violence to migration; it uncovers important findings made by authors of color that include Cecilia Menjívar, Lirio Gutiérrez, and Fabiana Pineda Sosa. The recent feminization of migration from Honduras to the US suggests a common thread in the stories of displaced women and girls. Both internally and across borders, women's reasons for migration include domestic, family, and sexual violence. All these dimensions of violence are perpetrated by partners, family members, community members, and gangs (R. Gómez & Vannini, 2017; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017; Menjívar & Walsh, 2019; Pineda Sosa, 2021; Rivera, 2018; Willers, 2016). Domestic violence as a push factor for migration evidences the systematic problem that arises in the country. It also sheds light on the limitations regarding protective alternatives, forcing victims to escape as the ultimate means of protection (Murray, 1997; Rivera, 2018; H. R. Smith, 2018; Zedginidze, 2016).

Finally, scholars agree on the diverse and negative repercussions of domestic violence on entire societies. The prevalence of domestic violence directly impacts the physical and mental health of our populations. It perpetuates poverty cycles, stunts economic growth and development, and

further increases other social challenges including alcohol and substance abuse, crime, and migration. The failure of states to provide effective responses and protection are largely, yet not entirely, responsible for the alarming situation regarding domestic violence in Honduras (Donovan & Barnes, 2020; Espinel Sánchez, 2021; Jokela-Pansini, 2020; Kofman & Garfín, 2020; R. P. Rodríguez & Brozovich, 2018; D. E. Schulz & Schulz, 2018).

2.8.3 Existing research on domestic violence in Honduras during the COVID-19 pandemic

To understand the situation of women and women survivors of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in Honduras, we first must recognize that long before the health crisis, women in urban Honduras were affected by multiple economic and sociopolitical factors that forced them into unequal positions when accessing basic services, employment opportunities, and sexual, reproductive, and human rights, while constantly exposing them to everyday violence (Bárcena, 2020; Madrid Rossel, 2020; Marín, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated these prevailing inequalities, placing women and girls in Honduras at greater risk of all forms of gender-based violence (Bárcena, 2020; Batthyány & Sánchez, 2020; Ham, 2020a).

International and local reports agree that the COVID-19 pandemic increased vulnerabilities for women and girls in Honduras (Bárcena, 2020; Iglesia Cristiana Luterana El Señor Es Nuestro Pastor, 2020; Tager, 2021; UN Women, 2020a). This is because emotional and economic dependencies are exacerbated in crisis scenarios. That is to say, women faced even more challenges with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic (Batthyány & Sánchez, 2020; CEPAL, 2020a; Ertan et al., 2020; Sacco, Caputo, Ricci, Sicilia, De Aloe, Bonetta, Cordasco, Scalise, Cacciatore, Zibetti, et al., 2020). There are limited studies that focus on domestic violence during

the COVID-19 pandemic in Honduras (CEPAL, 2020a; Ham, 2020a; Silva & Madureira, 2021); most available studies regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated increase in domestic violence focus on the global experiences that spiked levels of violence against women and girls worldwide (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Campbell, 2020; Ertan et al., 2020; Kofman & Garfin, 2020; Sacco, Caputo, Ricci, Sicilia, De Aloe, Bonetta, Cordasco, Scalise, Cacciatore, Zibetti, et al., 2020). This allows us to ponder the wider phenomenon, while guiding our understanding through available reports and archives, and the documentation produced by international, local, and grassroots organizations in the country (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2019; A. Y. Coello, 2020; IUDPAS, 2018).

Looking back to our first encounters with the COVID-19 pandemic in Honduras in 2020: after the declaration made by the World Health Organization (WHO) of a “public health emergency of international concern,” the Government of Honduras took measures to reduce mass infections. It extended a series of measures on March 16, 2020, declaring a state of emergency and suspension of constitutional guarantees established in the following articles: 69, 71, 72, 78, 81, 84, 93, 99, and 103.³³ This included freedom of association, freedom of mobility, arrest only with a court

³³**Article 69** Personal liberty is inviolable and may only be restricted or temporarily suspended in accordance with the law.

Article 71 No person may be detained or held incommunicado for more than twenty-four (24) hours without being brought before a competent authority for trial. Judicial detention for questioning may not exceed six (6) days from the time of its occurrence.

order, and the inviolability of authorities. This occurred while broad powers were granted to the armed forces to support the Ministry of Health to implement sanitary and emergency restrictions under the aim of maintaining order and national health (Despacho de Comunicaciones y Estrategia Presidencial, 2020).

The available data gathered by local and international organizations in the country confirm that since the measures were put in place, domestic violence cases have increased throughout the

Article 72 The broadcasting of thought by any means of dissemination is free, without prior censorship. Those who abuse this right and those who by direct or indirect means restrict or impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions shall be liable before the law.

Article 78 Freedom of association and assembly are guaranteed provided that they are not contrary to public order and morality.

Article 81 Everyone has the right to move freely within, leave, enter and remain in the national territory. No one may be compelled to change his domicile or residence except in the special cases and subject to the requirements laid down by law.

Article 84 No one may be arrested or detained except by virtue of a written warrant from a competent authority, issued in accordance with the legal formalities and for a reason previously established by law. However, an offender in flagrante delicto may be apprehended by any person for the sole purpose of handing him over to the authorities. The arrested or detained person must be informed immediately and clearly of his rights and of the facts with which he is charged; moreover, the authority must allow him to communicate his detention to a relative or person of his choice.

Article 93 Even with a warrant of imprisonment, no person may be taken to prison or detained therein, if he gives sufficient surety in accordance with the law.

Article 99 The home is inviolable. No entry or search may be made without the consent of the person who lives therein or without a decision of the competent authority. However, it may be searched, in case of urgency, to prevent the commission or impunity of crimes or to avoid serious damage to the person or property. Except in cases of urgency, a home may not be searched from six (6) p.m. to six (6) a.m., without incurring liability. The law will establish the requirements and procedures for entering or searching a place, as well as the potential liabilities of those carrying out these actions.

Article 103 The State recognizes, promotes and guarantees the existence of private property in its broadest concept of social function and with no limitations other than those established by law for reasons of necessity or public interest. (*Constitución Política De La Republica De Honduras De 1982, 1982*)

country, while the protective alternatives have reduced. Feminist organizations quickly reported that after March of 2020, the crime with the highest incidence at the national level during the COVID-19 pandemic was in fact domestic violence (Iniciativa Spotlight Infosegura, 2020; Iniciativa Spotlight, 2020a; Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD) en América Latina y el Caribe, 2021). During the first pandemic year of 2020, domestic violence cases increased by 16% in the country compared to previous years, with more than 40,000 cases of abuse that year. This means that on average one girl / woman was assaulted every hour during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in Honduras. Additionally, it is estimated that more than 250 femicides were carried out throughout the same period, of which 98.8% remain unpunished (El Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2021; Ministerio Público de la República de Honduras, USAID del pueblo de los Estados Unidos, 2020).

This warrants the contemplation of multiple factors. Worldwide, extensive attention was given to the COVID-19 pandemic, and other emerging problems were relegated to the background. Honduras was no exception: in significant fear of the pandemic, political will ignored all rising problems regarding violence against women (Coello, 2020; Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2021). Considering the prevailing situation, it comes as no surprise that research done by international scholars Stellamarina Donato and Amber Peterman, as well as local authors Yadira Vargas and Yuri Elvir from the National University's Violence Observatory, emphasized the need for specialized and protective alternatives to tackle domestic violence and reduce women's and girls' risk of violence (Donato, 2020; Mittal & Singh, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020; UN Women, 2020a) Yet in Honduras, the Presidency of the Supreme Court of Justice decreed the suspension of work in the judicial branch, while the domestic violence courts remained only

partially open, providing evidence that although domestic violence cases increased, the resources to tackle it were reduced (A. Y. Coello, 2020; Vargas, Elvir; Yuri, 2021; D. Vásquez, n.d.).

Allegations made by local women's rights advocates Ana Lizeth Cruz, director of the shelter for women victims of domestic violence Asociación de Calidad de Vida, and Gilda Rivera Sierra, director of the feminist center for women's rights Centro de Derechos de las Mujeres, point toward a series of limitations regarding protective alternatives due to the socioeconomic status of most women, both victims and survivors of domestic violence, recognizing their difficulties in accessing transport, economic means, and protection facilities. Women at high risk of losing their lives in Honduras had fewer alternatives as the only shelter in the Central District did not have adequate facilities to receive victims and follow quarantine mandates (A. Cruz, personal communication, 2020; G. Rivera Sierra, personal communication, 2020). This situation was compounded by the National Emergency System's collapse in the first months of the pandemic due to the rise in domestic violence emergencies. Likewise, the national police appointed to deal with domestic violence were not provided with necessary or additional resources to attend domestic violence victims (Campbell, 2020; Iniciativa Spotlight, 2020b; Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD) en América Latina y el Caribe, 2021; UN Women, 2020b). Further challenges in the process of safeguarding the lives of domestic violence victims included limited resources to abide by biological safety measures as well as a lack of trained care service providers in police posts and / or health centers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, state institutions in charge proved to lack the capacity to respond during the violence crises (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; A. Y. Coello, 2020; Ham, 2020a; Vargas, Elvir; Yuri, 2021).

For many women in Honduras, the “stay-at-home” policies did not represent the safest option. Quite the opposite: they increased their risk of domestic violence (Batthyány & Sánchez, 2020; CEPAL, 2020a; Iniciativa Spotlight y UDIMUF y Mariposas Libres del Corozal, 2020; Ramos Rollón, 2020). The compounding factors surfaced within urban households as women, traditionally responsible for the care of children, the elderly, and ill family members, were forced into an exacerbated role that intensified their chores, demands, and responsibilities. This was due to the rising challenges of access to food, economic means, social services, education platforms and policies of aid and protection during the COVID-19 pandemic. For women who were mothers, the situation was even more complicated: as exclusive caregivers, they are burdened with the responsibility and need to protect their children and family members from health threats and food inaccessibility (Batthyány & Sánchez, 2020; Castro, 2020b; del Río Lozano & del Mar García Calvente, 2022; D. Gutiérrez et al., 2020a; Rodríguez Fernández, 2020). In Honduras, they also served as the main education providers, thus having an additional toll in their added social and economic pressures (Ordorika, 2020; Paz-Maldonado et al., 2021, 2022; Silva & Madureira, 2021).

While social distancing, quarantine, and confinement affected the entire Honduran population, people living in peri-urban settlements were exposed to heightened challenges such as income scarcity, limited basic services including potable water, food scarcity and insecurity, inadequate sewerage services, space limitations, overcrowding, limited access to educational services and comprehensive health, and, above all, latent and normalized violence against women (Orellana, n.d.; Ramos Rollón, 2020; Velásquez, 2021). Eighty percent of Hondurans depend on the informal labor sector, which was the sector most impacted by the measures introduced to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Ham, 2020b). In addition, evidence suggests that urban and

peri-urban settlements are more susceptible to COVID-19 infection due to the poor infrastructure (Baumeister, 2020; de Sousa Santos, 2021; Velásquez, 2021). These existing vulnerabilities heightened tensions within urban households, where most women accepted the additional burdens to avoid conflict (CEPAL, 2021; Lustig & Tommasi, 2020; Vaca-Trigo, 2019).

Although religion plays an important role in urban Honduran society, there is limited evidence on the effect it had during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Honduras, all faith-based organizations, which had served as safe spaces for women, closed (Dondé & Botega, 2020; Libertad de Religión o Creencia, 2020). More needs to be explored on this subject, yet this may have had an impact in further segregating women in their households, as well as limiting their social connections (Iglesia Cristiana Luterana El Señor Es Nuestro Pastor, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the Honduran health system and women's sexual and reproductive health services. Although it is advised within the literature that these services deserve particular attention during crisis scenarios, the pandemic contributed to the rise in domestic violence cases (Castro, 2020b; CEPAL, 2020b; Riley et al., 2020; Velásquez Paguada, 2020). It is important to acknowledge that the virus was introduced in Honduras when the system was already collapsed, evidenced in the limited equipment and personnel in charge of the provision of services for women. Most, if not all, were diverted to meet needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The limited facilities for isolation areas and staff redeployment and shortages, as well as limited resources, resulted in the reduction of care for women in the country, directly affecting their access to family planning and protection for sexually transmitted diseases (CEPAL, 2020a, 2020b; Figueroa-Quñones & Ipanaqué-Neyra, 2020; Valdés et al., 2020).

The literature suggests that all these aggregated factors increased financial and emotional dependencies, stress, family arguments, depression, and neglect (Clemente-Suárez et al., 2021; Jiménez, 2021; G. Vásquez et al., 2020). This resulted in the increase in domestic violence. Generally, during the COVID-19 pandemic most women experienced a deterioration of their own well-being as they took on greater responsibilities for productive and reproductive work and embraced all the necessary activities that enable them to survive during times of crisis. In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic serves as our generation's most detrimental context for the alteration of relations between women and men (Abarca et al., 2021; Ertan et al., 2020; Sacco, Caputo, Ricci, Sicilia, De Aloe, Bonetta, Cordasco, Scalise, Cacciatore, Zibetti, et al., 2020; UN Women, 2020c, 2020a).

There have been significant advancements in research that considers the situation of violence that women in Honduras experience, especially a body of work highlighting femicides as a national phenomenon (Menjívar, 2020; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017; Turcios, n.d.). Yet, there is still an important need to untangle how all the compounding factors play a crucial part in women survivors' lives. I argue that there was no clear precedent for the recent pandemic crisis in the country and its demonstrable impact on domestic violence survivors and women.

2.8.4 The concept: Domestic violence and a gender-based violence framework as a result of global action

The four United Nations World Conferences on Women³⁴ marked a milestone regarding contributions to and advancement of women's rights, as well as for the concepts of domestic and gender-based violence. Under the adoption of several global resolutions, including "Abused Women and Violence in the Family," and the approval of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), legal instruments for acknowledging and promoting women's equality were established. The Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing in 1995, serves as a prominent milestone that is particularly instrumental for the feminist movement in Honduras (M. Eguigure, personal communication, 2020). Due to its results, "gendered" perspectives were incorporated in official documents, with a recognition of violence against women as a human rights problem (United Nations, 2017).

These moments in history resulted in global action to formulate, prevent, address, and eradicate violence against women, but more importantly, it was during these events that the institutionalization of the feminist struggle gave birth to the concept of violence against women, also commonly referred to as gender-based violence (Ortiz-Barreda & Vives-Cases, 2013):

³⁴ The United Nations has organized four world conferences (Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995) regarding important issues and struggles for women; the last was followed by a series of five-year reviews. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing is significant for advancing gender equality, as the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action were adopted unanimously by 189 countries. These continue to serve as a tool for global policy documents on gender equality, considering several strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women's rights and the achievement of gender equality, including in relation to violence against women.

Any act of violence based on membership in the female sex, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, as well as threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (World Health Organization, 1995)

Adopted by the United Nations through all its offices and missions, this definition is utilized worldwide. It nourishes international law and feminist advocacy, as well as gender-equal policies in different countries and regions under the conceptualization of “violence against women.” It includes the concepts of domestic violence and / or IPV. The definition is fundamental for two important reasons. First, it states that violence against women occurs in different spheres and through different modalities, identifying psychological, physical, and economic violence as violent acts against women and girls. Second, it illuminates the relational nature of this type of violence. It discloses that men do not exercise violence against women for the sake of harming women: they do so for purposes of control and subjugation (Sancho i Víctor, 2007).

Essentially, an important characteristic of gendered dynamics centers on the fact that they are relational. They occur and depend on relations among gendered bodies. The way gendered relationships are defined in modern society happens to occur in a context of asymmetry and inequality, hence relations among men and women are articulated in terms of power, translating gendered relations into power relations (Expósito & Moya, 2011).

There are several economic, political, and socio-cultural values that are put in place and rooted in economic and political structures that legitimize the control by the gendered bodies of men over the gendered bodies of women. This exercise of power is clearly marked by the statistically significant examples of men exercising violence against women. Men, on a larger and alarming

scale, use their power within the established structures to offer protection, in return for obedience or submissiveness. An important element of economic and emotional dependency of women on men persists, transforming violence into a resource offered by society to conserve male power (R. Segato, 2021b; R. L. Segato, 2014).

Feminists of color have built on this very idea, revealing important considerations regarding gendered bodies as a means used by men to obtain and sustain their power within the different gender regimes. This will be explored further in the conceptual framework that supports this work. Yet it is important to acknowledge that women are not being attacked or disadvantaged solely for being women, as originally believed and reiterated. The violent offenses are being made across women's bodies. It is through economic, political, and socio-physical violence that women's bodies endure suffering in order for men to maintain their power within the structures that continue to benefit them (R. Segato, 2021b).

In other words, women are not under attack because they are a minority; quite the contrary, women statistically represent 51% of the world's population (United Nations, 2020). Women are meant to be rendered a minority and a vulnerable population by the same systems of oppression that reiterate men's dominance over their bodies. Understanding violence in this manner allows us to identify its birth in patriarchal structures, which Segato rightly considers the first structures of domination. She also identifies the exacerbating role of capitalism as a product of coloniality in the modern world. The structure of property continues to place economic resources in male hands, alienating women from income-generating opportunities and land ownership (Martínez & Leiva, 2019; R. Segato, 2016).

3 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY AND STATE OF THE ART

This chapter provides a theoretical discussion around feminist theories and existing debate, focusing on the resources that have resulted in third-wave and world feminisms. To initiate the discussion, I will situate the research in the global context, introducing “gender” as a term and category of analysis. I will further discuss the works of intersectional and decolonial feminisms, their critiques, and points of coalition. It is through these points of coalition that I intend to frame my concepts and considerations. I will then proceed to establish a structure for comprehending domestic violence in urban Honduras, embedding the intersectional and decolonial discourses into the theory of gender regimes. Gender regimes better illustrate the different patriarchal systems that nurture and intensify domestic violence.

While categorizing the gender regimes into 1) the economy, 2) the polity, and 3) civil society, I intend to narrate women’s lived pandemic experiences in urban Honduras, painting a clearer picture of the increase in domestic violence, in order to understand ourselves through the complexity of living through the different gender regimes.

3.1 Conceptual considerations

The mythical binary and split image of women is sourced from Judeo-Christian culture and a capitalist society generated through a process of colonial domination first and imperialism later. A common characteristic of cultural diversity and successive social formations throughout this historical process is that societies and cultures have been constituted as patriarchal.

Marcela Lagarde y de Los Ríos (Lagarde, 2016)

In her book *Los cautiverios de las mujeres: Madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas*, which literally translates as “The captivity of women: Mother-wives, nuns, whores, prisoners and crazies,” Mexican feminist anthropologist Marcela Lagarde identifies several conditions that affect not only Mexican women but also other women born south of the U.S. border, recognizing that these societies are intrinsically linked to colonial history. More importantly, she recognizes that societies and cultures constructed south of hegemonic and imperial borders have been settled in patriarchal and external domination, and this domination is compounded by cultural, political, and violent hybridization processes that add power to a very specific narrative (Lagarde, 2016).

Our understandings of Honduran women, constructed within a patriarchal system and body of thought that are both imposed and replicated today, reveal the diverse commonalities of being the primary victims of a patriarchal sociopolitical and economic system. To start a discussion that includes the mythical binary that Lagarde refers to, we must first comprehend “gender.” How we understand, analyze, and discuss gender is especially important to how we frame modern relations and dynamics, as well as being important to this feminist research. Gender will also help us unravel the complex phenomenon of domestic violence in urban Honduras.

Feminist theory opens up a wide stream of criticism, including questions of validity and of methodological positions (Elam, 2013; Loza, 2014; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015). Women, predominantly of European descent and Caucasian, were the first to narrate the experiences of women within the literature and academia. Nonetheless, their contributions described a single and unilateral perspective. This perspective managed to reproduce stereotypes about “third world

women,”³⁵ often portraying women that were not White as needing to be saved by Western, liberated, and emancipated powers, which coincidentally continue to control the region (hooks, 1989; Lorde, 2020).

This original mainstreamed thinking about women has been contested by many women of color, predominantly from Abya Yala, Africa, and diasporic communities in the US. “Other” feminist women, or women of color, explicitly started denouncing their inability to belong to any of the waves historized by Western academia. Additionally, they illustrated how this single-minded perspective excludes the diversity of experiences and struggles that exist in different regions and through different bodies (hooks, 1989; Lorde, 2020).

3.2 Les feminismos:³⁶ Introducing gender, women, and violence against women through multiple feminisms

The stories that unfold in this research are those of people who identify as women and I intend to place my analysis of their narratives within a framework that responds to women’s studies, which is undeniably connected to the gendered notions that attempt to define them. Following that understanding, I present ideas about gender within the broad range of feminisms. I speak of

³⁵ “Third World women” is a term used by Western feminists to refer to women in the Global South, or “women of color,” that signifies “non-Western” women. The terms are used within First World feminisms and by women of color themselves.

³⁶ *Les feminismos*: this translates into “the feminisms” in Spanish. I incorporate Spanish in some important headings in this dissertation to situate and make visible the advancements made by native Spanish feminisms through language. I choose to include all beings that live outside the dichotomic (female / male) classifications, and the inclusive pronoun “*les*” in Spanish allows me to do so. “*Les*” refers to a non-defined gender, or a gender that integrates “*los*” and “*las*,” which are the “masculine” and “feminine” pronouns in Spanish.

feminisms because it is impossible to research and discuss gender, or women for that matter, without taking into consideration the advancements made by feminist literature through academic participation and advocacy; I also speak of feminisms because there are not one but plenty of ways patriarchy is resisted and opposed (hooks et al., 2004).

When we speak about gender, we unavoidably recall the works of women from Anglo-Saxon and European territories, who categorize their feminist findings in waves.³⁷ First- and second-wave feminists were fundamental to acknowledging the definitions and impositions carried into the sexed bodies. They were responsible for exposing how bodies born with biologically different genitalia were assigned characteristics around those genitalia. Therefore, gender can be originally understood as the set of attributions and characteristics assigned to each sex (De Beauvoir, 1997). This thought has resulted in an ongoing debate that unravels many discussions, including the influence of biological, psychological, sociological, and even literary discourses that help shape and construct how the gendered bodies have been imagined and brought into existence within different societies (Boxer, 1982; Day, 2011).

³⁷ To date, Anglo-Saxon and European feminism is better understood through four main waves. The first wave of feminism took place around the period 1880 to 1940, emerging out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal politics. The objective of first-wave feminists, predominantly from the US and Europe, was characterized by their fight for suffrage. The second wave began in the 1960s within the anti-war and civil rights movements. Second-wave feminists were characterized as “louder” through their fight for sexual and reproductive rights. The third wave of feminism began in the mid-1990s and was informed by postcolonial and postmodern thinking, including a big rise in feminists in Abya Yala. Women-of-color feminists are characterized for destabilizing the original notions of “universal womanhood,” body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity. The fourth wave of feminism is what defines contemporary times (2000s—present) and it is a movement still in the process of formation. To better explain this wave, the role of social media is incorporated: the #MeToo movement and the rise of women’s organizations globally.

While discussing mainstreamed notions about gender, we also quickly narrow down to two words: women and men. This is by no means a coincidence; this is what is known as gender binarism, a social and political classification that separates men from women. This thought system is replicated through women's and men's life histories, interlaced in all spheres of life, from birth and across households, schools, streets, and systems of representation (Butler & Lourties, 1998). Honduras is no exception, subjected as it is to a process of external domination that resulted in an important hybridization of society, with a predominantly mestiza³⁸ population that is also classified into men and / or women. Both elements of social categorization are commonly known to be static and fixed—in other words, one or the other, never both or neither (Becerra, 1983; Euraque, 2004).

Theoretical discussions continue to unfold within feminist literature regarding sex–gender relations. Discussions revolve around the assignment of sex first and gender later, or sex–gender as an inseparable category that defines the destiny of human bodies (Lagarde, 2018; Oakley, 2016). Either way, gender is to be contemplated as intrinsic to social systems. Those who have contested gender theories point to gender as more than a way to classify society. Coincidentally, gender and the theories that surround it try to express, analyze, and unveil the dimensions and

³⁸ Mestiza: of mixed race, used throughout Latin-Central America to name the populations that resulted from the processes of hybridization between European colonizers and Indigenous colonized populations.

conditions that are attributed to the gendered bodies (Davis, 2000; H. I. Hartmann, 1979; Lagarde, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Beyond a biological definition of gender, gender has been understood to indicate the characteristics that define what it is to be a “woman,” emphasizing clear differences from what it means to be a “man,” from the way bodies act and look to the opportunities they can access. That is to say, gender can also be understood as a social construct, a creation, a performance. Within this pact sustained by societies through binarism, both women and men perform the roles they assigned, and dress as such and therefore act as such (Butler, 2002, 2009). Subsequently, the gendered bodies of women have been relegated to childcare and childbearing, with a clear mandate to blossom into motherhood, with only recent possibilities of negotiation. Additionally, they are assigned to care for the elderly and the ill and to undertake domestic responsibilities (Prokhovnik, 2012).

Patriarchal societies are configured by the separation of gendered bodies and the activities they perform, often separated into masculine or feminine. With this separation, a hierarchy is implied, and unequal valuations are established of what men do and what women do. Feminist theory acknowledges these gender and power dynamics, through its emphasis on the patriarchal system as explanation of the structural differences between men and women (Bartky, 2020; Walkerdine, 1989).

In the 1970s–1980s, feminists started incorporating Marxist and socialist definitions in feminist theory, resulting in important connections between patriarchy and capitalism (Davis, 2000).

Marx considered diverse modes of production. Humans produce objects, labor, instruments, capital, and even children. They also produce socially and reproduce. Every society is based on a

certain division of labor that historically has given rise to differentiated access to what is being produced. In fact, our capitalist society fosters the division of gender roles to ensure the production and reproduction of the labor force. This results in a rigid and sexual division of labor and the organization of societies through stratification (H. Hartmann, 1976).

During the second wave of feminism (1960s), women pointed critically to the effect of capitalism in reducing societies to the hierarchies of gender. They identified how capitalism reinforced a sexual division of labor that forced men to concentrate on violence and war, while displacing women into reproductive work. The latter also contributed to diverting the appropriation of goods, services, and capital to men (Beneria & Sen, 1981). In addition, not all men had access to the same amount of capital, fostering the emergence of different social classes. These patriarchal relations persist to date, as the current economic system continues to reproduce the model of males as breadwinners and women as caregivers. War has simply been replaced by labor in the form of wage-earning (Mojab, 2015).

In terms of sex and gender relations, patriarchy implies a set of social relations in which there are mechanisms that allow men to have a superior role to that of women. These mechanisms include access to / ownership of capital. Furthermore, one of the most obvious and historical sources of the subjugation of women is the continuing reliance on their static role as main caregivers and caretakers (Bowles et al., 1975). Let us use this example to reiterate 1) the capitalist and gendered division created in the production of life, and 2) the differing value accorded to those divisions. The patriarchs, defined as men, are differentiated from those who generate life, defined as women. Together they produce children; providing for children has an actual commodified

value, in the form of a wage, yet taking care of them does not (Folbre & Hartmann, 1989; H. I. Hartmann, 1981).

Within this economic system, the reproductive role, predominantly assigned to women, has not been provided with a capitalist “value.” It is precisely from capital that “value” is assigned to the actions produced by the gendered bodies. In turn, this contributes to the solidification of patriarchy and the control of men over women (S. Smith, 2013).

Capitalism, and the set of relations it reproduces, converts everything, including labor, into a commodity. Human wealth, experiences, knowledge, and capacities are presented in the form of products that can be bought according to a value attributed to them (Read, 2011). The latter point best unravels the significant connection between capital and patrimony. Thus, findings made by Marxist feminists fostered a heated debate, while revealing an important outcome: hierarchies imposed by patriarchal oppression serve the economic basis of the capitalist system (H. I. Hartmann, 1979; Omvedt, 1986),

Subsequently, feminist scholars have explored meaningful insights into the relationships among the gendered bodies of women and men, identifying gender oppression.³⁹ Historical evidence disentangles the unequal dynamics between the gendered bodies. Some examples include women fighting for space within formal employment, equal pay, and political participation, in the Global

³⁹ Gender oppression is associated with gender norms, relations, and stratification imposed on the genders in society. It is a result of social processes that institutionalize and reproduce certain norms assigned to the gendered bodies. Theories of gender oppression often describe women’s disadvantaged situations as a result of the power relationship between men and women, in which men have fundamental control over women. Gender oppression is defined through different strands of feminist theories that unravel how at certain intersections of class, or race, gender suppression increases and / or persists.

North as much as in the Global South (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Treiman & Hartmann, 1981). Women continue to fight for autonomy over their own bodies, a different reality than that of the bodies of men, as legislation on sexual and reproductive rights continues to be imposed on female bodies (Petchesky, 1998).

Within this dichotomic paradigm, women tend to face many challenges that men do not, such as unequal access to education and health, as well as unpaid domestic labor. Although the primary caretakers of households, most women are often kept marginalized from financial decision-making as well as from access to loans and land ownership (Beebeejaun, 2017). In addition, relationships become entangled in complexity as other important factors start affecting gendered relations. For example, class plays an important role among gendered bodies: women in privileged positions may have more access to certain social and political benefits than men from oppressed socioeconomic backgrounds. With this in mind, women's experiences themselves will differ according to class structures (hooks, 2000; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Undoubtedly, feminist scholarship has made vast contributions to women's lives and resources for women's advocacy. And the other way around: struggles conducted in the streets and transformed into public policy have nourished and advanced feminist literature. Therefore, I choose an intersectional and decolonial feminist approach to narrate the stories in this research. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that feminists' findings present a problematic vision. The static division that homogenizes our societies into women and men not only limits the existence of beings outside these dichotomic classifications, but also generalizes experiences within these categories, disregarding cultural and personal differences (Butler & Lourties, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The first feminist statements were made by predominantly Anglo-Saxon and European women, also commonly referred to as White women in academic discourse. Their findings revealed valid questions regarding their duties catering to their husbands and children through domestic labor, yet they failed to mention women who did not have a husband or children, or who dared to prefer a life within the domestic realm. These first concepts also remain questionable for women with husbands who do not benefit from the system due to their race or class. The homogenization of women that occurred during this period was based on relevant experiences, yet the homogenization was done by only considering the experiences of a very particular group of women. Besides leading to erroneous and mainstreamed ideas of women, it replicated the system that was being disputed in the first place. This led to the silencing of women of color, queer women, transgender women, women with disabilities, or any other woman who fell outside the upper-middle-class and White description of a “woman” (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 2020).

In fact, the first access to women’s writings in the forms of feminism revealed women who wanted more of the opportunities that men have—or, in the words of bell hooks, “They wanted more seats at the table,” disregarding the fact that the table was a sexist one, predominantly White, and consistently racist. This first fight for equal rights for women meant more opportunities for some women only within the established system. Due to this problematic vision, feminists of color then introduced the improved concept of eradicating the problems raised by the patriarchal system by dismantling the system completely (hooks, 2000).

Thanks to the profound contributions made by women of color, including studies from African, Latinx,⁴⁰ African, African Caribbean, and diaspora women (Collins, 1998; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015; Murray, 1997; R. Segato, 2016), it has become clear that one cannot fight to advance equal rights without embracing equality for all beings; this means all races, all classes, and all ethnicities. That is to say, one cannot acknowledge feminism without acknowledging racism, or classism. Additionally, there is great danger when speaking for others as we fall into mistaking and generalizing views and perspectives as much as contributing to portraying women as statistical references and generalized figures (Temin & Roca, 2016).

3.3 Introducing intersectionality: “Ain’t I A Woman?”⁴¹

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen

⁴⁰ “Latinx(s)” refers to people of Abya Ayala. It is a cultural or ethnic identity in the US, to include Latino, Latina, Latine, and Latin@ as well as Hispanic. It is a gender-neutral {-x} suffix which replaces the {-o/-a} ending and is meant to incorporate those who do not feel represented by the binary and mainstreamed gender system.

⁴¹ “Ain’t I A Woman” is a famous speech by Sojourner Truth, the first Black woman to win a court custody case against a White man. The speech was delivered at the 1851 Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio, emphasizing the need to fight for equal rights for African American women. Her remarks regained popularity and were republished in 1863 by Frances Dana Barker Gage. Her speech has been passed down through history in different versions.

most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none
but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Fragment of "Ain't I A Woman?" (1851) by Sojourner Truth (Truth, 1851)

Following the statement made decades earlier by women's rights activist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth, Black women declared their differentiated and historically bound experiences. Consequently, exhausted by the Eurocentric / Anglo-Saxon view of women that fell short of representing women of color, Kimberlé Crenshaw built on her community to introduce the concept of intersectionality (K. W. Crenshaw, 2017). The concept emerged from the racialized experiences of Black women in the US. Intersectional thinking has gained recognition as a critical study, methodology, and feminist theory. The predominant focus of the field is an overview of a variety of individual social categories assigned to humans, including ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and / or class, among others. Social categories commonly intersect and determine diverse life experiences (Collins, 1998; Collins & Bilge, 2020a).

Originally, Black intersectional feminists argued that the experiences of Black women, especially when confronted with the judiciary system, were not like those of White women. To simplify the term: the systems of oppression that confront a Black woman in court, for example, not only constitute patriarchy but racism as well. Black women have then become the crossroads of those social categories, falling into an intersection. These experiences occur within a system that does not recognize their differentiated experiences and lacks the resources to tackle the problems created at such intersections (K. Crenshaw, 2015).

Intersectionality has been enriched by many feminists from Abya Yala, who have illustrated the discriminations perpetrated at the intersections of race, class, and gender. They aimed to deconstruct and discuss the hegemonic and Western notions of feminism, making explicit the connections between different oppressions (Lugones, 2007; Miñoso, 2007). For example, a woman in Honduras can be a woman at the same time as she is mestiza, married, and part of a middle-class system (race, marital status, class). Her experience regarding access to employment, healthcare, and reporting of domestic violence will be utterly different from that of a woman who was born poor and is single and Lenca⁴² (class, marital status, race). Both experiences can only be understood when placed and identified within their intersecting categories.

Intersectional theory and methodologies mark a breakthrough for women who did / do not feel represented in the feminist waves imposed by the available academic principles (Busquier, 2018; Fournier-Pereira, 2014). From this point forward, feminists of color started integrating ethnicity and sexuality, among other categories, unraveling discoveries regarding the differentiated experiences of lesbians and Indigenous women, identifying the role sexuality and ethnicity play in the construction of political and cultural organizational processes (Fournier-Pereira, 2014; Miñoso, 2007; Morales, 2014).

Their findings have greatly benefited feminist literature, identifying the invisibility of women of color in most political, economic, and social spheres (Almendra, 2015; Galindo et al., 2012). To

⁴² The Lenca are a Mesoamerican Indigenous population, located in southwestern Honduras and eastern El Salvador. The Lenca are the largest Indigenous group in Honduras.

begin to recognize the multiple systems of oppression that are embodied by individuals through their life experiences and throughout different contexts, intersectionality allows us to start naming experiences as different from those of White Western women. It allows us to start telling different stories, perhaps even our own (hooks, 1989). The most important contribution includes the acknowledgment that everyone has the right to their own story—a space, if you will, to express and share differentiated experiences (Hancock, 2019).

Although it entails a multifaceted process, these diverse experiences need to be gathered to start to confront not just one but several experiences of discrimination. Women's bodies, and the categories that have been used to define them, are confronted by several systems of oppression and privilege at the same time (K. W. Crenshaw, 2017). Therefore, I intend to analyze the main social categories mentioned in women's narratives to begin to understand the experiences that unravel at such intersections.

Finally, intersectional theory leads with narratives of women who have historically been less privileged than others (Collins & Bilge, 2020b). I incorporate intersectionality in this research to foster conversations with and through voices of women who are in extremely socioeconomically disadvantaged conditions, such as those who have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in the Honduran peri-urban landscape.

3.4 Moving toward a decolonial feminist approach

Making visible what is not, I intend not only to draw from intersectional learnings but also to begin to incorporate the analytical discoveries of those who have developed their narratives through a decolonial gaze. Pioneer María Lugones suggests reflection is needed on intersectional

viewpoints, arguing that gender was first and foremost constituted through the violent processes of colonization (Lugones, 2010). Her work, which builds on Anibal Quijano's "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2000), introduces the term "coloniality of gender," which is a system that remains and which forms dynamics within the modern socioeconomic and political relations between men and women, although colonization seems to be a past event (Lugones, 2016).

Going beyond descriptive biology and focusing on the colonial imposition that separated men from women, she identifies how these categories were reserved for White Western men and women, with the colonized populations of "non-White men" and "non-White women" depicted as savage and inhuman. The fact that colonized populations were subjected to the lesser-valued impositions of the colonizers highlights the possibilities of untold stories in two distinct ways: first, in the way colonized populations endorsed the definitions of their bodies as "untamed," and second, in the way they resisted them (Lugones, 2012b, 2014).

According to decolonial thought, the colonization mandate justified the brutality used to tame the colonized territories and bodies. Parallel to this, colonization normalized a violent process of religious conversion under the premise of saving the "untamed" populations through Christianity (Mendoza, 2015). The traditional Judeo-Christian roles assigned to the binary are extremely visible in contemporary Honduran society, serving as evidence for Lugones's coloniality of gender (Sagot Rodríguez, 2019). Nonetheless, she argues that by utilizing "gender" and "religion," as well as other social categories including race and age, we not only run the risk of fragmenting ourselves, but we also reiterate the colonization mandate, as "gender" and all social categories constitute a Western obligation—that is, an outsider definition of who we are. More than positions, they become social impositions, engraved through the violent processes of

external domination. Therefore, according to Lugones, the use of the words, as well as the concepts, is tainted by such processes (Lugones, 2010; Thomas, 2020). Additionally, she argues that coloniality of gender is supported by a patriarchal system that was imposed on the arrival of colonizers (Lugones, 2007; Mendoza, 2014).

Expanding on this argument, Lugones (2010) highlights how colonialism institutionalized gender binaries and patriarchal norms through religious doctrine, framing spiritual and bodily autonomy, especially for colonized women, as deviant or heretical. Christianity, particularly in its Catholic and later evangelical expressions, played a central cultural role in embedding these hierarchies by promoting fixed notions of womanhood rooted in obedience, modesty, heterosexuality, and domesticity (Giorgi, 2021). These ideals constituted not only spiritual but also political tools used to regulate women's behavior and justify male dominance. As such, religion became both a mechanism of colonization and a cultural apparatus through which patriarchal power was normalized. In the present, the influence of this religious doctrine in Latin America continues to reinforce gender inequalities by legitimizing submissive femininity and condemning women's sexual and reproductive autonomy (Giménez et al., 2024).

Theologically engaged decolonial scholars such as Enrique Dussel and Catherine Walsh further argue that even liberating Christian discourses in Latin America often remain embedded in colonial epistemologies unless they explicitly reject Eurocentric assumptions about divinity, gender, and moral authority (Padilla, 2024; C. E. Walsh, 2020). Thus, understanding religion in this manner is not only to critique imposed Eurocentric religious doctrines but also to recover and validate erased epistemologies, which include hybrid and lived experiences forged at the intersections of Catholic moral discourse, colonial gender codes, and—in the case of this

dissertation—the everyday life of mestiza women. The mestiza experience that unfolds through this work represents ways of knowing, which do not seek a return to a romanticized precolonial past but rather navigate the contradictions of imposed and inherited religious doctrines. As Anzaldúa suggests, mestiza consciousness carries the tension of opposites, traditional and modern, secular and spiritual, submission and resistance, which makes it a powerful site of critique against patriarchal structures rooted in colonial religion (Anzaldúa, 2009).

Inspired by the works of communitarian feminism⁴³ to understand the current patriarchal systems, we must include history without romanticizing the gendered past. It is fundamental to acknowledge that ancestors' civilizations prior to colonization were not free of patriarchal or gendered notions. In fact, documentary, historical, and ethnographic data evidence structures that were differentiated, similar to what we presently label as gender relations (R. L. Segato & Monque, 2021). As much as we would like to imagine otherwise in order to effortlessly direct blame, patriarchy was always present. The hierarchies and ways of life differed, yet “When the colonizers arrived, both visions came together to the misfortune of ‘non-White women’” (Paredes, 2010).

To grasp how gendered notions came together, we must examine current gender relations within the economic and political contexts where they are taking place. Rooted in the legacy of Marxist feminism, feminist thinkers in Abya Yala found ways of understanding the diverse systems of

⁴³ Communitarian feminism, also known as Indigenous feminism, refers to a stream of feminism based on the collective thinking and conceptions of Indigenous peoples and their lived experiences, which differs from Western feminist thought.

oppression endured by women of color, analyzing society through its economy and history, as well as in terms of power. In this way, decolonial feminist theory engages in debates regarding coloniality / modernity, illustrating current gender relations, which are intrinsically linked to colonial and imperial history (Lugones, 2007; R. L. Segato & Monque, 2021). The aim of decolonial feminist theory centers on providing a space for experiences that have historically been silenced, or “othered” (Said, 2014). In other words, the goal of decolonial thinkers relies on the actions of telling the stories through the bodies that were sacrificed during the process of colonization and imperialism.

Having established that, I base my framework on several findings gathered by Rita Segato, decolonial thinker and recognized Argentinian Brazilian academic. Segato re-analyzes the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, explaining the way in which capital intensifies patriarchal (violent) practices in Abya Yala. At the same time, patriarchy becomes instrumental for capital. Therefore, patriarchy and capitalism create a strong alliance (R. Segato, 2019). Each feeds the other, creating a differentiated and violent threat for female bodies. She argues that gender relations take place in an economic system that reiterates ownership: land ownership, capital, wages; ownership of businesses, houses, decision-making, ownership of thoughts. It separates those with decision-making power from those without. Thus, those in power become the owners of those that do not have it. Within current capitalist societies, women are turned into a commodity. Much like territory, they are used to demonstrate male ownership and control (R. Segato, 2016; R. L. Segato, 2016; R. L. Segato et al., 2011).

As an emerging theoretical concept, decolonial feminism builds on the work and experiences of women who are not White, nor of exclusively Anglo-Saxon or European descent. This research

introduces the decolonial framework as a space for other stories—in particular, the stories of those historically excluded from dominant narratives of gender, development, and modernity. It focuses on women whose daily lives unfold within their communities, families, and broader social structures. By narrating these lived experiences, the research aims to reframe the discourse that has been maintained about women over time, foregrounding the contradictions, tensions, and complexities of gendered life in contemporary Honduras.

This research draws on the perspectives of mestiza women whose positionality reflects a multifaceted intersection of colonial legacies, Catholic moral frameworks, socioeconomic marginalization, and everyday resilience (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015; R. L. Segato, 2018). In doing so, it offers an alternative archive: one that resists homogenizing or romanticized narratives and instead affirms plural, context-specific ways of knowing and being. The decolonial approach thus functions not only as a critical and reflexive lens, but also as a methodological approach through which this research is narrated and situated within the political and economic histories of Honduras (Icaza, 2018; Lugones, 2016; R. L. Segato & Monque, 2021).

3.5 Feminisms in Abya Yala: A decolonial resistance and remembrance

There is an understanding within the feminisms that reveals that the separation between the gendered bodies of women and men feeds the subordinate relations women have with men. In Abya Yala, this thought is resisted distinctively. In Honduras, for example, feminist practices have intersected with contemporary political ones (Mendoza, 2022). Yet to discuss this matter further, we should first look into feminist genealogy, which points toward an identification of

origins and feminist tradition (Owesen, 2021). To do this, we will reflect on some examples that unravel feminist memory.

At different paces, Abya Yalan feminist organizations have carried out actions to raise awareness regarding violence against women, establishing protective alternatives for “mestiza women.” An important example of feminist advocacy and Abya Yalan resistance to patriarchy is that of Indigenous / communitarian feminism. Several groups of organized Indigenous women have established joint fronts to fight for autonomy and cultural recognition. Indigenous movements denounce both gender oppression and racial oppression, which deeply characterize colonized territories. Thus, ethnic background, class, and gender have determined “mestiza women’s” experiences (Motta, 2021).

To better illustrate the previous idea: the Zapatista communitarian feminism in Mexico serves as one of the region’s symbolic examples. Within a long history of abuse and the extreme imposition of traditional gender roles that segregate women from decision-making and relegate them to childbearing as early as age 12, Zapatista women demanded their rights through their participation in the Zapatista National Liberation Army.⁴⁴ By organizing themselves within a predominantly male structure, they demonstrated their capability to do the same work as their

⁴⁴ The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN, after its phrasing in Spanish) is a political-military organization, formed by Indigenous people of the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, and Mam groups of the State of Chiapas. The origins of the EZLN date back to the early 1980s, when a small guerrilla group settled in the mountainous area of the Lacandón Jungle with the intention of creating an armed front to promote their Indigenous rights. The group gained popularity on January 1, 1994, because of the armed conflict in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas and the towns of Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Chanal, Ocosingo, Oxchuc, Huixtán, Chalam, Simojovel, and San Andrés Larráinzar (Millán, 2006).

male counterparts. Zapatista women fairly represent Indigenous women born south of U.S. borders, developing several actions to demand and obtain their rights (Millán, 2006).

Their collective actions include organizing Zapatista communities and enhancing women's participation in several regions of Mexico. They took over the Municipal Palace of San Cristóbal de las Casas⁴⁵ while actively participating in the construction of the National Indigenous Congress,⁴⁶ which, compounded by other actions, led to the creation of the Women's Revolutionary Law.⁴⁷ This law grants them their inherent rights to political participation, allowing them the right to hold leadership positions, a life free of sexual and domestic violence, the autonomy to decide how many children to bear, the right to select their spouse, and access to a fair wage, education, and quality health facilities. Zapatista women managed to incorporate themselves and make visible their struggles within the region's narrative. Their demands have shaped new epistemological approaches, connecting collective demands with gendered knowledge. This illustrates how Indigenous women comprehend the experiences of their bodies as they continue to be intertwined with their racial, economic, and cultural realities (Padierna Jiménez, 2013).

⁴⁵ On January 1, 1994, thousands of EZLN members surrounded the Municipal Palace, taking over the premises, snatching the flag while creating a chaotic entrance to demand their rights and national recognition.

⁴⁶ Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI) is an organization of communities, nations, towns, neighborhoods, and Indigenous tribes of Mexico, which serves to represent the rights and particular demands of historically discriminated Indigenous populations.

⁴⁷ In 1994, the organization of Indigenous women in Mexico demanded and helped to establish the Women's Revolutionary Law, which contains ten articles that enumerate several rights of Indigenous women. This charter was created in consultation with Zapatista, Tojobal, and Chol people.

As another example, we can follow the journey toward legalization of abortion in Argentina. Argentinian feminist organizations developed collective actions with the intention of decriminalizing abortion in the country. These actions include the first movements to organize women during and after the dictatorship conflict,⁴⁸ giving special importance to women's organizations whose visibility was enhanced thanks to the role of mothers and grandmothers in the emblematic events of Plaza de Mayo, who demanded to know the whereabouts of hundreds of their children who disappeared during the regime. Feminist organizations worked for the coalition in several sectors.⁴⁹ They managed to establish a unified front of directed efforts, solidifying a network composed of 42 feminist collectives from different parts of the country. This combined with a brilliant articulation in the form of social campaigns⁵⁰ as the ultimate expression of female verbalization to legalize safe abortion (Petracci, 2007).

⁴⁸ 1983 marked the end of a civil-military dictatorship that spurred diverse human rights violations, and systematic extermination of guerrillas and left-wing ideas in Argentina. Through presidential elections, the role of social sectors was enhanced, giving special importance to human rights organizations and favoring women, because of the important role they played in demanding to know their children's whereabouts in the emblematic Plaza de Mayo, or "*Plaza de las abuelas*" (grandmother's plaza).

⁴⁹ Multisectorial de la Mujer was formed in Buenos Aires, Argentina, as an experience and symbol of unity among feminists, human rights activists, women from political parties, trade unions, housewives, and LGBTQIA+ members, among others, who came together to enhance debate to favor all women. The first public activity of the Multisectorial was to organize the emblematic march of March 8, 1984, meant to celebrate the advancements made after the signing of a document with key points, including the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, equality of children before the law, modification of the parental authority regime, compliance with the law on equal pay for equal work, regulation of the law and implementation of local kindergartens, modification of the law on retirement for housewives, and the creation of a Secretariat of State for Women.

⁵⁰ On May 28, 2005, within the framework of the International Day of Action for Women's Health, the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion appeared publicly for the first time because of collective feminist and political practices.

As a result, these organizations managed to place abortion at the center of public, political, and social interest. Thanks to their actions, women's reproductive rights became visible and accepted as human rights. As of December 30, 2020, National Congress approved the Law on the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy, authorizing abortion.⁵¹ In this way, the feminist movement, as a product of alliances and consensus, as well as expert and technical knowledge, built policy. The understanding of abortion as a public health problem has meant a great advancement for Abya Yalan feminist movements. This has been an important event for formerly colonized and religious populations, consequently leading to a new understanding of how women organize themselves as well as how they reproduce what they understand women's and men's rights to be (Burton, 2017).

Ultimately, of the many inspiring stories in Honduran political resistance, I choose to focus on the stories fostered by the Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla (Women's Movement for Peace, Visitación Padilla). The feminist collective, also known as Las Chonas,⁵² was inspired by Visitación Padilla⁵³ herself. She is a teacher immortalized in feminist and national history who is well-known for standing outside Palmerola, the largest U.S. military base in Central America, screaming "La Patria no se vende, no se renta, ni se alquila," which

⁵¹ Law No. 27,610 of December 30, 2020, in Argentina establishes that induced abortion is legal and free of charge, in the cases of therapeutic abortion and rape, as well as other cases when gestation does not exceed the fourteenth week.

⁵² "*Chonas*" is short for Visitación in colloquial Honduran Spanish; it is an endearing term, highly disseminated within local feminist communities in Honduras.

⁵³ Considered one of the first feminist pioneers in Honduras, Visitación Padilla stood out for her political participation against the U.S. military occupation, organizing a movement to remove the troops, along with Froylan Turcios and other Honduran decision-makers.(Valencia, n.d.).

translates as “Our homeland is not for sale, rent, or lease,” resisting, in her own ways, imperial domination. She is also present in the origins of feminism in Honduras, as she also co-founded *Cultura Femenina*.

Based on Padilla’s ideologies, *Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz*, Visitación Padilla was founded in 1984 with the objective of transforming structures within the Honduran patriarchal and legal systems. It continues in an anti-imperialist fight to promote actions that benefit the social organization of women. It is formed of many women’s collectives in different regions, neighborhoods, and barrios around the country, including urban and rural areas. It brings together a diversity of women’s sectors that include the participation of women at intersections that are made invisible by the state, including the rights of domestic workers, women with disabilities, and Indigenous women. Prompted by the epistemic violence that attacks women in Honduras, the *Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz*, Visitación Padilla, among many other women’s organizations,⁵⁴ constitutes the feminist movement in Honduras. It has selected to tackle violence, or, more accurately, the existing violence that persists has forced and inspired it to tackle it as the central issue of its work (Mendoza, 1996, 2022).

Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla has been interspersed with traditional political practices, although new forms of politics have also emerged. Its interactions with

⁵⁴ Colectiva de Mujeres Hondureñas—CODEMUH-Honduras; Comité Latinoamericano y del Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM-Honduras); Centro de Derechos de Mujeres—CDM; Centro de Estudios de la Mujer Honduras—CEM-H; Colectivo Feminista Mujeres Universitarias—COFEMUN; Centro de Estudio y Acción para el Desarrollo—CESADEH; Jóvenes Feministas Universitarias; Red de Mujeres Jóvenes; Comisión de Mujer Pobladora; Articulaciones Feministas de Redes Locales, que incluyen la Red de Empleadas Domésticas Convergencia de Mujeres de Honduras; Asociación Nacional de Escritoras de Honduras—ANDEH; Proyecto de Atención Integral a la Mujer, GTZ.

underprivileged groups have led it to turn its attention to the elaboration of drafts for public policy and advocacy to create new structures to respond to women's needs (Mendoza, 1996).

Among many achievements, it has contributed to the elaboration of laws including the Law Against Violence and the Equal Opportunity Law, as well as advocating for the creation of the Women's Prosecutor's Office, family counseling, and specialized courts for women.

Concurrently, it has catered directly to women victims and survivors of domestic and other forms of patriarchal violence. Its work is strengthened through several mechanisms that include specialized political and psychological attention. In other words, Las Chonas is the political backbone for women's access to their rights and a life free of violence, with its members serving as frontline workers, friends, allies, lawyers, and protectors of women in Honduras—moreover, during strict confinement and the closure of institutions during lockdown, Las Chonas continued its work.

These examples of feminist collectives expose different political genealogies, yet they have all defined the ways in which “mestiza women” prioritize political demands and resist the diverse patriarchal mandates. That being said, their significance does not rely on strictly defining what feminism(s) are: instead, what is important relies on exposing the demands and negotiations that make women's struggles visible. In addition, feminisms make visible the ways in which they are demanded, which helps us unravel mestiza women's autonomy. Simultaneously, these diverse modalities of feminist action, embodied in these feminisms, contribute to the denaturalization of homogeneous ideas on gender, redefining what it means to be women (Castillo, 2021; Pictou, 2020).

3.6 Tension or complementary approaches? A decolonial and intersecting feminist framework embedded in gender regimes

Having exposed several understandings of gender through multiple feminisms, I intend to express my findings by exploring diverse social categories, in parallel extracting insight from colonial history and its living legacy (Dulci & Malheiros, 2021). I argue that the institutions responsible for several acts of oppression remain and are to be denounced through those same logics. Therefore, an approach that is both intersectional and decolonial, or what I define as a “complementary” approach to theorizing oppression, is necessary to understand domestic violence in urban Honduras. This also responds to Lugones’s suggestion of a space for coalition (Lugones, 2011).

The space for coalition, or the use of critical approaches as complementary, can be asserted through an intentional attempt to expand the imposed logics of gender. This can be attained by interrogating the origins and contexts where gender relations are being carried out, but also by moving beyond that and identifying the stories of resistance that are bravely narrated by those who fall into diverse intersecting oppressions.

Alongside recognizing the coloniality of gender, I propose to tell the stories that emerge from the lived experiences of women who are commonly viewed and detailed from an “outside gaze”—women who are commonly treated as statistics, depict them as “pobrecitas,”⁵⁵ “uneducated,” and “violated.” I refuse to feed this practice by distancing myself from a description that blames them

⁵⁵ “*Pobrecitas*” is a Spanish word that means “small poor women.” It is used colloquially, often to produce a sense of pity for someone.

for their lived experiences. Instead, I propose an understanding of the phenomenon as a totality, an entire diversity of experiences that are brought to life in a specific global, economic, political, and social environment. I aim to tell the stories of mestiza women and identify how social categories are intertwined within their bodies and result in the complexity of living through them (Mendieta, 2020; Ortiz Ocaña & Arias López, 2019).

Rather than ignoring diversities for the sake of a false collectivity of women, I intend to identify them and forge ways of acknowledging the historical and personal dynamics that shape modern relationships (Dulci & Malheiros, 2021). I plan to expose how and why they unfold in this very manner and sociopolitical context. To do this, I take refuge in Abya Yala feminisms; specifically, I intend to use feminist movements to historize our conditions and reflect on the structures that are to blame for the increase in several forms of violence against the bodies of women. My work is guided by the ideas that have formed Honduran feminism, which coincidentally serve as the main space for guidance and coalition.

To respond to the critiques made of both intersectional and decolonial methodologies, I intend to contribute to the act of decolonizing knowledge in the following ways:

1) Acknowledge colonial history and its legacy of power relations that results in modern ways of relating to one another. Instead of completely eradicating their use, I utilize “gender” and other social categories (religion, age, race, motherhood, etc.) as critical for analysis, being attentive to the complex racialized hybridization that has occurred over colonized bodies (Lugones, 2012a). It is inherent to this research to denounce how the colonial processes have marked the practices that define contemporary relations—colonial processes that were then interchanged with imperial ones, having a lasting effect on current political economies and societies. I also maintain that by

naming the problems entangled within intersecting social categories, we will get closer to finding collective solutions for them (Ahmed, 2016).

Furthermore, although we must be aware of intersecting social categories, instead of separating them we ought to think of them together:

2) Connect the intersecting social categories that include gender, religion, race, class, and many others. This is not done by adding up or naming the various oppressions, but by finding the ways in which they are intertwined through the bodies of women, and starting to understand them from the intricacy of living by and through them (Ortiz Ocaña & Arias López, 2019).

Finally, decolonial feminism urges us to ponder how to do this:

3) Resist: the colonized bodies not only accepted the colonial mandate but also resisted it. It is through this resistance that various untold stories unfold (Lugones, 2014). This entails going further than simply historicizing the previously established conceptions of gender, which has been and must be done (Álvarez, 1998). This also incorporates the current economic, political, and social realities that have been disentangled from history and continue to surround and shape lives.

I do this by illustrating my findings through an intersectional and decolonial analysis of in-depth narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic of all beings who identify as women. Moreover, from this point forward, I would like to highlight the stories of women by integrating them into existing structures of social theory. I do this as follows:

4) Embed the stories of women into the theory of gender regimes. Gender regimes theory was developed by British sociologist Sylvia Walby (Walby, 1989, 2020) and serves to structure women's truths by addressing the alternative forms of gender relations at the macro level. She depicts patriarchy as embedded in the various systems (economic, political, and social structures). For her, "structures of patriarchy" and "gender regimes" are used interchangeably.

The theory identifies patterns of inequality between women and men, and how these patterns have changed through time and space. The author refers to these changes as gender transformations (Walby, 2003). In other words:

My grandmother lived and resisted Honduran patriarchy, yet she did so differently from my mother because they had different experiences regarding economic, political, and social access. I, on the other hand, also resist patriarchal structures in the modern day, yet not in the same manner. Thus, I focus on understanding the modern gendered bodies that emerge from the fracture that occurred during colonization, focusing on the contemporary realities shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This recognition allows us to rethink gender in ways that analyze the unequal relationships between "mestizo men" and "mestiza women," yet in a changing and dynamic context, as gender oppression does not correspond only to the interests of Western powers. This approach recognizes both the commonalities between the colonizers and the Indigenous populations, and those that persist within our mixed populations (Paredes, 2012). That is to say, the patriarchal system survived, transformed even. This one thought invites us to create strategies to overcome what emerged into such oppressions.

Ultimately, and extremely significantly for this study, the state's regulation of domestic violence embraces an important transformation that must be given space for proper understanding. In this sense, feminisms serve to illustrate current gendered experiences. For Sylvia Walby, feminisms are not only highly relevant in helping us analyze the ways gender regimes are resisted but are also crucial for historicizing the different gender transformations that have evolved. Thus, her theory becomes key to structuring and holding the intersectional and decolonial feminist analyses in place.

In addition, academics have identified the roles of market economies, political provisioning, and regulations as driving change within the different gender regimes, which Walby later categorizes into economic, political, civil society, and violence regimes (Walby, 2005). All regimes are lived in two different spheres, domestic and public. According to the experts, a noticeable shift in gender relations occurs when women's confinement to the domestic sphere changes (Walby, 2003). This one fact helps us theorize gendered transformations as historical formations. Furthermore, it allows us to structure the increase of violence endured by women during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban Honduras: while the global population was relegated to the domestic sphere to avoid the spread of the virus, women's bodies witnessed significant gender transformations.

Consequently, through my work, I intend to illustrate the realities that exist in Honduran urban and peri-urban territories, using gender regimes to structure the collected stories, and tell them in the complex ways that they are lived, rather than simply defining those gendered relations as better or worse.

3.7 Diving deeper: Exploring the gender regimes

In her earlier work, Sylvia Walby started developing gender regimes as a theory by exploring the concept of “patriarchy,” which has been both vital and controversial within feminists’ analyses (Walby, 1989). As previously established through the different feminist understandings of gender, one of the major criticisms of the concept of patriarchy, as much as of the concept of gender itself, is that it lacks holistic integration of all aspects of gender inequality, while failing to incorporate the diversity of the experiences of all women (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000).

Apparently, feminists have been unable to identify a precise historical and cross-cultural alternative that pins down women’s subordination. Therefore, the author introduces a way to theorize patriarchy by taking its various forms into account: 1) economic, 2) political, 3) civil society, and 4) violence, both within the domestic and the public spheres (Walby, 2020).

Within the examinations of the economic regime, the author highlights the patriarchal mode of production that divides the tasks done by men and women. In our case, this is “mestizo men” and “mestiza women,” with “mestiza women’s” labor relegated to the domestic sphere, leaving them mainly responsible for childcare and domestic unpaid labor, and, in many cases in Honduras, childcare for other and more privileged women. This has established a dependency on their male counterparts, as much as an economic dependency on the higher classes.

This regime was first comprehended as the patriarchal relations in paid work, which illustrates the exclusion of women from waged opportunities. In the limited cases where women are given the opportunity to participate in any mode of production, they are often relegated to part-time jobs and a wage gap that is prominent in modern times. It is within this regime that occupational segregation occurs, and women have flourished in nursing, teaching, or any other work that

allows them to foster their caregiving abilities, while men are given full-time wages and employment in diverse sectors. This regime, like all gender regimes, has transformed through time and through different contexts, yet it serves as a prominent form of significant inequality in all its transformations. The economic regime cannot be comprehended outside the relations within the capitalist system (Beneria & Sen, 1981; Bowles et al., 1975; Walby, 1989, 2007). Here, Walby highlights the different forms of economy, which she defines as Western and non-Western economies. A few oversee the restructuring and deregulation of the global economic forum, creating opportunities for women, mostly in Europe and America, while the other economies are mere victims of those same drivers. The global inequality fosters greater inequality between women and men in the least developed countries (Walby, 2009).

The examination of the political regime is based on Sylvia Walby's findings about the patriarchal state, predominantly pointing out women's exclusion from state resources, in terms of both participation and representation (Walby, 1989). Our long-awaited opportunity to vote serves as a prominent example. Other milestones can also be comprehended through women's and feminist histories, including women's late opportunity to access education and congress, and current struggles within those spheres.

Included in this regime is the representation of women's interests in political decision-making including trade unions and feminist movements and changed behaviors toward family practices. Also important are the laws that ought to protect women, including those on access to health and maternity leave, and states' overall influence on all institutions that impact women's lives and citizenship. The institution of marriage also serves as an important example, as well as opportunities for separation and divorce and how they are operationalized by the state (Walby,

2021), and, relatedly, how domestic violence is handled—or, in the case of Honduras, not handled—by the state. The regime includes the way the law operates as much as how decision-makers encounter, establish, and follow the law. The role of organized religion also persists within a patriarchal state, allowing for an analysis that includes the impacts of religion and religious beliefs in state practices.

The civil society regime was first illustrated through practices regarding intimacy and sexuality. This regime is understood within a neocolonial imposition of heterosexuality that complemented the division of gendered bodies. Sexual relations and how they are perceived, replicated, and accepted become prominent within civil society relations and actions. This regime includes social practices that condone sexual abuse toward women, and that simultaneously encourage men to have multiple heterosexual partners to prove their masculinity. Sexuality then becomes a powerful tool for the subordination of women, and thus sexuality and intimacy are transformed into patriarchal contributors of lasting and current inequalities (Walby, 1989). To illustrate this in the Honduran context, I expose the Judeo-Christian ideas that surround women on topics of family and motherhood. I expose the role of religious institutions in the peripheries, as well as their impact on women residents and women survivors. I argue that women's value in society is relegated to their ability to establish heterosexual partnerships and, with them, families. This is compounded by the limited access to social alternatives and spaces for recreation and freedom. The civil society regime also includes all sets of discourses and patriarchal practices, including education, media, and social narratives and overall social interactions (Walby, 2009, 2020).

Finally, the violence regime, first introduced as male violence, illustrates how men use violence as a way of exerting power over women. Violence is used not as a means to an end, but as

another strong form of women's subordination. It includes all forms of violence, including physical and sexual abuse as well as psychological and systemic violence. Yet, I argue that violence against women is a transversal factor. It is in fact a result of all regimes, more than a separate regime: I place it center-stage and not as a distinct regime. Moreover, the narratives guide us into comprehending how domestic violence cuts across all sociopolitical and economic structures (Pascall & Lewis, 2004; Walby, 1989, 2009).

The importance of diving deeper into the gender regimes is that it enables me to introduce the structure that holds the conceptual basis of this work and helps me a) perceive it, and b) tell the stories in a structured manner. I intend to deepen the analysis and understand domestic violence by pointing out the main institutions that generate, regulate, naturalize, and replicate domestic violence, and ultimately increased it during the pandemic. I will do this by incorporating women's diverse social categories and experiences. Sylvia Walby's structure is rigorous enough to be an effective tool for a clearer analysis and paint a picture of the phenomenon, and it allows for embedment within the Honduran urban context. I also find the theory helpful in identifying the agency women possess, allowing us to map the options women actively choose and, more importantly, the ones that are available to them. For this work, I name those options acts of resistance. This will be further illustrated through the empirical chapters.

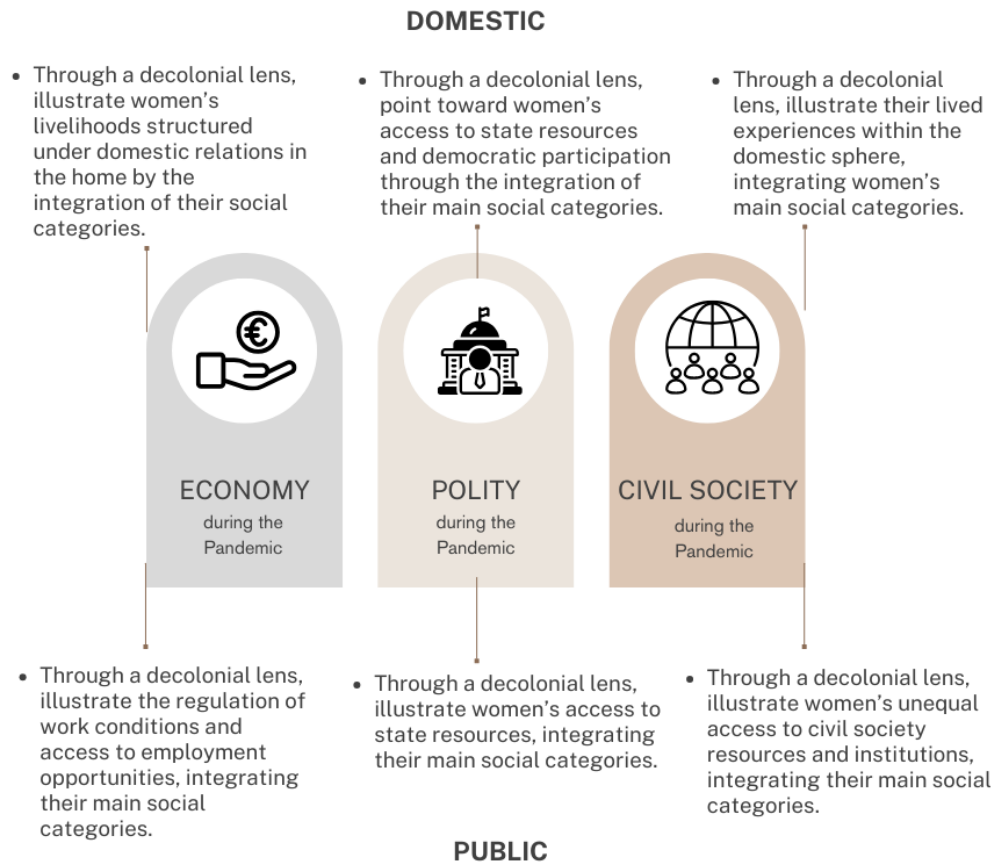
I have borrowed the table elaborated by Sylvia Walby in her latest work (Walby, 2020) regarding the varieties of gender regimes, to help us visualize the regimes as follows:

Table 1: Varieties of gender regime by Sylvia Walby

Gender regimes	Varieties of gender regime			
	Domestic	Public		
		ALL (segregated but no excluding)	Neoliberal / unequal, thin democracy	Social democratic / less unequal and deeper democracy
1) Economy (domestic, state, market, capital)	Women's livelihood structured under domestic relations in the home	Women's livelihood from free wage labor	Little regulation of working conditions	Regulation by polity for equality and balanced use of time
2) Polity (national state, local state, polity, organized religion)	No democratic participation	Some democratic participation	Thin democracy, suffrage	Deeper democracy, presence and breadth

Gender regimes	Varieties of gender regime			
	Domestic	Public		
		ALL (segregated but no excluding)	Neoliberal / unequal, thin democracy	Social democratic / less unequal and deeper democracy
3) Civil society (sexuality and intimacy, projects and movements)	Confined to domestic	Not domesticated	Unequal, commercialized, thin	Reciprocal, mutual, thick
4) Violence (interpersonal, intergroup, state–individual, interstate)	Violence by domestic perpetrators, not regulated by the state	State claims a monopoly on legitimate violence	High levels of violence and criminals, security state	Violence criminalized by state welfare to support victims / welfare state

Figure 2: The conceptual structure



What follows is meant to illustrate the way the research is structured. I have divided the empirical chapters based on the different gender regimes that replicate and nourish the violence women endure through 1) the economy, 2) the polity, and 3) the socio-culture. Each chapter is narrated through the voices of a) experts, b) residents, and c) survivors. Their narratives have been analyzed through a feminist inspectional and decolonial lens and are meant to be delivered through that lens.

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes how this research was designed, planned, and executed. It contains my motivation to work on the topic, stating the methodology and methods utilized to achieve an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. It contains all the information regarding the process of data collection, from its handling to its analysis, including ethical and anonymity concerns. This same process of deepening understanding led me to choose and answer the research questions proposed. The chapter also reflects my positionality regarding the overall research.

4.1 Main objective of the study

The primary objective of the study is to examine and explore the lived experiences and conditions that put women at greater risk of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in the urban areas of the Central District of Honduras.

4.2 Central research question

How did urban households transform into life-threatening spaces for those who are women during the COVID-19 pandemic?

4.3 Main research questions

- 1) What were the living conditions of women residents and women survivors of domestic violence in the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) What were the factors that increased violence against women residents and women survivors of domestic violence in the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- 3) What were the protective alternatives for women residents and women survivors of domestic violence during the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?

4.4 Subquestions

- 4) What are the dynamics of violence against women survivors in urban spaces in the Central District?
- 5) How is domestic violence performed, produced, and / or resisted in urban spaces of the Central District?
- 6) How is the sociohistorical context of the urban spaces in the Central District of Honduras implicated in domestic violence representations?
- 7) What are the structural conditions that put women survivors at greater risk of domestic violence?
- 8) How does domestic violence intersect within other systems of oppression, such as on the political, socioeconomic, and / or interpersonal level?

4.5 Research motivation: Choosing the research subject

In March 2020, I landed in Honduras, ready to pursue the data collection phase of my PhD on a different though related subject. At the very same time, the true significance of the pandemic was becoming apparent, both in my country and in the wider world. Guided by my supervisor, my tutor, and the Center for Development Research (Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung—ZEF faculty), I was able to understand the importance of adapting as a researcher. Through all the changes that were forced on me, a constant interest in understanding the differentiated experiences women were facing in Honduras remained intact. With that constant in mind, it was

impossible to ignore the increased levels of domestic violence that were shaping the world, and, within a precarious structure of protection alternatives, were resulting in unprecedented levels of domestic violence against and through the bodies of women in Honduras. Therefore, more than having chosen a research subject, I claim that the context of the pandemic intensified realities for women and girls, fostering a subject that could no longer be overlooked. Therefore, it selected me as a researcher and motivated me to adapt at a rapid and changing pace.

I lived and studied in the Central District of Honduras for the first 26 years of my life, yet it was on graduation that I first became invested in development initiatives. Throughout the process of becoming a development professional in the areas of communications, monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge management, I was rapidly exposed to and responsible for gender mainstreaming and providing accountability for donors. This became prominent in my professional life. My earlier roles led me to interview a diversity of “beneficiaries,” a term given to people receiving or benefiting from international projects and donations. This encouraged me to explore the impacts of development projects on overlooked populations, often represented by women. These experiences formed my first capabilities as a researcher, allowing me to familiarize myself with the subject of gender inequality, and, in particular, exposed me to the different realities that women and girls endure in high-conflict areas, sparking a particular interest in the conditions fostered by urban spaces.

I found myself concerned as our society continued to engage in dynamics that accept all implications regarding unequal rights, positions, and opportunities for women and girls. I became curious to understand how all members of society, including myself, came to be, and to accept the patriarchal legacy that characterizes modern relations in the country. I eventually

enrolled for a master's program (MA) in International Studies, specializing in development and conflict resolution, with the objective of understanding the impacts of gender inequality in the country. After having acquired knowledge of the damaging implications of such inequalities, it became evident that understanding why and how we continue to replicate gender-unequal dynamics was my next step.

4.6 Research methods

4.6.1 Research area

The research focuses on unraveling women's experiences in urban spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically exploring the risk factors that account for the increased levels of domestic violence in the Central District of Honduras. The research area is constituted by the urban spaces within the Central District, with a focus on Los Pinos and La Era peripheral settlements. Both settlements are key to this research, to make visible the precarious situation of women living in the urban peripheries of the city, where settlements are characterized by extreme poverty, overcrowding, lack of basic services, high unemployment rates, and urban violence. They also constitute the most socioeconomically oppressed and overlooked populations of the Central District during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were prioritized by the state and the U.S. Government as well as international cooperation initiatives due to the high levels of inequality and homicide that distinguish both settlements (Ackermann, 2016; Centro de investigación y promoción de los derechos humanos (CIPRODEH), 2012).

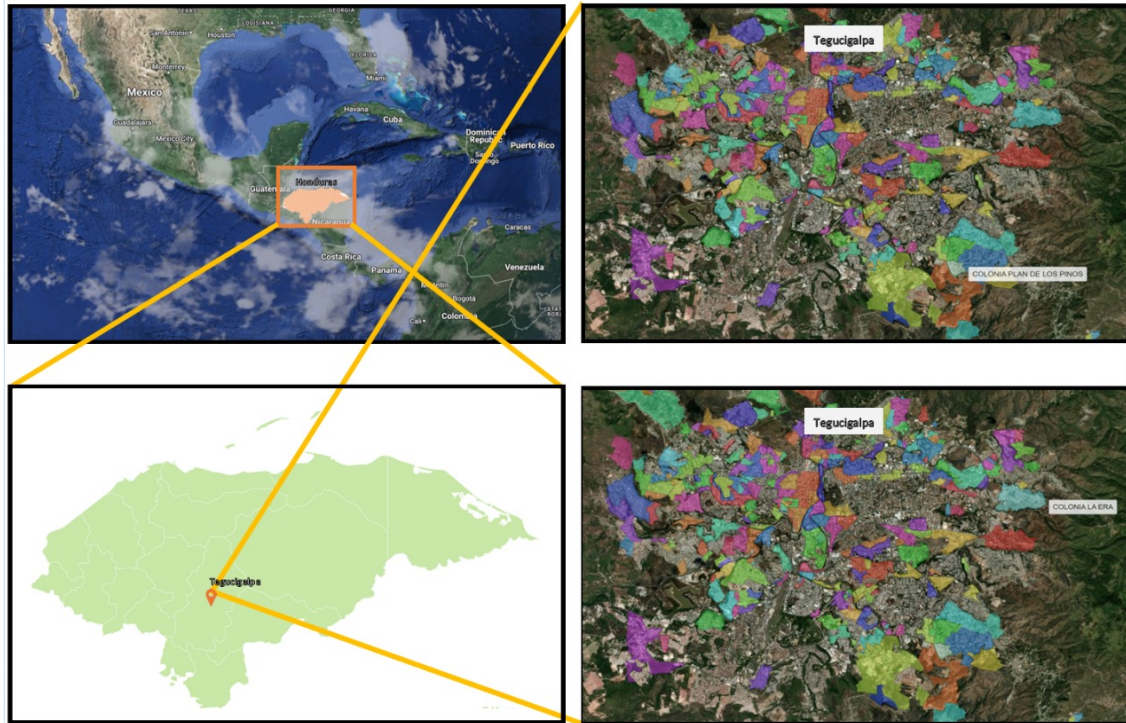
Additionally, for this research study, domestic violence survivors were addressed through different institutions and feminist organizations, thus potentially differing in location from the

rest of the respondents. Their various locations, including the Central District's women's shelter and other organizations, are withheld for anonymity and safety concerns. Nevertheless, their voices are key for guiding this research as they foster understanding of the experiences of women survivors in urban and peri-urban areas of the Central District of Honduras.

An illustration of Los Pinos and La Era peri-urban settlements is provided in figures 3 and 4.

The official coordinates of the La Era and Los Pinos settlements found in Google Maps are shown in Figure 3, below. I also developed a research map utilizing the Open Data Geographic Information System available in the Central District Mayor's Office website (Figure 4) (Alcaldía Municipal del Distrito Central, 2024).

Figure 4: Study area: Location of the La Era and Los Pinos settlements in the Central District of Honduras (image created by the author)



The diverse colors on the maps correspond to the various peri-urban settlements within the sectors of La Era and Los Pinos, highlighting the unique characteristics and spatial distributions of these areas.

4.6.2 Accessing the respondents

4.6.2.1 Referral sampling / snowball sampling

Referral sampling or “snowball” sampling, widely used in qualitative research, relies on referrals from initially sampled respondents to other persons believed to have the characteristics of interest, as well as availability for interviews. This non-probability sampling technique allows researchers to identify existing subjects who provide not only overall information about the

theme of interest but also referrals to recruit respondents with specific traits required for the research study. In this research, it was possible to generate a sample based purely on referrals (Furseth, 2017; Potter & Potter, 2020).

Previously established networks allowed me to contact residents and community leaders from the two selected areas of interest. Fortunately, they remained responsive and willing to provide details and referrals for the research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this sampling technique, the desired characteristics of participants were established. The research aimed to foster equal participation, targeting Hondurans, both women and men as well as LGBTQIA+ members, living in peri-urban settlements. Focusing on obtaining a diverse sample through an intersectional approach, participants were selected mainly by their membership of varied social categories. This allowed the research to obtain a sample containing different perspectives based on diversity of gender, age, religion, and occupation, to mention some of the social categories identified during the interview processes. The sample is composed of people who worked as well as people who were unemployed, single mothers and fathers, married people, older and younger people, widowed people, and those who are religious and not, fostering the inclusion of respondents from varied social categories in the sample.

I was guided by the Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla, a feminist organization composed of advisers, activists, and counselors, as well as virtual meetings with the coordinator of the Central District's shelter for women, Asociación Calidad de Vida. In parallel, listening to the opinions and lived narratives of community leaders in the settlements of Los Pinos and La Era, I quickly identified national activists and experts dealing with the subject of domestic violence and gender-related topics. I also identified experts with experience in the peri-

urban settlements, incorporating a wide range of representatives from international cooperation agencies and projects, the national sector, and grassroots organizations, mainly focusing on those working on the frontlines, including shelter workers, domestic violence service providers, and counselors. The counselors led us to domestic violence survivors who offered to share their experiences. Research was thus conducted in two phases: a first phase focused on residents living in Los Pinos and La Era peri-urban settlements during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a second phase focused on frontline workers in domestic violence and survivors of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the initial subjects of interest were properly identified, a snowball sampling technique was then used to identify more participants.

The sampling criteria for the first phase of the research were as follows:

- a) any given background, fostering a diverse group by taking into consideration varied social categories (age, religion, occupation, religion), living in either the Los Pinos or the La Era settlement in the Central District with access to a mobile phone during the COVID-19 pandemic
- b) a different background than the previously interviewed respondents (different age, employment abilities, sector, etc.)

The sampling criteria for the second phase of the research were as follows:

- a) worker on the frontlines of domestic violence, either as a policy adviser, counselor, or shelter worker or within a local feminist organization in the urban areas of the Central District with access to a mobile phone or computer during the COVID-19 pandemic

- b) domestic violence survivor who was able, safe, and psychologically cleared by either the psychologist or an expert in the feminist movement to participate in the mobile phone interview during the COVID-19 pandemic

4.6.3 Gatekeepers and research field entry

Research about both 1) residents living in the La Era and Los Pinos peri-urban settlements, and 2) domestic violence survivors is considered an extremely sensitive undertaking. Those in the first category are considered vulnerable populations, not only due to the precariousness of the resources available to these settlements but also due to the high presence and control of gangs in the area, often limiting participants in engaging in monitoring practices or information collection. The second category is a highly sensitive matter as domestic violence survivors are not only a risk group, but also in some cases they remain unsafe and cannot report on their identity or location. Most survivors suffer from psychological trauma such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), insomnia, and paranoia, which can be triggered through interview processes and the recounting of events. Therefore, additional caution was taken while accessing all respondents through trustworthy and well-known local leaders and organizations.

Gatekeepers for the first group of respondents represent people with insider knowledge and public participation as well as acknowledgment and acceptance from residents. In the case of this research, highly respected community leaders served as a key entry to settlement narratives. In Los Pinos, Agripina Cantillano, water board president and human rights advocate, was contacted directly through previously established networks to access narratives from the diverse sectors of the Los Pinos settlement. In the case of the La Era settlement in the San Miguel District, the pastor Carla Martínez and her husband, the pastor Moises Aguilar, who are active religious

leaders and community activists, were able to facilitate and provide access to interviews with residents from the La Era settlement.

In terms of accessing domestic violence respondents, social media advertising and communications about protection alternatives for women and girls suffering domestic violence, as well as the identification of recognized systems composed of women's organizations, allowed me to contact the frontline workers directly. Through these interviews, especially with the coordinators of the Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla, as well as virtual meetings with the coordinator of the Central District's shelter for women, Asociación Calidad de Vida, I was able to get, first of all, an overall perspective on the historical phenomenon of domestic violence in the country, and second, the opportunity to map and interview all key actors. Follow-up interviews and conversations with frontline workers then allowed me to contact domestic violence survivors who were able, safe, and willing to share their experiences. Domestic violence survivor interviews, both tools and respondents, had to be cleared either by the psychologist of the women's shelter or by counselors in the women's organizations. Most importantly, domestic violence survivors had to be willing to share their narratives.

4.6.4 Research tools

To respond to the concern of “measuring” violence against women, I make explicit my qualitative approach, for two reasons:

The phenomenon of domestic violence is underreported as only 10% of women experiencing domestic violence file a report (UN Women, 2022). Therefore, focusing on hard data reinforces an empiricist bias to knowledge. Few theoretical approaches have been developed without

collecting the results of measurements or dialoguing with the “data.” A multifactorial and complex phenomenon such as domestic violence can only be thoroughly understood in a flexible and qualitative matter, to avoid a disconnect between theory and data (Castro & Riquer, 2003).

Following a qualitative, intersectional, and decolonial feminist approach, three different flexible and semi-structured interviews (see Annex 1) were put together. The interviews were designed to target the following:

- 1) open-narrative interviews of individuals living in peri-urban settlements in the Central District of Honduras
- 2) in-depth interviews with domestic violence survivors
- 3) open-narrative interviews with frontline workers in domestic violence and experts on different disciplines dealing with domestic violence

Complementing the intersectional referral process, all interviews were designed to allow respondents to identify themselves, limiting the interviewer’s impositions on their own descriptions after the interviewer had gathered general socioeconomic information (age, status, location, employment conditions) about respondents through direct contact with gatekeepers; the interviews made it possible to corroborate general information as well, as they permitted respondents to share, through their narratives, experiences in additional categories such as religious beliefs or circumstances, which led to the collection of interviews with specific and diverse experiences within the pandemic. Additionally, simple, everyday language was used throughout the interview process, and instead of intersectionality being densely described as an academic term, all interviews were conducted to collect information regarding each individual

experience. These methods were complemented by archive desk work and online ethnography, which enabled the gathering of information throughout the research (Guerrero Bejarano, 2016).

- Flexible and semi-structured interviews

Flexible and semi-structured interviews are methods widely used in feminist research to achieve closeness to respondents. For this research, the semi-structured interviews (see Annex 1) contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions based on a semi-structured interview guide, which served as a scheme of questions and topics that the interviewer needed to explore. Interview guides were useful for exploring the narratives of many respondents in a more comprehensive manner. They also managed to keep the interview focused on the desired purpose of the research (T. B. Hernández & García, 2008). While they were utilized mainly to guide the conversation, allowing the interviewers to clearly identify the important topics, they also provided the freedom to change words and incorporate follow-up questions when necessary. Semi-structured interviews are meant to create a comfortable conversation with respondents, overlooking time constraints and rigor. Following feminist principles, the interviews remained adaptable, prioritizing respondents' availability, both regarding their time and emotions. Taking into consideration the fact that the context generated in the COVID-19 pandemic had severe impacts on mental and emotional well-being, the semi-structured interviews were revised by a psychologist, ensuring that the content did not revictimize potential domestic violence survivors or threaten the emotional well-being of any of the respondents.

- Open-narrative interviews

Fitting in with qualitative feminist research, open-narrative interviews were utilized as a means of collecting respondents' stories about their lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Guided by the understanding that social groups and communities tell stories through words and meanings specific to their life experiences, open narratives were chosen as the most appropriate approach to understanding the diverse experiences that the different respondents were living (Fine and Torre, 2019). This allowed the respondents, and their own perspective, to be placed at the center of the research. Open-narrative interviews were used to involve respondents in the research process by fostering dialogue and enabling the sharing of stories, anecdotes, memories, and feelings. They also revealed the place, time, and context of each interview, allowing a diversity of statements to be conveyed as they referred to each personal experience. Although remote interviews were utilized for this research, most phone interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the conditions women and men lived in during the COVID-19 pandemic as they remained the only source of communication most people possessed within the restrictions. Open narratives allowed me to go beyond data collection, fostering meanings, specifics, and deeper understandings of lived events (Amezcuca, 2003). Each narrative session lasted between 20 and 60 minutes, depending mostly on the respondent's availability and willingness to share. Conducted in Spanish, interviews were audio-recorded if participants consented; in those that were not recorded, following the respondent's choice, thorough notes were taken.

- In-depth narrative interviews

In-depth interviews were collected to get detailed and intensive information about specific respondents. For this research, they were especially suitable for the interviews conducted with domestic violence survivors. In-depth interviews require great attention as it is the interviewer's

duty to probe answers (Bartra, 2012). This research was supported by a skilled interviewer experienced in probing conversation and understanding gender-based violence and vulnerabilities faced by domestic violence respondents. The interviewer maximized the technique, providing information as well as generating understanding and empathy toward the respondents. The interviews served as comprehensive and extensive spaces to discuss aspects of the respondent's life, collecting their individual experience regarding domestic violence, specifying different violence situations, collecting details about the relationships they engaged in, and providing a safe space to validate their emotions. Each narrative session lasted between 40 minutes and 100 minutes, depending mostly on the respondent's willingness to share. Conducted in Spanish, all interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the respondents and serve as a key and guide for the entire research.

- Archival desk research and historical research

Archival research methods were applied to facilitate the examination of documents and textual materials produced by local and international organizations. Specifically, due to the overlooked location of the urban neighborhoods chosen for this research, there was an active recovery of work, including papers, reports, and methodologies on the areas of study, with the aim of gathering previously established and scattered efforts (Hernández Carrera, 2014). Additionally, academic books, policy documents, and peer-reviewed articles from online and paper sources in libraries in Germany and Honduras were extensively utilized. I also obtained directly from authors their peer-reviewed journal articles regarding the peri-urban subjects in this dissertation, engaging in a variety of forums and exchanges with other scholars. Finally, due to the constant need to stay informed during the pandemic, especially regarding government-imposed

restrictions, I followed all press releases on communications from the state, as well as local newspapers, national statistics, and feminist organizations' news and reports. To manage the secondary data sources in terms of citations, library access, and creating the final reference list, I made use of Zotero software. (The sources used are listed in the references section of this dissertation.)

- Virtual ethnography

Virtual ethnography is a qualitative research approach that facilitates the observation, identification, and exploration of social interactions that take place in virtual environments. Based on traditional ethnography, virtual ethnography transforms settings into virtual interactions, often found on internet sites (Domínguez et al., 2007).

Advancing digital media and information technologies proved to be essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilized by policymakers and decision-makers to communicate COVID-19-related restrictions, advancements, and news, virtual platforms became a prominent source of information, especially in topics dealing with gender-based violence. In the case of domestic violence, platforms like social media, web announcements, and articles became a significant channel for feminist and human rights organizations to disseminate campaigns and promote virtual activism, mainstreaming the alternatives, advice, and options for women suffering domestic violence (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2020).

Virtuality opened up a wide range of cyber-interactions that include the provision and sharing of information and fostering the participation of civil society to allow victims themselves to report abuses, complaints, and experiences of violence during the pandemic using their social media

platforms (Ringrose & Mendes, n.d.). This allowed the researcher to stay informed about violence dynamics and statistics and alternatives for women and girls. I followed all nine feminist, local, and international organizations dealing with domestic violence in Honduras through social media groups and webinar interactions. Additionally, due to the transfer of work dynamics into the virtual workplace during the pandemic, most international organizations' events, forums, and conferences were moved to online platforms, allowing me to join over 11 social media and web shows, discussions, and debates that focused on the topic of domestic violence in Honduras. These platforms also allowed me to participate as a guest speaker in two interviews held online by local and international organizations regarding this research and the topic of domestic violence in the Central District. The general discourses gathered through this method contributed to the data collected through open-ended and in-depth interviews.

- Online discussion panel

Seven months after the data collection process ended, I held an online discussion panel as part of the first phase of my data analysis process. On February 14, 2021, six key actors and frontline workers of domestic violence in Honduras were invited to an online debate called “Patriarchal conversations and what else?” (see Annex 2), with the intention of broadening the conversation and generating a discussion among participants so they could share their experiences of either supporting survivors during the pandemic and / or researching the issue of domestic violence. The panel focused on answering five key and guiding questions divided among the expert panelists. The questions, intended to foster discussion, focused on clarifying the factors that exacerbated the problem of domestic violence in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. It allowed for a deeper reflection on the preliminary findings of the research.

Table 2: Operationalization of research methods

Research question	Research method	Sources	Concepts
What were the living conditions of women residents and women survivors of domestic violence in the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Open-ended interviews with residents Expert interviews Archival and historical research	Interview narratives and findings COVID-19 pandemic and women's reports Organizational briefs from grassroots organizations Newspapers Government measures platform	Food insecurity Water scarcity Overcrowding Peripheral settlements
What were the factors that increased violence against women residents and women survivors of domestic violence in the first 5 months?	Open-ended interviews with residents Expert interviews In-depth interviews with survivors of domestic violence	Interview narratives and findings Reports of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic	

Research question	Research method	Sources	Concepts
What were the protective alternatives for women residents and women survivors of domestic violence during the first 5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Archival and historical research	Feminist organizations and grassroots organizations' briefs, reports, and advertising	
	Open-ended interviews with residents	Interview narratives and findings	
	Domestic violence operators	Reports of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic	
	In-depth interviews with survivors of domestic violence	Public and virtual reporting	
	Archival and historical research		
	Virtual ethnography		
	Online discussion panel		

4.7 Research overview

4.7.1 Transforming the research: Channels for data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic

As safety for all participants and the research team became a fundamental concern among the COVID-19 health crisis, the channels had to transform and adapt to the context. The research execution followed the measures set by the national government; all channels selected to collect the data for this research constituted remote means. All interviews were collected via mobile phone and video calls. In the case of residents in peri-urban settlements and domestic violence survivors, the interviews were conducted by mobile phone. In the case of the experts and frontline domestic violence workers, the interviews were adapted to online video interviews utilizing the Zoom web resource.

4.7.2 Research team

Understanding the importance of collecting data in the first months of change brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, I rapidly formed a research team with valid experience in the peri-urban sector of the Central District as well as significant experience working with respondents with the characteristics required for this research. This allowed me to connect to the diversity of participants the research required. Following ZEF's advice for researchers, I incorporated men and women in the research team, as women respondents commonly feel more comfortable with female interviewers and men respondents tend to feel more comfortable with male interviewers (Fraser & Taylor, 2020). The same is the case for respondents who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, especially in subjects regarding gender-based violence (Potter & Potter,

2020). The formation of a diverse research team also contributed to the intersectional research design implemented throughout this research.

The description of the research team follows in Table 3.

Table 3: Research team

Head researcher and interviewer Maryoriet Rosales Salgado	In charge of the overall research progress and execution, I also carried out all expert interviews and all interviews with women living in the peri-urban settlements.
Research assistant Ricardo Medina	With over 10 years of experience in peri-urban settlements, specializing in research assistance and projects fostering prevention and interruption of violence in gang-controlled areas, Ricardo was in charge of engaging in constant communication with community leaders. He was able to organize participants, ensuring their availability as well as delivering the incentives provided in the data collection process.
Interviewer and LGBTQIA+ specialist Danny Barrientos	With his extensive experience working as a documentary and anthropological photographer for more than 5 years, specializing in highly vulnerable populations in the country, Danny utilized his expertise to carry out interviews with men in both peri-urban settlements, serving also as the interviewer for any participant who identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Domestic violence interviewer and gender specialist Karen Duarte	A feminist activist, with a post-graduate degree in Gender Studies and over 19 years of experience coordinating programs in the field of international development, Karen utilized her experience in peri-urban settlements as well as her knowledge of domestic violence to carry out the interviews with domestic violence survivors.
Substitute interviewer and development specialist Ana Karina Suazo	With over 8 years of experience in project management in the research area, Ana conducted the interviews with women where intricate schedule coordination was required. This task proved necessary when respondents were available in a narrow time window that fell outside the availability of the head researcher.

Furthermore, every week during the data collection phase, through virtual meetings, the team engaged in sharing experiences regarding interviews, afterthoughts, prominent narratives, and even emotions brought up in the research. This allowed me to further reflect on the data collected, allowing us to foster important debates and deepening our understanding of the subject matter.

4.7.3 Summary of interview data

From March 8–July 10, 2020, the research team collected 67 mobile phone and video-call interviews divided as follows—the interview data generated from the research phase is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of interview data

Respondents	Number of interviews	Channel of interviews
Experts/state representatives and justice operators	5	Video call
Experts/cooperation agency representatives	9	Video call
Experts/academics	3	Video call
Experts/grassroots organizations	2	Video call
Domestic violence frontline workers/grassroots organizations	8	Video call
Residents who identified as women in Los Pinos and La Era	20	Mobile phone
Residents who identified as men in Los Pinos and La Era	11	Mobile phone
Residents who identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community in Los Pinos and La Era	1	Mobile phone
Women who identified as survivors of domestic violence	8	Mobile phone
Total interviews	67	

It is important to acknowledge expert interviews as crucial in comprehending the issue on a macro level. These interviews played a crucial role in shaping the research direction, guiding the selection of respondents who were essential to addressing the research question effectively. Nonetheless, not all expert interviews underwent transcription, as their purpose was primarily to provide guidance and offer points of clarification.

Within the scope of the research analysis, particular emphasis was placed on transcribing and analyzing the insights shared by frontline workers engaged in domestic violence and violence prevention. Additionally, the heart of the analysis lies in the interviews conducted with women residing in peri-urban settlements and women who have survived domestic violence. While interviews with men contributed to a valuable contextual comparison and granted a holistic perspective on gender nuances, it is important to note that their transcripts, while available, have not been integrated into the project's analysis. This decision stems from the aim of allocating substantial space within academia for the voices of women, especially given their historically limited representation.

4.8 Challenges and limitations encountered during data collection: The influence of channels and context

Under the guidelines and restrictions set worldwide to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the entire research was adapted to utilize phone and video calls, undoubtedly influencing the overall data collection.

The available channels restricted personal interaction between interviewers and respondents.

All interview settings were chosen following the stay-at-home policies, allowing both interviewers and respondents to remain in their homes while using the channels mentioned. Prior to each interview, the respondent was informed about the interview process with an information call, and in the case of domestic violence workers and experts, via email. This allowed all respondents to pick the optimal time for them to speak freely. In the case of open-narrative interviews with residents living in the peri-urban settlements and in-depth interviews with domestic violence survivors, during the interview process interviewers double-checked respondents' settings and availability, by simply asking each respondent to describe their setting and whether they were accompanied or alone during the interview. This was to ensure safety and allow respondents to discuss topics and answer comfortably. Furthermore, as a result of undeniable gender and cultural aspects in Honduran society, most men were interviewed by men and women were solely interviewed by women (Guerrero Bejarano, 2016; Hernández Carrera, 2014).

As with any research, there were limitations, which we are able to identify more clearly at this point. Due to the change in collection channels, which prevented us from meeting respondents in person, there was a clear inability to identify respondents by phenotype and race, with no opportunity to explore such issues. However, this has also served as an opportunity, allowing the respondents' narratives to naturally ignite their own identities and social categories.

Nevertheless, although race was clearly mentioned and considered in theory, it was not a social category mentioned in the respondents' interviews. Meanwhile, other social categories such as religion, gender, and even occupation served as clear tools for self-description. It should also be noted that 90% of the Honduran population is mestiza / mestizo / mestize. For certain Indigenous or Afro-descendant groups, there is barely representation in the Central District, where all the

data were collected. For optimal racial diversity, designs for future research in the country must consider the northern coasts and the western part of the country as research areas.

With an overall understanding of the Honduran context, the research team anticipated some potential challenges regarding the socioeconomic conditions that respondents would have, establishing incentives for each interview. There is debate over the action of paying participants and the implications it has for recruitment for research projects, as well as the influences it has on data (Zapata Rotundo & Hernández Arias, 2010). I considered how these issues were relevant to this research, specifically with socioeconomically challenged populations and how offering such incentives might attract different subsets of the population to participate (Carullo & Vaccarezza, 1997). In this case, I argue that gatekeepers account for most of the influence on the respondents rather than the incentive itself; nevertheless, it is important to mention that gatekeepers prioritized people who could use the help of the incentive, which led us to access extremely economically oppressed populations within an already vulnerable context that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This snowballing sampling to some extent contributed to the intersectional approach intended for this research.

Providing incentives during a conflict such as the context imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to foster high levels of engagement, faster recruit times, and a positive association with the research sponsors. The decision to provide such incentives for this research was based on the feminist approach selected to carry out the data collection phase, supported by the principles of expanding relationships between interviews and interviewers. This was an important consideration for designing effective incentives (Bartra, 2012).

Therefore, for both peri-urban settlements, incentives were administered via community leaders. In the case of Los Pinos, small €3.50 bags of basic groceries containing beans, rice, and corn flour were distributed to all respondents. In the case of La Era, an incentive in the form of mobile data was directly transferred to interviewers as soon as the interview was over. In the case of domestic violence survivors, incentives were directly consigned to the women's shelter in the form of food and other necessities at the time. The differences in incentives were the result of several conversations with community leaders and the shelter's director, who prioritized the resources needed by the different populations. I had to adapt to what the participants considered convenient and necessary. To ensure that interview ethics were not compromised, the incentive was not promoted and with the help of gatekeepers was left as merely a possibility in the case of collaborations. Essentially, respondents were informed of their right to withdraw their consent, at any given time, with no repercussions for the incentives provided.

4.8.1.1 Managing emotional interviews

The process of data collection for this research was emotionally demanding for the entire research team. The topics of food insecurity, unemployment, and precarity of resources under the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were as constant as they were common during individual open interviews. In some cases, peri-urban respondents elaborated on a series of troubling events and even shared their feelings with the research team. In other cases, respondents did not elaborate as much and limited themselves to answering the questions. In all cases, respondents were in extremely emotionally, socially, and economically vulnerable positions, transiting different contexts, mostly adapting to pandemic-imposed changes, and dealing with a prominent concern about availability of basic resources.

To support this claim, the following is an example of some comments that were familiar in all narratives:

Food? No, we don't have any income, neither my dad, my mom, nor me, are working. People have gifted us some rice or beans when they have it and that's how we are getting by. My mom's sisters live close by and sometimes help us out. People help you sometimes, but we have no income, no money at all. (Resident, 2020)

The biggest problem here is food, not the virus. People depend on work, selling food, selling water, most of them [in informal work] will do anything that is needed. Food is the most serious issue; if we won't die of the virus we will starve. (Resident, 2020)

In addition, the in-depth narratives regarding domestic violence were especially sensitive, as respondents shared their most traumatic experiences with the specialized interviewer. Constantly reminded that they could stop sharing at any moment, all respondents taking part in phone interviews chose to share their experiences openly. Every survivor interview represents an emotional and sensitive narrative; nonetheless, one that stood out for me was about a survivor we will name Resiliente ("Resilience") for the purposes of this research. She narrated her experience of being close to death:

After he told me, "I'm going to teach you to respect men," I was washing my hands, and while I was about to turn on the stove, my little girl shouted at me, "Mummy, watch out!" Then I saw him over me with a machete, with the intention of splitting my face in half. I stepped aside, he cut the left side of my throat through the jugular vein. I froze, I couldn't believe what was happening to me. I grabbed my throat, and the blood started coming out

and I told him, “You killed me,” and he said “Yes and I’m going to finish you off.” ... My daughter was screaming like crazy, while I was bleeding to death. I am alive by a miracle. (Survivor, 2020)

This narrative is highly moving and was managed professionally by the specialized interviewer. She thanked the respondent constantly for sharing, as well as allowing her time to express her feelings and reminding her of the option to stop at any time. Resiliente, however, chose to continue as she felt that it was good for her to open up about the experiences she had lived through, repeating how she did not want it to happen to other women and hoped her narrative could help others. As was the case with all domestic violence respondents in this research, she had previously shared her lived experiences with a psychologist.

Due to the intensity fostered by the narratives shared during the data collection phase, all members of the research team had the opportunity to access professional therapy sessions online after data collection was finalized. This was done in order to provide proper guidance to close the data collection phase properly. This allowed all of us to express the diversity of feelings that resulted from listening to and engaging with emotionally charged stories.

4.9 Who am I to tell these stories? Positionality and reflexivity

The term positionality in qualitative research describes the researcher’s world view and the position held about the research within specific social and political contexts. It is essential for all researchers to reflect on our own values and belief systems, because personal experiences often shape positionality (Bover, 2013). Our own position and beliefs clearly influence research processes, interpretation, and outcomes. It is through a reflexive approach that I was made

continually aware of my social positions, understanding that they are dynamic and dependent on my personal contexts. Additionally, as a proposed methodology for designing and executing the research, a decolonial and intersectional approach also became an important element to inspire personal reflection. By discussing several social positions and my personal and collective history, I started reflecting on my own gender, class, ethnicity, religion, lack of (dis)abilities, sexuality, education, geographical location, and other characteristics that might influence how I experience the world, and thus this research. I used the same interview structure targeted toward respondents on myself, identifying how different / similar the answers I provided were to those of the respondents. What follows is a reflection on my own positions.

I want to first position myself as mestiza, experiencing, like many others, several systems of oppression and privilege at the same time. To be mestiza means one cannot separate oneself from colonial history, as what I critically condemn throughout this process is also part of who I am. Born decades after the brutalization conducted to tame our “savage” bodies under the colonization mandate, I was meant to exist in the body of a woman, a mixed body, one that contains both a dominant and an oppressed epistemology inside it. This allows me to speak Spanish, a colonial language, which fortunately found an interesting use when mixed with the Nahuatl⁵⁶ that remained suppressed in our Indigenous bodies. Therefore, I claim that I speak both

⁵⁶ Nahuatl is an Aztec and Indigenous language that was used to communicate in Central America prior to colonization. After the Spanish colonized our territories, the ancestral language was lost, yet a large number of Nahuatlisms remain in Honduran and Central American Spanish.

Spanish and Honduran,⁵⁷ which allows me to use slang and local slang to react when colonial language is used “inappropriately.” I do this while understanding several experiences of being female in this country: I am constantly aware of my appearance and the collective fate that was chosen for me of becoming a wife first and mother second—one I have so far refused.

To be born a woman in this country means to address
the intersecting oppressions both at home and in Congress.
It is a constant battle over the right to our own bodies
and the creativity to navigate the persistent
threat in the streets. Looking a certain way, while borrowing from
other women a general understanding to resist the everyday.⁵⁸

Although I understand how to reduce my presence to become less of a distractor and avoid the male gaze, I was not born into impoverished conditions and was never addressed by gang members in my neighborhood. As a means of protecting me, my family distanced me from the “dangerous” realities of my homeland. Thus, I acknowledge my differentiated experience and the social class that provided me with access to private schooling. Moreover, in 2020, the pandemic year in which this research was birthed, I reentered my country as a young, middle-class former

⁵⁷ Honduran—or, as it’s commonly referred to, “Catracho”—means the use of the Spanish language in the country. In this case, it refers to the informal language that is spoken rather than written. Used especially by groups of people in the barrio, in markets or informal settings, “Honduran” refers to slang, including “street words.”

⁵⁸ Fragment from personal text entitled “They are killing us,” published in February 2021 on my blog: <https://www.marsalgado.net/writings-1/they-are-killing-us>. Accessed 22 June 2022.

development employee and migrant student. Unsurprisingly, the social categories I embody mark the inequality that prevails in the country.

I am alive today, because I am lucky, probably because of my privilege
or because I do not live in Honduras anymore, perhaps,
I am alive by destiny. However. I can also easily be dead
because every 38 hours a woman dies in Honduras at the hand of a
man, who claimed to love her first.

My entire history reminded me of the social positions that have placed me in a different context than that of the respondents. Representing cooperation agencies years ago allowed me to foster gatekeeper contact, which paradoxically marked a structural difference between us. The word of mouth fostered by participants about the research circled around “people doing research for a German University.” The fact that they could not meet us in person possibly contributed to an image of “outsiders,” no matter how “Honduran” or a “woman” I really felt like. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a different set of privileges I embody, as most, if not all, respondents were enduring enormous challenges to access food and basic services.

Domestic violence survivors in particular confronted me with a different set of positions. Not being a stranger to domestic abuse myself, I understood quite early that domestic violence does not observe class, yet it is usually the poorest and most disadvantaged women whose experiences of violence are researched and extensively shared. This is due largely to the fact that women like me benefit from social resources that allow us to navigate protective alternatives outside shelters and police stations. That is to say, we do not live experiences the same way, and therefore I

undertake this research aware of, and constantly thankful to, those who lent me their life narratives. To them I say, I will attempt to constantly check myself to better tell your story, herstory, our story.

I borrow this idea from decolonial thinkers Ahmed and Anzaldúa, regarding their deductions about telling other feminist stories to unravel how diversity works within the feminisms (Ahmed, 2016; Anzaldúa, 2009). In particular, Ahmed's work *Living a feminist life* encouraged me to start telling stories that were lent to us for an indefinite amount of time, acknowledging intersectionality first and moving further within my continent. These stories are meant to teach us how to think—feel, even—past the categorical logics that have been imposed (Ahmed, 2016).

I also take inspiration from the works of Korean American migrant Jeong-eun Rhee, who made me reflect on our writings as personal in *Decolonial feminist research: Haunting, rememory and mothers*. She uses her personal stories to compel decolonial readers to peruse connections in the stories of “others.” When speaking of “others” she refers to people of color. “Others” have not had the same opportunities and spaces to share their / our stories; in this case, others can also mean us, our untold stories.

I am also gratefully influenced by academic and healer Paulina Trejo Méndez. She encouraged me to follow my voice and contribute to decolonizing knowledge; she did this personally, and through her work *Decolonizing healing: Weaving the curandera path*, where she explores ideas on modernity / coloniality as well as feminist theorizing, while revealing local healing practices in Chiapas, Mexico. She encourages us to take a closer look at spirituality, which has been excluded by the dominant epistemologies. She bravely weaves through art and poetry the

medicinal history and stories that have long been ignored in the region (Trejo Méndez, 2021). I also got to share and talk to / with her, during which conversations she encouraged me to share our common language and ideas.

The work of these two authors opens a method with vast possibilities—possibilities I can finally see myself becoming a part of, since they trigger new spaces for wisdom and knowledge. They both clearly illustrate their positionality throughout their work, while connecting academia with personal life narratives. These readings made me conclude that the only way to fairly tell you these stories is through my own voice. My most authentic voice is not that of a “common” academic; it is far from that, and it is inspired by the literary language I was raised in / with. My voice is of a communications specialist, an advocate, a storyteller, and a development professional with a gut-driven intuition to tell othered stories. I am also:

I am my mother’s daughter, journeying through the identities of
Latina, migrant, and mestiza.

Yet, I am not confined to these labels.

I am a layered becoming, shaped not only by what happened to me,
—but also, by what I made of it.

I hold more than just an identity.

I reach toward empathy.

I strive for justice.

I am resilient.

I am also a survivor.

I am the echo of what I have endured.

and the voice of the women who came before me.⁵⁹

Consequently, the empirical chapters in this research are presented through the original narratives provided to me. I feed them with my descriptions and interpretations, while filling the gaps with the reflections of experts on Honduras. This is the only way that seemed true to my research style and to those who fearlessly intertwined their experiences with mine.

Having started a feminist process myself, I could not avoid understanding and analyzing the narratives that unfolded through my own feminist lens, one based on Western thought and access to academia. Interestingly, all the domestic violence survivor interviews were accessed through local feminist organizations, which led to narratives of domestic violence survivors who had already recognized themselves as such. This meant that they had each undergone a feminist training of some sort, understanding gender-based violence, violence patterns, and the unequal relationships that foster violent dynamics. More importantly, they all recognized the need for sharing to avoid future generations replicating the same social patterns and acceptance. Attached to “local” feminist narratives were religious ones: domestic violence respondents mentioned their experience of violence as a God-sent test. Similarly, faith represented their main source of the strength to continue and endure the aftermath of it all.

⁵⁹ Fragment inspired from personal text entitled “Who am I,” published in January 2021 on my blog: <https://www.marsalgado.net/writings-1/who-am-i> Accessed 22 June 2022.

Through an ongoing understanding that feminism looks and works differently in different contexts, I began to distance myself from the idea of a single antidote for such complex problems. A feminist perspective is born through the experiences of many women, a diversity of women: wives, sisters, queer women, neighbors, mothers, and their mothers before that. This has given me one of the finest learnings that resulted from this research experience:

We are resisting patriarchy with the resources we have,
with those that have been handed to us, and those that we have loudly claimed.

These are the stories that must unfold and become feminist theory.

I understand now: one is not born a feminist—
one becomes a feminist.

Formed not in comfort, but through a fragile set of choices.

Built through feminisms that rise
amid staggering statistics—
rape, abuse, femicide.

To survive, one must take refuge in sisters—
the only ones who truly understand,
because they, too, have endured it all.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Fragment inspired from personal text entitled “They are killing us,” published in February 2021 on my blog: <https://www.marsalgado.net/writings-1/they-are-killing-us>. Accessed 22 June 2022.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Like all junior researchers at ZEF, I attended an ethics seminar that allowed me to reflect on the topics of positionality, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and minimizing risks / danger to all research participants.

4.10.1.1 Informed consent

All respondents of this research granted consent prior to and during the audio recordings of the interview sessions. They were informed of the right to withdraw their consent at any time. For some experts in high-ranking positions, such as justice operators and policy advisers, informed consent was signed, and their interviews were not taped for security reasons. Regarding the domestic violence survivors, a professional psychologist and / or counselor selected only respondents who were emotionally and psychologically able to share their stories. I assured them that their identities would be kept confidential and anonymized throughout the entire research.

4.10.1.2 Anonymity / confidentiality

Consensually, real names were documented during the data collection phase as all respondents felt free to provide their identities to the research team. This helped us organize calls and consolidate the interview schedules, as well as allowing us to refer to respondents in a more personalized manner. With their authorization, I use the real names of respondents who did not identify as survivors of abuse throughout the empirical chapters. But in the case of survivors, they remain anonymous, and their names have been changed to aliases due to safety concerns.

I assigned each of them an alias that reflected not only an ethical commitment to confidentiality, but also a recognition of their unique lived experiences and survival strategies. These names, Amada, Guerrera, Creativa, Abnegada, Valiente, Resiliente, Coraje, and Guardiana, emerged from a narrative and relational process grounded in respect, listening, and sensitivity. Amada (“Beloved”) lived in a feminist domestic violence shelter when the interview was held. Her name speaks to the need for care and restoration in the face of profound isolation. Guerrera (“Warrior”) lives with limited mobility in her arm as a result of the violence she has endured, and her name honors her daily strength. There is Creativa (Creative) who has sustained her lived advocacy in the Public Ministry, constantly seeking justice with creative perseverance. Abnegada (“Sacrificing”) stayed with her partner and took on the role of caretaker for her children, demonstrating the emotional labor often required of women in violent homes. Valiente (“Brave”) had survived living with a known killer and showed immense courage in escaping that danger. Resiliente fought a public figure and a member of Congress, transforming personal pain into public advocacy. Coraje (“Courage”) continued to maintain a loving home despite being left in debt and vulnerable by her ex-partner, a drug addict. Finally, Guardiana (“Guardian”) shared details of her relationship with a police officer, as well as how it ended, navigating the blurred lines between protection, control, and the road to freedom within a domestic space.

These names are not meant to romanticize trauma, but to recognize each woman as an active subject—resilient, complex, and politically situated. Through this naming practice, I sought to resist reductive victimization and instead highlight the multiplicity of ways in which these women confront, navigate, and survive domestic violence (see Annex 2).

4.10.1.3 Exiting and reentering the research field

I returned to Germany on May 25, 2020, on one of the few flights offered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although I officially finalized data collection by July 10, 2020, we continued, as a team, to make informal calls, have meetings, and analyze the data. To date, we maintain contact, sharing news, updates, and afterthoughts, which has allowed us to further encourage discussions about the subject matter. After the data collection phase, I delivered an official report to gatekeepers, allowing me to discuss the preliminary results and findings of the research with them. Thankful for the information, I was enabled by this to be included in meetings and report presentations and even become a speaker on diverse online platforms. I maintain that although one leaves the field, one remains connected to it. As I started the writing process, I also continued to hold interviews and informal conversations with experts, women's historians, and decolonial feminists.

Fortunately, I was able to return to the field in January 2022, before leaving again for Germany on April 1. This brief but meaningful visit allowed me to reconnect with members of the feminist collectives, participate in their ongoing campaigns, engage in active advocacy, and draw new inspiration from their work. Most importantly, I had the opportunity to share preliminary research findings in person and encourage critical dialogue about my methods and theoretical approaches. This period of re-engagement significantly boosted my confidence as I was able to test my ideas against the perspectives of local people and benefit from their invaluable feedback and ongoing guidance.

I continued this engagement by returning to the field annually in 2023, 2024, and 2025, each time for approximately four months. These visits were intentionally structured around knowledge

dissemination, communicating both the progress and the challenges of my research to diverse audiences. In early 2025, from February to April, I devoted a significant portion of my residency to broader dissemination efforts across multiple platforms, both academic and community based.

During this time, I gave talks and organized discussions on my research findings, with a focus on decolonial practice and critical methodologies. These events took place at the Universidad Tecnológica Centroamericana (UNITEC) and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH) in Honduras, as well as the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC). I also designed and facilitated a workshop series on decolonization and storytelling at the Cultural Center of Spain in Tegucigalpa. This series brought together interdisciplinary professionals with the common goal of reclaiming and retelling stories, to unravel the many narratives that remain untold, yet are deeply woven into our lived experiences.

4.11 Data analysis

In line with the qualitative and feminist decolonial and intersectional nature of my research, I approached the narratives provided by respondents through this lens. This qualitative feminist method of analysis highlights the experiences of the most overlooked populations by depicting multiple and / or intersecting systems of oppression, while acknowledging our colonial legacy and identifying stories of resistance.

The term intersectionality pays attention to these layered forms of oppression, such as gender intersecting with race and age, as an example. More importantly, this analytical approach grants us the ability to further the scope of a single dimension of inequality and allows us to observe meaningful inequalities, recognizing various dimensions that contribute to the diverse

experiences that are of interest for this research (Christoffersen, 2020; Hancock, 2019). The intersectional guidance allowed me to explore how respondents experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in the urban settlements, in parallel, enabling me to identify the factors that put women and girls at greater risk of domestic violence. The intersectional approach is then complemented with decolonial thinking, encouraging me to accept other ways of working, organizing, seeing, and even feeling these valuable narratives. Acknowledging our own history and the coloniality that persists in our modern society, I illustrate my findings through stories that were lent to me to unravel our own mestiza struggles.

The “unified” approach was then operationalized through several actions. To start, anyone who considered themselves to be a “woman” counted as a woman for the research analysis. The same applied for respondents who considered themselves men or members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The socioeconomic data collected prior to the interviews was double-checked with respondents in order to remain open to their own descriptions and self-identification narratives. Taking into consideration the fact that these categories are not fixed, but are, rather, open to personal interpretations, we also allowed a diversity of respondents to further elaborate on their own experiences without including terms or questions to solicit specific or preconceived social categories (Heard et al., 2020). An important approach in analyzing the data was that of identifying moments in the narratives when respondents mentioned a social category such as gender, ethnicity, level of education, occupation, religion, etc., in connection with their specific experiences (Ilmonen, 2020). With this, I realized that there are plenty of situations where social categories intersect, revealing authentic experiences embodied by both women and men. This allows me to reflect from another location, using alternative knowledge traditions that were all

gathered in urban respondents' life experiences during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, for a decolonial and intersecting analysis, it is essential to take context into account—context that is intrinsically linked to history and politics—acknowledging the colonial legacy that persists within current and pandemic social dynamics. The historical background became extremely relevant in the analytical process (Barsigian et al., 2020). I engaged in triangulating and fact-checking; I made sure to acquire all relevant information to raise an extensive reflection on the history of the urban and peri-urban city as well as the gender inequality in the Central District of Honduras.

I was very careful in rereading the data several times, each time with a different question in mind. As I came across each narrative, some questions included “Where is the patriarchy in this?”—”Where is the inequality here?”— “Where is the coloniality of gender here?” Then I revisited each narrative with other questions regarding different forms of oppression. In doing this, I also paid close attention to typically unnoticed features of speech and wording. I paid great consideration to the use of “Honduran” Spanish, which is a localized version of our colonial language: we explicitly take pride in the way we speak, as we, Hondurans, narrate stories that are different even from those of our bordering neighbors.

I mainly focused on how social categories related to each other. For instance, when religion and gender were mentioned within a narrative, rather than pointing out the differences between them, I navigated how they are interconnected. There is a complexity in such analysis, yet I am mindful of the diverse experiences and outcomes that are formed when several systems of oppression occur. Finally, I was attentive to anomalies, or differences; by this I mean I took into

consideration all experiences, including those that were constant or common throughout respondent narratives as much as those that were not. I critically analyzed any questioning of the status quo, looking at narratives that went beyond the rules and social norms, valuing those singular and unique narratives by giving them space within the research analysis (Cutts & Waters, 2019; Harris & Patton, 2019; Kapilashrami & Hankivsky, 2018).

4.12 Data management: Transcriptions, coding, and categorization

The data analysis consisted of a series of steps that included data cleaning, transcribing, categorization, and identifying the main themes that resulted in the empirical chapters. I started the process of cleaning all collected data by reviewing all my field notes. I then organized this in an Excel data sheet created for all interviews. The Excel data sheet contains all information regarding each interview, including each research participant's gender, location, age if available, number of children, marital status, date of interview, and telephone number. Some have special notes regarding the individual interviews as well as general comments (see Appendix 2). I entered participants' information and specific details right after the interviews were held and added some general comments after I transcribed them. When respondents did not feel comfortable being recorded, I took notes, creating a Word document of each interview that was not recorded (2). Collective reflection was held once a week with the research team, fostering extensive conversations and leading to a summary Word document named "Lessons learned" that contains conclusions, reflections, and specific debates about these interchanges.

During the first phase of analysis for this research, transcription became a significant source of knowledge identification and reflection. Transcription, as an imperative means for qualitative research, can contribute to theory as much as it contributes to representing, addressing, and

containing qualitative interviews. As data are processed differently by different people, with their changing social categories, it is important to acknowledge that, although it is often perceived as a “technical” task, transcribing was given considerable attention as the first step in analyzing these data (Azevedo et al., 2017). I transcribed all interviews for this research, which produced enriching insight about the context, as well as revealing important information about each narrative collected. I was committed to preserving the original Honduran Spanish and meaning of all narratives, with the aim of capturing the way respondents communicated their lived experiences; therefore, a strict transcription was produced in the case of all resident and domestic violence survivor open-ended and in-depth narratives. In the case of expert interviews, most transcriptions were edited, avoiding paraphrasing yet limiting unnecessary non-verbal communication, and in some cases an intelligent transcription was made with the objective of capturing only what was relevant for the research. This research was conducted bilingually, with participant interviews and narratives in Spanish. I transcribed all interviews in Spanish, considering nuances and the use of slang as part of the analytical process. The analysis was then also conducted in Spanish and translated into English for the purpose of this dissertation. All translations from Spanish to English presented in this dissertation are the author’s own. In keeping with decolonial research ethics, the original Spanish is maintained throughout the empirical chapters to honor the linguistic and cultural integrity of the participants’ voices. Readers will note that quotations appear first in their original Spanish, followed by an English translation in square brackets. For example: “Sin trabajo, a veces sin comida...” [Without work, sometimes without food...]. This approach aims to resist the erasure of local languages in academic discourse and centers the epistemic value of Honduran Spanish as a language of

knowledge production. Translations have been carefully carried out to preserve both literal meaning and cultural nuance.

To further manage and organize the data, I used the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti, which helped me better review the transcripts. The data were organized into categories shaped by the gender regimes theory explained in the previous chapter. I divided each interview into 1) the economy, 2) the polity, and 3) civil society (socio-culture). This means that whenever interviewees referred to, for example, economic struggles, that part of their narrative is used, reflected, and interpreted in the first empirical chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 5: “The Economy.” And whenever a narrative highlighted an experience related to policy or state intervention, it was reviewed for inclusion in the second empirical chapter, Chapter 6: “The Polity.” Finally, whenever a respondent shared an experience related to social actors or social factors, that part of the narrative is used in the final empirical chapter, Chapter 7: “The Socio-culture.” All interviews are divided into three parts and structured to enhance the reader’s understanding of the respondents’ overall experience during the pandemic. However, it is important to emphasize that these narratives are deeply interconnected, not fragmented. For example, Economic impacts are political as well, influencing the socio-cultural dimensions of everyday life. The division into regimes follows the methodological framework of gender regimes and is intended to provide clarity, not oversimplify the complexity of living through and across these overlapping regimes.

All the empirical chapters are influenced by and grounded in the original narratives. I feed them with my descriptions and interpretations, filling in the gaps with my own analysis and the guidance of interviews with experts on Honduras. This is done to reinforce the historical and / or

political observations that help to shape the residents' stories. All of the empirical chapters begin with interviews with residents who have not identified as survivors of domestic abuse and are followed by interviews with survivors. Throughout the work, the narratives of survivors of domestic violence take precedence. In the findings section of this research, their voices are intended to occupy the most space.

“No one is living the pandemic like we are.”

– Resident of Los Pinos settlement,

Central District, Honduras

5 THE ECONOMY

“Aquí no hay enfermedad, es que aquí la gente se está muriendo de hambre.”

[Here there is no illness; what’s happening here is that people are dying of
hunger.]

Community leader, Los Pinos settlement, Central District, Honduras

5.1 Introduction to the economic context in the Central District

To deepen concepts and understandings regarding domestic violence in the urban landscape of the Central District of Honduras, it is crucial to consider the economic context that surrounds it. This chapter centers on Walby's economic regime, illustrating the modes of production assigned to the binary and specifically how they were lived by women during the first 5 months of confinement triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, income (and thus access to food), unemployment, and motherhood play a vital role in individual practices, and, most importantly, gendered experiences. Together they construct the economic regime, which is intertwined with the violence women tend to endure. In addition, to contribute to healing the colonial wound that often erases the diversity of experiences endured by mestiza women, I introduce this chapter as a space to collect, recognize, and analyze mestizas' pandemic experiences.

By illustrating the economic regime, an important revelation is unknotted: rather than being a safe space, urban households in Honduras were transformed into the main spaces for differentiated experiences for mestiza women. These differentiated experiences, exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to women's financial and emotional dependency, consequently, serve as fertile ground for increased risk of domestic violence. The narratives chosen to illustrate these realities unravel these complicated relationships. They encompass the sounds and feelings that accompanied residents through their experiences, painting a rich backdrop for the reader. It includes opinions, thoughts, and ideas regarding their available opportunities.

More importantly, this chapter is rooted in the production and validation of knowledge anchored in the experiences of specific social groups that have systematically and historically suffered

injustice and oppression. The day-to-day narratives you are about to experience are drafted by individual voices of residents from the Los Pinos and La Era peri-urban settlements. They help develop an understanding of the economic conditions that construct the urban and, now, pandemic city.

Resident narratives help us access the experiences of women survivors of domestic violence. I argue that the differentiated experiences of women who have already endured domestic violence serve as significant stories of resistance and need a proper space to be discovered. Their knowledge and wisdom are complemented by my own interpretations. This starts to make sense of the extensive knowledge that results from their lived experiences.

With the purpose of enriching future analyses, this segment is meant to illustrate a deeper reflection of the urban landscape this research is centered on. The following information does not attempt to construct a concrete definition of the peri-urban settlements in the Honduran Central District, but rather to illustrate the characteristics that construct the research area and served as an economic scenario for the COVID-19 pandemic within this work. Conceived as a storyline, rather than materializing a single / only truth, the chapter is intended to present several narratives that often, but not always, come together as a collective one.

5.1.1 The economic structure of the urban and peri-urban settlements: An overview of the La Era and Los Pinos settlements

Long before the pandemic, the peri-urban and urban settlements served as tangible representations of the inequalities that persist in the country, with the most obvious being economic inequality, yet this is not to the exclusion of the systemic political and gender inequalities internalized and entangled in the stories sustained throughout this chapter. These settlements also happen to represent an accurate illustration of the city as they are home to 60% of the Honduran population. It is important to recognize informal settlements as inherently poor, with limited access to education and health services and inadequate living conditions, including deficient infrastructure and overcrowding, as well as higher risk of external and climate hazards. Urban and peri-urban residents struggle to access water, electricity, and employment. The lack of employment opportunities has an impact on their experience of the economic regime.

A result of internal migration, the peri-urban settlements were the first urban home to citizens who moved into the city during the 1970s and 1980s, motivated by employment and better opportunities. Originally described as invasions, the settlements are still commonly referred to as illegal and informal. Since their establishment, generations have fought, one after the other, for their legality, ensuring water, electricity, education, and health access over the years. However, services are significantly different than those experienced by residents living outside those same locations. In fact, informal settlements were initially established without any access; settlers were prevented from obtaining all basic and necessary services, thus normalizing multiple and current discriminations.

Alongside limited basic services, the reality for peri-urban settlements includes a high dependency on the informal sector, and violence as a result of the absence of the state and the presence of criminal groups, corruption, and impunity (Figuerola and Yezenia, 2016).

The Los Pinos settlement, for example, is among the first and largest peri-urban settlements of the Central District, with over 280,000 inhabitants, mostly internal migrants from eastern areas of Danlí and the Santa Bárbara department. Named after the characteristic pines that adorn the area, these settlements are topographically challenging, as they are located in areas at risk of landslides and tropical storms. Set within mountains and hills, Los Pinos is divided into eight sectors, all differing in infrastructure and access to basic services, as not all sectors have access to services such as water and electricity. There are certain characteristics that connect their population to their “rural” origins. Most households use latrines⁶¹ and do not have access to a sewerage system. Most houses are made of scrap wood and leftover materials such as plastic bags and cement residues.

In the case of the La Era settlement, located in the San Miguel District, it is part of a bigger urban area of exponential growth. With a reported population of over 18,000 inhabitants to date, it was originally occupied by diasporic communities from the eastern departments of El Paraíso and Choluteca. Over time, due to ongoing internal migration, over 40 small settlements started to emerge, surrounding the original San Miguel, forming new settlements with different names,

⁶¹ Latrines are a type of toilet most often operated without running water. The type of latrine varies: it can be a communal trench in the earth used for emergency sanitation, a hole in the ground, or more advanced designs, including pour-flush systems.

including La Era. The area is often described as urban due to its proximity to the main highway of the city, known as “El Anillo Periférico” (peripheral ring). Its strategic location presents several differences from the Los Pinos settlement, such as paved roads, basic service offers, a sewerage system, and houses made of concrete. Yet, these structural conditions often mask the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the area (Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIPRODEH), 2012).

5.1.2 Everyday life in the peripheries

For most residents, social relations and dynamics are tied to access to capital, or more so to their struggle to access income. This distinctive relationship permeates all aspects of daily life, exerting a profound influence on the dynamics prompted by the pandemic. Income also shapes gendered relations. As a matter of fact, most peri-urban residents maintain a rigorous division of labor, where women often stay in the domestic realm and men venture into the city in the search for daily income. Peri-urban residents are highly dependent on the informal sector for survival. Usually, women access income through their partners, who subsist on opportunities as painters, construction workers, carpenters, shoe shiners, electricians, cab drivers, collectors, and drivers of heavy transport, among the other, limited options characterized by daily pay.

Women continue to maintain their roles as primary caregivers and domestic laborers and remain marginalized from financial and social decision-making (Beebeejaun, 2017). Women who are single mothers, widows, or in some cases the sole providers of their household are exposed to subsistence through even more limited options as domestic workers in middle- and upper-class

homes or as cooks, tortilla vendors, fruit sellers, hairdressers, dressmakers, gum sellers, and / or candy sellers within their own barrios. A lack of employment opportunities accompanies women's daily lives, as does the inequitable burden of housework and childcare, compounded by unequal access to health and educational services and normalized as a sense and style of living (Ossul-Vermehren, 2018).

While employment opportunities are actively pursued and secured within the city, the outskirts remain disconnected, with limited access to transportation. Despite encircling the city, these peripheries exist on the margins, barely integrated into the city's spatial fabric. Public transport in the form of buses is available, but private minibuses, referred to as *rapiditos*,⁶² are much more popular; they are available and common at main points outside the peripheries, allowing residents to leave and return to their household locations.

Nonetheless, households are equipped with all necessary resources for subsistence, starting with community-based organizations that provide some residents with access to basic services such as water, electricity, trash collection, and community development.

At the same time, most residents purchase their food daily from the different fruit vendors and small convenience stores, popularly referred to in Spanish as “*mercaditos*” and “*pulperías*,” located within the barrios. Residents often purchase basic food staples such as rice, beans, corn flour, milk, cereals, and local Honduran snacks and chips. Some residents go to the central

⁶² *Rapiditos* which literally translates as a diminutive of “faster,” are minibuses that are much quicker and slightly more expensive than the common bigger buses that are often referred to by foreigners as “chicken buses.”

markets to find better prices for commodities—that is, when money for transport is available. Regarding mobility, it is also common to find residents who own a vehicle or a taxi and charge for errands to the city. Their cultural daily life is intrinsically tied to the difficulty of access to transport.

In the case of Los Pinos, as suggested by its name, residents are established in a mountainous region filled with pine trees. It has three big soccer fields, usually utilized by young men and boys for soccer matches. Yet, according to expert interviews and narratives provided by community leaders, these spaces are also largely connected to gang surveillance and control, often used by gang members to sell drugs and manage different operations.

There is a community center that has been renovated by cooperation agencies over the years, following their different agendas, and which offers courses and workshops for residents. There are two water board offices and a health center that provides residents with basic health necessities such as aid in the case of common flu and chronic diseases, and in some cases sexual and reproductive information. There are two schools: a basic education center that reaches the ninth grade, and a high school referred to as Instituto, with a focus on technical professions. Similarly, in La Era there is a health center, a school, a high school, and a community center that often provides courses such as hair styling, or nail workshops for women. There are four different soccer fields for recreation and a bus and taxi stop that is prevalent throughout resident narratives. There is also a cemetery that serves as an important community symbol.

5.2 Lack of economic access to food: Financial dependencies, and God in the time of pandemic

With a grasp of the essential economic context within peri-urban settlements, a shared comprehension of poverty emerges. These preexisting realities collided with the implementation of COVID-19-related measures, further impoverishing peri-urban residents.

Following the confirmation of two positive cases of the COVID-19 virus on March 10, 2020, in Honduran territory, the government implemented a series of measures and declared a state of emergency and suspension of constitutional guarantees established in articles 69, 71, 72, 78, 81, 84, 93, 99, and 103.⁶³ Freedom of movement and freedom of thought were affected immediately.

⁶³**Article 69** Personal liberty is inviolable and may only be restricted or temporarily suspended in accordance with the law.

Article 71 No person may be detained or held incommunicado for more than twenty-four (24) hours without being brought before a competent authority for trial. Judicial detention for questioning may not exceed six (6) days from the time of its occurrence.

Article 72 The broadcasting of thought by any means of dissemination is free, without prior censorship. Those who abuse this right and those who by direct or indirect means restrict or impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions shall be liable before the law.

Article 78 Freedom of association and assembly are guaranteed provided that they are not contrary to public order and morality.

Article 81 Everyone has the right to move freely within, leave, enter and remain in the national territory. No one may be compelled to change his domicile or residence except in the special cases and subject to the requirements laid down by law.

Article 84 No one may be arrested or detained except by virtue of a written warrant from a competent authority, issued in accordance with the legal formalities and for a reason previously established by law. However, an offender in flagrante delicto may be apprehended by any person for the sole purpose of handing him over to the authorities. The arrested or detained person must be informed immediately and clearly of his rights and of the facts with which

The struggle for income was revealed as the most immediate impact for peri-urban residents, as the informal sector was shut down immediately and almost completely due to the measures established to avoid the spread of the virus. The scarce availability of income revealed the unstable relation urban residents continued to have with the local economy.

The impact of the measures evidences the precarious economic opportunities available: they reshaped residents' daily struggles, conversations, opportunities, and overall experiences, forcing them all into a **lack of economic access to food**. The inability to ensure income was rapidly worsened by lockdown and confinement measures, leaving residents unable to purchase food. This lack of economic access became a prominent problem for peri-urban settlers, one that most respondents, if not all, emphasized. Lack of food access in settlements was a result of income scarcity and had little to do with food supply; in fact, food was available for purchase. Although distanced from the center of the city, peripheral settlements were stocked with food that residents

he is charged; moreover, the authority must allow him to communicate his detention to a relative or person of his choice.

Article 93 Even with a warrant of imprisonment, no person may be taken to prison or detained therein, if he gives sufficient surety in accordance with the law.

Article 99 The home is inviolable. No entry or search may be made without the consent of the person who lives therein or without a decision of the competent authority. However, it may be searched, in case of urgency, to prevent the commission or impunity of crimes or to avoid serious damage to the person or property. Except in cases of urgency, a home may not be searched from six (6) p.m. to six (6) a.m., without incurring liability. The law shall determine the requirements and formalities for the entry, search or search to take place, as well as the responsibilities that may be incurred by those who carry it out.

Article 103 The State recognizes, promotes and guarantees the existence of private property in its broadest concept of social function and with no limitations other than those established by law for reasons of necessity or public interest. (*Constitución Política De La Republica De Honduras De 1982, 1982*)

with income could purchase, yet income was scarce for most, forcing women into a state of food inaccessibility.

Within the first days of the health crisis, the aggravating situation of food inaccessibility became undeniable for women residing in the settlements. In different locations and at different ages, they all experienced an exceptionally arduous situation regarding access to food once the measures were put in place. Most women were left to the support of their partners, charity, and food parcels in order to survive.

Yini (45), María L. (40), Yoselín (31), Doris (24), Isis (18), and Agripina (47), from La Era and Los Pinos, help us to understand the severe challenges they endured in accessing income during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic as follows.

As Yini tells her story, the rural characteristics of the urban periphery become apparent, with the crowing of roosters serving as background noise to her narrative. Within an 11-person household, Yini's family was barely getting by, sharing a small space with her children, her sister's children, and her husband, all with little to no food. As in many other peri-urban households, their income depends on one person's ability to provide. In her case, they all depended on her daughter's formal employment as a waitress at a local cafe in the Central District. Her job was suspended as soon as the pandemic measures hit the country. The situation was also difficult because her husband, an elderly man, depended on his crops to survive. During the dry season, he also had to endure a pandemic. They were unable to provide food for themselves, their children, or their families. For María L. and Yoselín, who depended solely on the income generated by their husbands, the situation was grim. Their partners and breadwinners lost their jobs as a

construction worker and a bricklayer as a result of the government's measures. In a context of strict mobility and compulsory confinement, the inhabitants were deprived of access to the only sources of income available to them. Entire families were therefore dependent on "divine intervention" and on the solidarity bags provided by the state and religious institutions.

Even for women like Doris, who relied solely on remittances, the struggle to access food was a challenge. Doris and her daughter relied on her husband to provide for them, but mobility restrictions affected his ability to send money for food. Urban dwellers rely on social connections and remittances to survive; they are also highly dependent on access to day labor and credit for food.

The situation was particularly difficult for single mothers: Orquídea, Isis, and Pamela relied on themselves both for economic security and for care of their children. "Sin trabajo, a veces sin comida. Con ayuda a veces del Gobierno, con lo poquito que tenemos. Hay días que no comemos" [Without work, sometimes without food. Sometimes with help from the government, with the little we have. There are days when we don't eat], shares 18-year-old Isis, a single mother, who was left confined to her household while sustaining herself by making popsicles for her uncle to sell. The measures established to reduce the spread of the virus immediately affected women's creative daily ways of providing food for their children. Before and during the pandemic, Orquídea, Isis, and Pamela relied on offering domestic services to middle- and upper-class households, such as washing clothes, cleaning, and caring for other people's children. Outside their own barrios, they also used their various cooking skills to make food to sell to their neighbors. None of these women were able to ensure a supply of food by themselves due to the strict confinement measures. They asked family, friends, and neighbors for money.

Interestingly, the case was also true for women who were not mothers, such as 71-year-old Alba and 24-year-old Daysi, who were both left at the mercy of food solidarity bags. Alba states, “Mire, por la voluntad de Dios vino una provisión, con eso nos hemos estado arreglando” [Look, by the will of God, a provision came; with that, we’ve been getting by]. The statement reflects a belief in divine providence, which is the idea that God provides for individuals in their lives. In many religious traditions, this concept reassures individuals that they are not alone in their struggles and that there is a higher power looking after them. Alba refers to their ability to “get by” as a spiritual conviction. This points to the intersection of faith and survival, emphasizing how a belief in God can offer hope.

Like many residents, Alba has never had access to a pension plan. She works in a small carpentry shop owned by her brother-in-law, which closed immediately after the pandemic. Daysi, on the other hand, was the sole breadwinner in her household, responsible for supporting herself and her parents and, when possible, helping her nephew. Her contract, like that of many others, was suspended without any payment.

An important constant in all the urban narratives is the struggle for income to secure food. I would argue that this one issue took up a large and significant space in all of the experiences that were shared, and understandably so. As we begin to unravel the different ways in which residents obtained food in the early months of the pandemic, one particular feature begins to shape their narratives. Peri-urban dwellers are used to being excluded by national measures and policies, and even basic rights. In fact, they are used to less access; they have lived in their homes under these conditions, often excluded from the services that should come with living by the city, as well as the rights that come with living there. Many, if not all, solve the many challenges that arise

within their own communities by finding solutions within their barrios. When faced with food inaccessibility during the pandemic, many sought to survive by reaching out to other residents and / or family members for small loans, the sharing of food, and food donations.

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Going beyond their faith and repetitious mentions of God, residents were able to subsist and receive various food donations from local and religious organizations. Moreover, the government

became visible through the distribution of basic products in the forms of solidarity bags.⁶⁴ Up to June 1, 2020, in the sector of Los Pinos and La Era, all interviewed residents had received donations carried out through the logistical support of the military. Settlement families, composed on average of eight to 10 people, received one solidarity bag each, and in limited cases two, ensuring food security at least for a couple of weeks.

Although essential for subsistence, the distribution of solidarity bags by the government exposed residents to a highly politicized process, where the organization and delivery of food was carried out solely by people affiliated with the ruling party: according to resident interviews, it depended on their relationship with the National Party. The bags were also insufficient for the number of families and the time the measures lasted. On average, the solidarity bag lasted a maximum of 14 days for a family of four.

During my interview with community leader Agripina, she shared her experiences and insights as an active resident and advocate for her barrio, Los Pinos. Agripina serves on the local water board, where she plays a vital role in addressing the community's water needs and ensuring sustainable access to this essential resource. She is also active in other services to the community, and this was particularly the case during the pandemic, when she prioritized distributing food donations. Her commitment to community welfare has garnered recognition

⁶⁴ On February 10, 2020, the national government launched "Operation Honduras Solidaria," which aimed to provide solidarity bags to approximately 800,000 families (3.2 million people) in prioritized urban and peri-urban settlements, including *La Era* and *Los Pinos*. Each bag contained basic food supplies including coffee, rice, beans, spaghetti, and soap. According to estimates by the Ministry of Finance during the health crisis, the value of a solidarity bag is 500 lempiras (\$20).

from various organizations and government agencies, which have recommended her as a representative of the residents of Los Pinos.

Not coincidentally, the most impoverished peripheries are also the most vulnerable to climate change. I spoke to Agripina while her barrio was being battered by a three-day tropical storm during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the heavy rain pounds loudly against the laminated roofs, she illustrates her pandemic reality: “El problema más grande es la alimentación, la gente depende del trabajo, de vender comida, vender agua, más que todo es la necesidad. Sí, la comida es el tema más grave” [The biggest problem is food; people depend on work, selling food, selling water, above all, it’s about need. Yes, food is the most serious issue], Agripina says, explaining that the spread of the virus was not as problematic as food inaccessibility.

Before and during the first months of the pandemic, residents also fought off dengue, malnutrition, and heavy rains, but the mobility restrictions resulting from the pandemic measures were a challenge that residents and community leaders saw as unreasonable. “Aquí no hay enfermedad, es que aquí la gente se está muriendo de hambre” [Here there is no illness; what’s happening here is that people are dying of hunger], she states.

Although residents are used to tackling challenges that arise from living within precarious alternatives, their only resource for survival is highly anchored in their own abilities to mobilize and organize themselves. They go out, they sell, they ask for informal loans, they share, they manage. In the case of the pandemic, confinement stripped them of their collective and individual autonomy of survival. Informal loans, food bags, food sharing, and church and / or political affiliation represented a much-welcomed relief, yet did not fully respond to the

hardships withstood by peri-urban residents, nor do they represent a sustainable solution to the unavailability of income that continues to mark residents' experiences.

The measures put into place to reduce the spread of the virus led to the alarming situation of food inaccessibility that shaped all peri-urban experiences. Residents' daily lives and rights of access were denied. Not surprisingly, these same residents were the first to test the strict limits imposed by the military state. Residents, desperate for food, began to violate norms by mobilizing in search of opportunities and / or donations. This made the spread of the virus a feared—but less feared—outcome.

The state of food inaccessibility is not only a threat to survival, and as such one of the most pressing issues in countries like Honduras but it also helps to illustrate the unequal economic regime that defines the peri-urban experience (Aboye et al., 2024). In addition, the inability to secure food during the pandemic highlights the persistence of strict gender roles in peri-urban life. While food inaccessibility affects entire urban households, the burden falls disproportionately on women due to entrenched social norms. Traditional gender roles dictate that women in many peri-urban communities are primarily responsible for cooking, feeding their children, and ensuring the nutritional well-being of their families. This dynamic often exacerbates the challenges they face in times of crisis. Not only must they cope with the emotional and physical toll of feeding their families, but they are also expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities regardless of the circumstances (Bradbury-Jones and Isham 2020).

The inaccessibility of food that results from the loss of income unravels the structural and financial dependencies that often lead to the economic control, coercion, and abuse of women. In

peri-urban contexts, where traditional gender roles assign men as primary breadwinners and women as caregivers, this harsh reality is particularly evident. These entrenched roles reinforce systemic oppression. Economic power plays a central role. In such settings, relying on male-dominated income streams can leave women vulnerable, perpetuating cycles of economic dependency and limiting their autonomy

These underlying power dynamics are exacerbated during periods of food inaccessibility, particularly under conditions of strict confinement and social distancing measures. The stress of meeting household needs with limited resources often leads to financial disputes. This exacerbates family tensions. The potential for abusive behavior increases as economic pressures increase. Women may find themselves in the middle of heightened conflict within the household, where financial dependency becomes a tool of control, further entrenching abusive patterns and relationships (UN Women 2020a; Usher et al., 2020).

As individuals become accustomed to living in often violent, precarious, and vulnerable situations, these dynamics become normalized. Over time, residents might become desensitized to economic control, and even violent behaviors, internalizing these conditions as routine (Muggah, 2012). Confinement, as seen during the pandemic, may act as a trigger, exacerbating tensions and putting women at increased risk of abuse, although it is not the underlying cause. Yini, for example, began to normalize her husband's anger and frustration; she attributes his growing hostility to the stress and restrictions of the measures: Yini described her husband's experience during confinement:

A mi esposo no le gusta estar en la casa, él ya tiene 70 años, pero él es de las personas... él pasaba en su milpa y todo esto, y entonces ahorita con esto, ha estado encerrado. A veces lo siento que anda como que...

—¿Malhumorado? [pregunta la entrevistadora]

—Neurótico [dice Yini]. Entonces le digo yo, el mismo encierro lo pone neurótico a uno...

Sí, a todos los pone locos.

[My husband doesn't like being at home, he's already 70 years old, but he's the kind of person... he used to be out in the milpa and all that. And now, with all this, he's been stuck inside. Sometimes I feel like he seems kind of...

—Grumpy? [asks the interviewer]

—Neurotic [says Yini]. So I tell him, it's the confinement itself that makes you neurotic...

Yeah, it makes everyone go crazy.]

As a pandemic increases pressure at home, rather than recognizing the deeper, preexisting patterns of control and aggression rooted in patriarchal norms, women might rationalize aggressive behavior, convinced that confinement is the cause of a man's outbursts. Like Yini, many women reported their male partners' stressful attitudes. As a result, the lockdown was used as an excuse to overlook or tolerate abusive behavior and to normalize feelings of frustration, anxiety, and aggression. This normalization displaced the urgency of addressing domestic violence, as it was often framed as a temporary response to extraordinary circumstances rather than a systemic problem. A critical insight is that in times of scarcity and insecurity, when basic necessities such as food and income are not assured, other issues—such as domestic violence—take a backseat. While there is evidence that domestic

violence is more prevalent / alarming / challenging when resources are precarious, it is important to see the problem as bigger than believing that providing food or income could solve the threats of domestic violence for women (Weitzman, 2024).

We must begin to understand the relationship between food inaccessibility and domestic violence by focusing on how these factors relate to the experiences of women from disadvantaged communities, and their impact. I say this because poverty is often listed as a risk factor for domestic violence (M. R. Carter et al., 2007; Fahmy et al., 2016; Henson, 2020). However, this is not a matter of simple addition or subtraction—that is, it is not the case that more food equals more security for women, or less food equals more violence for women. Food security or availability does not necessarily lead to the absence of violence against women (Aguilar & Corrêa, 2022). This goes beyond the availability or lack of food: it unravels the complex set of relational dependencies that have been set up, repeated, and reproduced by our gendered bodies. Dealing with economic challenges to access basic needs such as food cannot heal the complex phenomenon of domestic violence (Piquero et al., 2021a). To explore this further, we must understand economic challenges, in this case food inaccessibility, as a means of male control over women rather than as a direct factor in domestic violence (Laurenzi et al., 2020). While food inaccessibility is undoubtedly part of peri-urban women's pandemic experience, the stories behind the struggle for access to income are meant to illustrate how men, even in precarious conditions, are provided with more economic opportunities than women, and hold immutable privileges within the current economic regime.

In the peri-urban economic regime, the prevailing trend still positions men as primary providers and decision-makers. This fosters significant control. Their privileged access to informal

employment is evident, as highlighted by scholars such as Ham (2020b) and Malo (2019). This inequality becomes even more pronounced when we look at the situation of single mothers such as Orquídea, Pamela, and Isis. Strikingly, they are denied the same access to earning opportunities as men living in the same areas. In fact, their options are limited to informal occupations that correspond to traditional roles as caregivers and cooks. These roles are often underpaid or not paid at all.

Women's vulnerability was undoubtedly increased by the pandemic, but it is important to consider preexisting inequalities that make them dependent on male partners. These inequalities include traditional gender norms that position men as primary breadwinners. These norms limit women's access to education and employment. In addition, legal barriers limit women's rights to own property or access credit, while employment discrimination reduces women's economic opportunities. As a result, these interconnected inequalities not only threaten women's economic stability but also make it harder for them to afford to feed themselves and their families (Brida et al., 2008).

An important example can be drawn from the narratives of domestic violence survivors. Their testimonies underscore the intricate intersection between food inaccessibility and their violent experiences, providing an illuminating lens through which to delve into the intricate associations at play.

5.2.1 Surviving food inaccessibility

The case of domestic violence survivors revealed a set of accentuated experiences regarding food inaccessibility as well as financial dependencies on their partners and abusers (Dunn, 2005;

Kaukinen, 2020). Their individual and collective stories allow us to understand food provision as an important means of control, as well as a motivation to stay in abusive relationships. They also reveal the limited access to income mestiza women have in the current patriarchal and economic structures. To better illustrate this, I use the perspectives of survivors of domestic violence, each safeguarded by an alias to ensure her anonymity and safety. These aliases were thoughtfully selected from Spanish words for characteristics that encapsulate their resilient stories.

Guardiana shares how the pandemic forced her to continue to live with her partner and abuser, even after filing a domestic violence report. She allowed him to stay in their urban household as he was the only income provider. In addition, he happened to test positive for COVID-19, along with one of her daughters, within the first few months of strict confinement. Left with limited options to pursue a necessary separation, she was left to provide care for both of her daughters as well as for her abuser while he was ill. Although well prepared and capable of finding opportunities in the formal employment sector, Guardiana had been well established in her domestic role: “Yo soy bachiller técnico en salud comunitaria. La verdad que desde que me gradué, en este país es bien difícil encontrar trabajo, más en el área de salud, mi carrera no la he desempeñado” [I have a bachelor’s in community health. The truth is that since I graduated, in this country it is very difficult to find a job, especially in the health sector. I’ve never worked in my field], she says. This forced her to rely on the income of her partner, who was a policeman. Guardiana was left to follow the strict pandemic measures and deal with the COVID-19 virus within the uncertainty of both the disease and her abusive relationship. She decided to retain her abuser in her household as the means of ensuring food for her and her children.

This was similar to the story of Abnegada, who also lived with her partner and abuser. She describes herself as a devoted mother and housewife, very attentive to her daughters, and affected by the pandemic in several ways. Their household was dependent on her husband's work, left to eat at his expense. She further explains: "No volví a trabajar... él me decía que no trabajara, que no era necesario, que él me podía mantener" [I never went back to work... he told me not to work, that it wasn't necessary, that he could support me]. Although her partner did not have a job at the time of the interview, and she took part in income-generating activities by selling lotions and makeup from a catalog to help provide for her urban household, she continuously refers to her husband as the main breadwinner. "Con lo poco que tenemos del dinero que él ha trabajado por muchos años, hemos pasado, gracias a Dios... para tener el sustento, tanto el de mis hijas como el de nosotros" [From the little money he has, from all those years of work, we've managed, thank God... with the little food we can afford, for our daughters and for ourselves], she explains.

After years of humiliations, enduring physical and psychological abuse, she filed a domestic violence report for psychological violence when her partner insisted on bringing his lover into their residential building for cohabitation. Although her 8-year abusive relationship was ending, she shares:

Por eso no quise hacer nada en contra de él, porque yo decía: si a este lo meten preso... una, que él me decía, "si algo me pasa"—como que me amenazaba. Y dos, de que yo decía: ¿cómo voy a hacer sin trabajo, sin nada?, ¿cómo voy a pagar los servicios públicos?, ¿cómo les voy a dar alimentación a mis hijas?, ¿y cómo yo les voy a dar el estudio?

Sí... en este momento, hasta el son de hoy, no tengo nada, porque, como trabajo... ahorita, con todo esto que está pasando en el país.

[That's why I didn't want to take action against him. I used to say: if they put him in jail... first, he used to say to me, "If something happens to me"—it felt like a threat. And second, I thought: how am I going to manage without work, without anything? How would I pay for utilities? How would I feed my daughters? How would I give them an education?

Yes... at this moment, even now, I have nothing—because, with work, right now, with everything that's happening in the country.]

Income plays a crucial role in women staying in abusive relationships. Disadvantaged mestiza women are faced with challenging and limited options to access income, quickly transforming into incentives to stay within their established and abusive relationships. They are forced to surrender in order to provide, which reveals the violent relations that are reinforced within the current economic structure. Another important factor that is unraveled here is that stories of violence are not exclusively tied to the risk of physical violence: their stories reveal that abuse is also tied to economic control (Eriksson & Ulmestig, 2021).

Regrettably, women survivors who had separated from their abusers did not experience a better, nor a safer, environment regarding food accessibility. In fact, the women who manage to escape abusive situations disproportionately rely on financial assistance and low-wage jobs for survival. Coraje shares, "Yo tengo un trabajo, me acreditan mensualmente, tengo muchas deudas, no me ajusta ni para pagar la casa. Yo prácticamente pido prestado para pagar la casa... Pidiéndole a

Dios que esto termine, porque esto nos afecta económicamente” [I have a job, but I have a lot of debts. I don’t even have enough to pay for the house. I borrow money just to pay for it... I pray to God that this ends, because this affects us economically], she explains. Although employed, Coraje was constantly borrowing money from her sister-in-law and cousin to pay off her debts. As her story unfolded, we learned that her debts had accumulated over the course of her 11-year abusive relationship with her alcoholic partner. According to her, his addiction and violent behavior did not allow him to be a solid breadwinner for her. On many occasions, she was forced to borrow money for survival.

Being in an abusive relationship can take various forms—physical, emotional, financial, or psychological. In this case, the abuse appears to have financial implications as well. Within an unstable home environment, she was left in financial hardship. After filing for domestic violence protection on several occasions, Coraje was forced to endure the pandemic in her parents’ home.

For Creativa, who was also living with her parents after her stay in the domestic violence shelter, the situation was also challenging. She was economically affected by debt accumulated because of her former partner and abuser, who was a drug addict. Her narrative revealed how he forced her to sell her car and even asked her for money in order to support his addiction. After several years of abuse, she filed a domestic violence complaint against her partner and abuser, and although this freed her from the violence, it left her struggling financially, especially while enduring the COVID-19 pandemic. “Quedé bien afectada y saco bieeeen poquito sueldo, pero ahí voy saliendo, adelante verdad, con la ayuda de mi mamá voy saliendo” [I was really affected and I earn veeeery little, but I’m getting through it—moving forward, you know, with my mother’s help, I’m making it], she says. Creativa survived the first few days of the pandemic on food she

received from the domestic violence shelter, as well as from her church, and the help she was given by her family.

For Guerrero, who experienced single motherhood within the pandemic, the situation was also hard, leaving her with an continuing inability to solidify a formal, or even regular, source of income: “Pues en mi caso, yo estoy aquí en mi casa vendiendo frijoles cocidos, choco-bananos, vendiendo huevitos—buscando, viendo como hacer dinero, porque yo no tengo ninguna entrada de dinero” [I’m here in my house selling baked beans, chocolate-covered bananas, eggs—just trying to figure out how to make money, because I have no income], she explains. Confined and distanced from any type of support system, she was slowly selling everything she could in order to provide food for her children. Guerrero shares her experience after the ongoing violence she endured for 8 years with her former partner and abuser: “Estoy en una situación muy difícil, se me hace difícil trabajar... porque no tengo la movilidad al cien por ciento de mi brazo izquierdo, entonces, por lo general cuando uno para trabajar uno necesita las manos, los brazos” [I’m in a very difficult situation, it is difficult for me to work... because I don’t have one hundred percent mobility in my left arm, in general, to work, you need your hands, your arms], she shares, while clarifying that her disability arose as a result of the multiple and excruciating abuses perpetrated by her former partner and abuser. Guerrero shares how she barely gets by trying to sell street food around her barrio.

For Valiente, most pandemic days she managed to make US\$2 per day to feed her children. After filing a domestic violence report, she had been left with no income; her former abuser was the primary breadwinner. In order to secure an income, she began to sell things in her temporary rental home while she tried to make ends meet by making food to sell. Yet her only means of

income were immediately banned by the social distancing measures: “Solo uno sabe el miedo que siente por vivir día a día, sin un sueldo, sin apoyo, sin familia” [Only one knows the fear you have, living day by day, not having a salary, not having a support, not having a family], she states. After selling her stove, some plastic chairs, and her child’s tricycle to buy food, she could no longer afford to pay her rent. Her landlord responded by threatening her, including intimidating her children by smashing their toys with a machete.

After facing violence from her husband and landlord, she managed to find another small room to stay in during the pandemic. She barely had enough food and shelter for her children. She explains:

¿Cómo le dice uno a un hijo que no hay comida, cuando ellos piden, pues? Yo tengo una niña de cuatro años, y usted sabe cómo son los niños pequeños. Ya los otros dos entienden un poquito más, pero igual necesitan su alimento. A veces, lo que hago es un solo tiempo de comida para no tocar lo que sobra y que ellos puedan comer.

[How do you tell a child there’s no food, when they’re asking for it? I have a four-year-old daughter, and you know how little kids are. The other two understand a bit more now, but they still need to eat. Sometimes I just have one meal a day so there’s enough left for them.]

Women survivors often experience a fragile financial status that leads to an increased risk of food accessibility in times of crisis. In addition, most have to escape from their violent partners and social circles, leaving them further confined and isolated.

In Valiente's case, her former abusive partner was a hitman, suspected to have ties with gangs. He would repeatedly escape authorities, forcing his family to switch houses every other month. Separating from her husband and moving from place to place was a source of anxiety for her. After leaving her husband, her stress level increased because she assumed that her former partner could find her and the children; she was afraid that he would find her and that she would fall back under his control. She is awaiting a legal process that could take years, dealing with confinement, loneliness, and fear. She preferred to distance herself socially long before the pandemic measures were established: "Siempre vivimos en riesgo, siempre viví en riesgo" [We always lived at risk; I always lived at risk], she says emphatically.

Amada, who was still living at the domestic violence shelter when we spoke to her, explained that she was sent to the shelter because she was at high risk of losing her life after reporting domestic violence. Fortunately, the shelter provided her with food and an education for her children. She was limited in how much she knew about, and how to interact with, the outside world. She was in recovery from the severe trauma that is the result of years of domestic violence (Ghidei et al., 2022).

The stories of survivors not only embody remarkable tales of resilience but also shed light on a discriminatory social challenge for survival. Regardless of their marital status, or whether they were with their abusers or separated from them, they all experienced the challenges of not having economic access to food. Their lives remain intertwined with their abusers. Thus, their encounters with the pandemic were intertwined with the economic consequences of these abusive relationships.

This struggle underscores the broader issue: abuse goes beyond emotional and physical harm to include economic deprivation. Although many survivors were able to leave their abusive relationships, they found that their lives were still intertwined with the financial and social consequences of those relationships. The economic dependency cultivated during years of abuse often followed them. It limited their ability to rebuild independent lives (Christy et al., 2022). The economic impact of the pandemic compounded the financial challenges they already faced as a result of their abusive relationships: income loss, limited access to social services, and the disruption of support networks left survivors even more vulnerable to financial instability (Ragavan et al., 2022).

Contributing to the multiple challenges faced by women who have survived domestic violence are factors such as single motherhood, heavy reliance on the informal and restricted sectors, dependence on cash loans and credit, social isolation, and ongoing physical and psychological pain. The impact of confinement and social distancing measures compounds their vulnerabilities, as their already-limited economic resources elevate the risk of reentering oppressive and violent relationships (Iniciativa Spotlight y UDIMUF y Mariposas Libres del Corozal, 2020; G. Vásquez et al., 2020).

5.3 Water shortages and increasing debt to the state

The peri-urban settlements are characterized by their limited access to basic services. Residents are accustomed to living with a daily struggle to access water, electricity, formal employment, or social security, finding creative ways to ensure access to those basic necessities. Both water and electricity are scarce resources and seemed to be a subject of discussion throughout the pandemic narratives.

Water played a critical role in protecting against the COVID-19 virus through hygiene practices such as handwashing (Berendes et al., 2022). However, water was a scarce and sometimes unaffordable resource in the Central District. This scarcity highlights the unequal distribution of infrastructure in urban and peri-urban areas, where the availability of basic necessities such as water and electricity are uneven, leaving peri-urban barrios at greater risk. These disparities underscore the broader inequalities that shape how different residents access basic services.

It is essential to note that water scarcity within the Central District has been a prevailing issue that predated the pandemic (Balthasar & Aida, 2011). This scarcity holds true even for inhabitants with more substantial economic means. Yet the latter are capable of addressing this concern by procuring water and capitalizing on storage systems. Among these, cisterns, tanks, and technologically advanced storage solutions are available for middle- and upper-class households. By contrast, these very resources are absent from the discourse within the peri-urban barrios (Z. Coello, n.d.).

Lidia, aged 39, helps us understand. She shares her experience working with the local water board, a community organization that purchases water from the state⁶⁵ in Los Pinos: “Hay tiempo de lluvia aquí, la gente agarra su agua lluvia. Hay que aprovechar. El sistema agua es un poquito pobre, porque no le llega a la mayoría de las personas” [There is rainy weather here, so people grab their rainwater. We have to take advantage of it, as the water system is a bit poor and does not reach most people], Lydia explains. While confined, and having lost her mother to the

⁶⁵ The water board in *Los Pinos* sources water from the National Autonomous Service of Aqueducts and Sewage Systems (Servicio Autónomo Nacional de Acueductos y Alcantarillados).

COVID-19 virus, she helps provide for her 10-person household, enduring the pandemic next to her father, sisters, nieces, and nephews. Part of her job at the water board is to ensure the supply of water to the local residents. The water board is in charge of organizing, distributing, and providing water per month, charging US\$6 a month to each resident.

During the first months of lockdown, the water board, aware of the high dependence on the informal sector, continued to provide water to Los Pinos residents, paid or unpaid. Single mother of three Pamela confirms, “Gracias a Dios, no nos ha fallado, la junta de agua no nos cobra ni nada, pero nos está sirviendo” [Thank God, it has not failed us, the water board doesn’t charge us or anything, it is serving us], she says. María Elena, aged 63, also talks about making ends meet with the help of the water board and her children, stating that she pays the water board whenever she can, while her children help her with the cost of electricity. Although electricity was provided by the state in some sectors of Los Pinos, they had still not experienced any power cuts, and they feared their accumulated payments.

Some women who depended financially on their husbands—Berlín, María L., Daniela, and Yoselín—were directly affected by the measures introduced. Their husbands’ participation in the informal sector, working as gardeners, construction workers, and welders, allowed them to continue paying the water board when money became available. For Doris, who was dependent on the remittances that her husband sent home from Spain, the water and electricity bills continued to pile up. Scarcity is the reality for the women of Los Pinos. Before the pandemic, water was available once every 15 days or so. Water cuts are a normal occurrence. As a matter of fact, the women have learned to live without daily access to water. Women in the peripheries

know how to conserve water. They have become experts at using water wisely: most take advantage of the rain, and they store water in plastic containers.

Although access to water was maintained, the fear of having to cut back and of accumulating debt was present in all of the peri-urban narratives. Furthermore, access to water and electricity was not available to all residents within the same settlement. Not all sectors can be covered by the water board, as settlements continue to grow and multiply in size and population. Daniela, aged 30, explains her experience while residing in Los Pinos:

Aquí donde yo vivo no hay agua... pero nosotros no tenemos agua potable. Mire, ve, a veces vienen pipas a regalar agua... pero no vienen por la pandemia. Nunca ha habido agua, pero antes había pipas. Mi esposo tiene que andar con un balde azul en todos los sectores para que le regalen agua para poder tomar. Sí, a veces le cuesta conseguir el agua, pero siempre trae. Lo hace a diario.

[Here where I live, there's no water... we don't have potable water. Sometimes trucks come to give out water... but they haven't come because of the pandemic. There has never been water, but there used to be trucks. My husband has to walk around with a blue bucket through all the sectors so people give him water to drink. Sometimes it's hard for him to get it, but he always brings some. He does it every day.]

The case for women in La Era regarding access to water was different. With no mention of a water board, or other community organization in charge of ensuring basic services, all women were left to the mercy of the state. We hear from Daysi, Yini, Alba, and María Elena once again: “A veces hay dos meses sin agua. Siempre ha costado que viniera el agua, pero ahora peor”

[Sometimes 2 months pass and no water, it's always been difficult for water to come, but now it's worse], explains 24-year-old Daysi. Water scarcity is a prevalent phenomenon in La Era, tangible for residents, and limiting their options for drinking potable and safe water, as well as for protecting themselves from the spread of the virus. Scarcity forced residents to buy water from private sources in their barrios during the early days of the closure. In addition to collecting rainwater, residents also purchased water from a nearby community well. The price ranged from US\$1.61 to US\$2.01 per barrel, adding to their expenses. They also had to endure the effects of the well water, which is untreated and contains excess salts, making it difficult to use for cooking.

María Elena, a housewife and mother of two, shares the same experience as Carla, a pastor, wife, and mother. They both went 45 days without water and had to buy it from commercial companies that seemed to be profiting from the shortage. Access to water is a daily challenge in many urban and informal settlements. This is due to the limited resources that force them to depend on donations of water. This is especially true in crisis situations (Coello, 2020).

According to interviews, many residents documented an increase in electricity costs. Some reported an ongoing charge for those who did not use their homes during the quarantine. Other residents reported a doubling of costs. However, they all experienced limitations in their ability to pay, focusing their resources on feeding their families first.

Lack of access to basic services adds to the stress of urban households. For many residents, the pandemic and health crisis exacerbated the challenges of livelihood management. Women are disproportionately affected: as the sole caregivers for children and family members, they are under additional pressure to ensure the health and nutrition of their households. More

importantly, deprivation of resources sets in motion patriarchal notions of power. This exacerbates existing gender inequalities (Nigam 2020).

The challenge lies in the accumulation of limits. These limits are represented in all the respondents' experiences. When water becomes scarce or electricity fails, dealing with domestic violence takes a back seat. In fact, any other problem that does not involve the essentials of survival will lose importance. Women will focus first on the provision of basic services and will do whatever they can to provide for their families, including staying in abusive relationships. Thus, water and electricity begin to play an important role in the financial dependencies that women endure, especially women from impoverished backgrounds (Pelowich et al., 2024).

This is where the variable of poverty begins to gain momentum as a risk factor for domestic violence (Henson, 2020; Slabbert, 2017), as the ability to access basic services, much like food, is also tied to the ability to access income. In traditional Honduran society, earning an income is a role primarily provided for and assigned to men. The ongoing loss of income and the loss of wages as a result of confinement and mobility measures had a severe impact on the access to provision of income in urban Honduras. In this way, an overall increase in violence related to water or electricity can be explained by the dynamics of relationships that continue to promote men as the primary providers (Wheeler et al., 2021).

The existing literature (Nunbogu & Elliott, 2022; Tallman et al., 2023, 2024) documenting the links between water insecurity and gender-based violence continues to establish problems with water supply and basic services as highly disadvantageous for women. This is undeniable from all of the resident interviews. Therefore, a shift toward prioritization of all basic services has become important to reduce the risk of domestic violence. Interestingly, feminist and human

rights organizations have also begun to promote various initiatives in the country, including the banning of alcohol and the opening of dedicated community health services to attend to women victims and survivors (World Health Organization, 2021). Nonetheless, even with the provision of basic necessities, women's gendered and less valued aspects and conditions, which differ to men's, continue to be the real risk factors for experiencing domestic violence (Gibbs et al., 2020).

We can fragment realities by naming variables such as food inaccessibility, water scarcity, and increasing electricity costs as factors in domestic violence. However, we must begin to understand all these factors as part of a bigger story, a story in which men have been in control of the provision of necessities on the basis of income, while women, historically, have been reduced to receiving less pay and less access to financial resources. The impoverished economic structure exposed in the peripheries reveals the deepest inequalities (Malo, 2019). Finally, men, unable to provide and fulfill their gender roles due to pandemic-related restrictions, were more likely to become stressed and more violent. Thus, women, unable to provide, became submissive and vulnerable, creating a fertile scenario for learned and accepted dynamics of violence. Financial dependency, which becomes a tool for domestic violence, is reinforced within the economic regime (Mittal & Singh, 2020).

5.3.1 Surviving water scarcity and limited basic services

For survivors of domestic violence, access to basic services is a prevalent part of their pandemic experience. This access, or lack of it, is also an exposition of their relational ties to their partners and former partners. Guerrera laughs nervously while sharing that she still has access to water and electricity but has not been able to pay for it: “Me van a meter presa” [They're going to put

me in jail], she states, while referring to the government. After surviving several injuries from her former abusive relationship, Guerrero continues to struggle to find an opportunity to access income as her inability to move freely limits her job opportunities. “No puedo dormir, pensando en cómo voy a pagar el recibo de la luz, como voy a pagar el agua” [I can’t sleep, thinking about how I’m going to pay the electricity bill, how I’m going to pay the water], she shares.

In addition, she had appointments scheduled for surgery to improve her physical condition, which were all postponed given the priority established for COVID-19-infected patients. After having separated from her abusive partner, the single mother of two has no help, has no one. She owes over 5 months of basic services and is not able to rest while in her condition, constantly looking for opportunities around her barrio, while maintaining the hygiene and confinement measures established. “Paso encerrada. trato de no salir, y si salgo voy con mascarilla, con guantes, con gorro, con el gel antibacterial, a poder comprar algo de producto para lo mismo que yo vendo... tomó todas las medidas” [I am locked in, if go out, I go with a mask, with gloves, with a hat, with antibacterial gel, to be able to buy some product, because I sell... I take all the measures], she explains.

The latter unravels an important constant of women survivors’ narratives, which reveals the additional burden the COVID-19-related measures bestowed. Not only did they mean additional costs in accessing all resources, including masks and sanitizer gels, but they also required an intense level of mobility restrictions and social distancing. Most women worried about accessing basic services as much as they did about contracting the virus, mostly due to women’s responsibility for household health. “No salimos de la casa” [We do not leave the house], shares

Resiliente, who was trusting social distancing to protect their family. Although, “Es difícil no salir... porque cuando uno sale, sale con ese temor” [It’s difficult not to go out... but when you do, you go out with that fear], she explains.

Furthermore, in urban and peri-urban settings, a considerable number of women rely on their social networks to secure their fundamental necessities. This dependency becomes particularly pronounced among survivors, who often find themselves reliant on their families for survival. This reliance hinges them maintaining contact with their families, as the aftermath of domestic violence frequently entails isolation as one of its many consequences. Valiente’s story serves as an example: “La verdad estoy acostumbrada, yo he vivido encerrada. Cuando vivía con el papá de mi hija,⁶⁶ él compraba todo, yo no iba ni a la pulpería”

[Honestly, I’m used to it, I’ve lived locked in. When I lived with my daughter’s father, he bought everything; I didn’t even go to the small corner store], she says.

This circumstance similarly resonated with Creativa, whose isolation began long before the onset of the pandemic: “Obligarme a hacerme enemiga de mis amigas... Prácticamente me sacó a la fuerza de ahí, osea no me dio ni opción de elegir” [Forced me to make enemies of my female friends... He practically forced me out of there, didn’t even give me the option to choose], she says, of the time when she took refuge in her parents’ home after discovering that she was pregnant by her abuser. Currently, Creativa lives in her parents' house. She confirms her inability

⁶⁶ All names have been removed or replaced with general references (e.g., “mi hija” [my daughter]) to protect participant and family confidentiality.

to pay for basic services. While her sister had been a source of support in covering electricity costs, the stringent shutdowns across numerous economic sectors in Honduras have left her sister unable to assist her during the challenging times.

This was also the case for Coraje, who explains, “Una cuñada de mis sobrinas me envió dinero. Tengo una prima que también me da dinero” [A sister-in-law of my nieces sent me money. I have a cousin that also sends me money], which allows her to eat, “sobreviviendo con lo necesario” [surviving with the necessary.] Coraje cannot even talk about basic services, because her only focus is accessing food for her two daughters. An internal migrant, Coraje ventured to the city in pursuit of better opportunities. As one of the limited number of women afforded the privilege of formal employment, she finds herself allocating a significant portion of her salary to settling debts accumulated during her abusive relationship. In addition, she opens up about her strategy for staying safe amid the challenging circumstances posed by the pandemic measures: she maintains her well-being by minimizing going outside. “Mi niña me ha dicho que esta harta, pero aquí hay terraza para jugar, para que le de el sol. Se pone histérica... al banco solo a retirar” [My girl has told me that she is fed up, there is a terrace here, so she can get sun, she gets hysterical... to the bank just to withdraw money], Coraje explains, about the strict measures she maintains in her household, only allowing herself to go to the bank.

Amada, who is still healing after her domestic violence report in the only shelter in the city, seems to be the only one able to dismiss the worries of paying for basic services or avoiding cutbacks. “Aquí en el refugio me dan todo, no ha habido necesidad” [The shelter gives me everything, there has been no need], she shares.

Although water shortages are a commonality for all urban residents of the Central District (García-Santos et al., 2022; Grillos et al., 2021), depending on the availability of income and social contacts, the experience of accessing them varies. Similarly, power cuts are not uncommon in Honduras (Grillos et al., 2021). However, the challenge of the pandemic is based on the immense fear associated with the virus, accompanied by harsh measures that reinforce such fears, depriving survivors of the opportunity to access essential and basic rights (Nicoletti, n.d.).

Finally, all the narratives related to access to basic services helped us identify an important commodity that became essential during the pandemic: the internet, especially mobile data access. Its importance arguably parallels that of water and electricity, especially considering the complete closure of schools in Honduras. In order to understand this further, motherhood is next introduced as a differentiated experience for women during the first months of the lockdown, intrinsically tied to their responsibilities as caregivers and, due to the pandemic, as the educators of their children.

5.4 Women embracing (m)otherhood and the role of educators and caregivers

Access to internet exposed the exacerbated role of mothers during the pandemic. In addition to the tales of residents' pandemic journeys to secure food and basic services, the internet became a particular commodity that generated different experiences for traditionally gendered bodies. In response to the pandemic restrictions, educators coordinated their efforts through assignments via WhatsApp. In particular, this platform proved to be an invaluable tool for mothers. It was a necessary luxury during the pandemic, and a crucial element in their children's education. All facets of these mothers' experiences were permeated by the availability of the internet. It made them an integral part of their children's education.

Carla, a recognized community leader from La Era, pastor, and mother, helps us understand the bigger picture:

La gente compra sus paquetitos de internet y se comunican con el maestro, y el padre está ahí a la par del alumno haciendo tareas, porque algo que hay que rescatar es que ningún padre quiere que su hijo pierda el año escolar... Imagínese diez maestros mandando tareas a discreción. Cuánta carga emocional tiene.

[People buy their little internet packages and communicate with the teacher, and the parent is right next to the student doing homework, because something worth recognizing is that no parent wants their child to lose the school year... Imagine 10 teachers assigning homework freely. The emotional burden is enormous.]

While her husband provides to secure the internet packages, she is the one responsible for making sure the school assignments are received, done, and sent back to the teachers. Most peri-urban settlers do not have a computer, or a laptop, so students depend on their parents' mobile phones to receive communication from their teachers. Mobile data for a week cost approximately US\$4 in Honduras; this same amount also represents a week's worth of basic products like eggs or rice and beans. Women from both La Era and Los Pinos had similar experiences regarding the need to secure internet.

Women who financially depended on their husbands, like Daniela, Berlín, María L., and Yoselín, shared their collective experiences. For example, 30-year-old mother of five, Daniela, is in charge of her children's assignments and emotional well-being: "Pues mire la verdad estresada,

con todos los cipotes,⁶⁷ yo a veces tengo acceso a internet a veces no, cuando yo le meto una recarga de 18 lempiras ya tienen un montón de tareas” [I'm stressed, with all the cipotes, sometimes I have access to the internet, sometimes I don't, when I get an 18 Lempira internet package, they already have a ton of homework], says Daniela. She carries on explaining the workload of homework the children receive from their different teachers. In some cases, these mothers were required to send videos of children doing their assignments. This not only intensified the workload for women but also created additional costs for their partners and in many cases for themselves. The demanding situation started having an effect on all family members. Women were stressed, men were angered, and children were in the middle of it all. Daniela better explains by sharing the struggle of her eldest daughter: “Mi hija mayor esta mal emocionalmente, le pegan ataques de ansiedad, son 5 niños y no están quietos, ellos quieren salir, gritar y no se puede” [My eldest daughter is bad emotionally, she has anxiety attacks, there are five children, and they are not quiet, they want to go out, scream and they can't], she says.

The situation was similar for 43-year-old Berlín, whose husband was the breadwinner and with whom she lived in the highest sector of los Pinos. “Yo me encargo de los niños, paso con ellos” [I take care of the children, I'm the one that is with them], she confirms; although both she and her husband were confined with their children, the traditional gender roles persisted. The husband was in charge of looking for ways to provide income, which were evidently scarce,

⁶⁷ “*Cipotes*” refers to “children” in English. It is a common Honduran word (slang), it means “boy” or “girl.”

while she was in charge of providing care, food, basic services, and education for all her six children. The lack of proper courses and teacher presence forced mothers like Berlín and Yoselín to become their children's teachers. María L., on the other hand, felt lucky that not all her children needed internet access. "Uno no puede estar comprando internet porque estudiando solo mi hija de 14, mi hijo ya se graduó y la niña entró a preparatoria" [You can't be paying for internet all the time, only my 14-year-old daughter is still studying. My son already graduated, and the little one just started secondary school], she shared, referring to the burden mothers quickly took on to support their children's education.

For single mothers Orquídea and Pamela, the pressure of getting mobile data to ensure education for their children added additional tension and challenges to their daily struggles: "El varoncito está atrasado con las tareas porque no he tenido internet. No voy a dejar de comprar tres o cuatro huevos para comprar internet. A veces mi hermana me comparte internet y ahí les bajo las tareas" [My little boy is behind with his homework because I haven't had internet. I'm not going to stop buying three or four eggs just to pay for internet. Sometimes my sister shares her internet with me, and I download the homework for them], she shares. In the same context, single mother Pamela is responsible for her three children. Referring to her neighbors, who sometimes help her children to access the only available education platforms that were put in place during the pandemic, she says:

Yo vendía baleadas,⁶⁸ no hay dinero, cuando puedo, les doy arroz y frijoles... Yo cuido a los niños, cuando voy a lavar la niña me cuida al niño. No van a la escuela. Si reciben tareas por parte de la escuela, pues a veces me comparten internet, a veces no tengo acceso a tener internet.

[I used to sell baleadas, there is no money, when I can, I give them rice and beans... I take care of the children, when I bathe the girl, the other girl takes care of the boy. They don't go to school. If they get homework from school, sometimes they share the internet with me, sometimes I don't have access.]

Yini also explains, “Yo como le digo a ellos, no voy a dejar de poner un huevo les digo, por poner una recarga” [I say to them, I’m not going to stop paying for an egg, to put in a recarga [data top-up]].

Buying internet access in order to access education became a forced and additional expenditure that also relied on the gendered bodies of men but somehow was formally executed by women. This ties back in with the traditional gender roles assigned to the gendered bodies of women, especially in the peri-urban landscape. Although women are used to providing care and work in their homes, they are not used to the extreme precarity that the COVID-19 pandemic measures brought on their households. They were certainly not used to being confined with their husbands and children for such long hours. Schools, in this sense, play an important role for women in the

⁶⁸ A *baleada* is a typical Honduran dish composed of a flour tortilla with refried beans, cheese and other local dairy products.

peri-urban landscape, serving as a second space for protection and education of their children, while also balancing their role as caregivers, providing women with support.

Finally, most mothers in the peri-urban landscape had lacked opportunities to finish school themselves: most had not been able to finish high school, yet they were given the task of formally educating their children, which became an overwhelming and enforced task (Mortoja et al., 2020). Most, if not all, shared the accentuated stress they felt, bringing up their anxiety problems, tensions, and trouble going to sleep.

Motherhood, in this sense, helps us see the bigger picture. It unveils the broader implications of the pandemic as an amplifier of preexisting challenges and deeply ingrained inequalities. In this way, we can identify the conventional roles of women as primary nurturers and educators, an enduring role not solely established through the pandemic. This is evident due to the intrinsic connection between motherhood and womanhood. Women's duty to provide care and maintain the family structure is rooted in this fundamental reality. Even when not fulfilling the biological mother's role, women are often assigned the mantle of caregiver. This designation stands as the most resilient and pronounced gendered role attributed to mestiza women, solidifying the distinction of their responsibilities from those embraced by their male counterparts. Notably, this role differs significantly from fatherhood, encompassing aspects that span biological, legal, and societal dimensions. The roles women undertake as caregivers, mothers, and, in the pandemic context, educators serve as a comprehensive narrative that helps unravel the entirety of their stories.

Traditionally, women who are mothers will do everything to protect their children. This includes staying in unequal relationships, which often lead women to encounter domestic violence but at the same time represent a means of providing for children, particularly in crisis scenarios.

Moreover, the economic regime reveals the multiple ways financial dependencies occur and how they result from the dichotomic and traditional separation of gendered bodies and their roles (Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017). By illustrating the roles for mestiza women, we can better comprehend how domestic violence starts to become easily replicated and normalized (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2021).

During lockdown, men continued in their roles as providers without success, and women continued in their traditional roles with reduced resources, additional burdens, stress, confinement, and often little or no help from their partners (Iglesia Cristiana Luterana El Señor Es Nuestro Pastor, 2020). This last detail reflects how the gendered dynamics spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic started changing the space mestiza women called home. Urban households serve as scenarios for condensed dynamics of power, which can be distorted or accentuated in times of crisis such as the pandemic, serving as fertile grounds for abuse (Batthyány & Sánchez, 2020).

Amid the pandemic crisis, the “stay-at-home” paradox became clearer, and mestiza women’s narratives offer a lens through which to examine the phenomenon. Their stories unravel significant implications that materialized within the confines of their homes, unveiling the unsettling reality that urban households transformed into (Kaukinen, 2020). The repercussions are complex, intertwined with unequal access to income, water scarcity, and the intricacies of motherhood. Moreover, the impacts of the imposition of mobility restrictions were not limited to

intensifying dynamics among the gendered bodies; they also constricted women's avenues for seeking protection. Paradoxically, these restrictive measures failed to safeguard women's well-being and inadvertently contributed to a surge in coercive relationships and abuse during the lockdown (Barranco et al., 2024).

5.4.1 Surviving (m)otherhood

For women survivors, motherhood seems to represent one of the strongest ties to their abusive partners, playing a fundamental role in the longevity, admission, and acceptance of their partners' violent behaviors. Guardiania, for example, admits the lack of respect her partner had toward her, yet decided to endure the pandemic with him because of his role as the only provider for her and her daughters. "Yo estoy sufriendo, luchando que mi hija salga adelante, que ocurra un milagro en la vida de ella" [I'm suffering, fighting for my daughter to get ahead, hoping for a miracle to happen in her life], she shares, as her oldest daughter was diagnosed with arterial thrombosis, a condition that prevents her from moving freely. This forces Guardiania to stay at home and provide care for her child, limiting her employment opportunities. As she explains, "Yo siempre, la verdad, siempre he intentado buscar trabajo, lastimosamente no se me ha dado la oportunidad" [I've always, really, always, tried to look for a job, but unfortunately, I have not been given the opportunity]. At the same time, her role as primary caregiver has prevented her from accessing the opportunities to legally separate from her partner. "Venía de la audiencia... pero como le dije, mi hija recayó y la prioridad era ella" [I was coming back from the hearing... but like I told you, my daughter relapsed, and the priority was her], she shares, while explaining the situation she faced immediately after filing a report for domestic violence. She had a court-mandated audience but did not follow it up due to her daughter's unstable condition. Although

she continues to be threatened, insulted, and bullied by both her abusive partner and his lover, she hopes her daughters do not have the same experience as she has had and hopes to find a job that allows her to provide for them.

Coraje's situation echoes a similar sentiment. Trapped in a cycle of abuse perpetrated by her alcoholic partner, she found herself compelled to endure violence for nearly 11 years. Her decision was driven not only by his role as the primary breadwinner but also by the fact that he was the father of her child. Interestingly, numerous survivors find a final catalyst in their children: in most stories collected, reporting of abuse was rooted in concern for their children. Within the context of domestic violence, it is an unfortunate reality that children eventually become witnesses to or even victims of the violent scenarios. "Me empujaba, me gritaba, los niños miraban" [He pushed me, yelled at me, the children watched], Coraje shares, allowing a deeper understanding of the intricacies entailed in leaving an abusive and controlling situation when children are involved.

She shares further:

Yo le tenía miedo horrible. Un día me dijo que me iba a matar, que me iba a encostalar. Si yo lo denunciaba iba a salir y después me iba a matar. Cuando se ponía a beber, se ponía como loco y no me ayudaba económicamente... Yo me sentí mal cuando puse la denuncia, me sentía sola. No quería exponer a mis niños a eso.

[I was terribly afraid of him. One day he told me that he was going to kill me, that he was going to put me in a burlap bag. If I reported to the police, he was going to get out and kill me. When he started drinking, he went crazy and didn't help me financially... I felt bad when I filed the report, I felt alone. I did not want to expose my children to that.]

Most women survivors think about their children before they think about themselves. “Mis hijos, de repente, les hace falta el papá. El niño me dice poquito, la niña se queda callada. Lo bueno es que ya no hay gritos” [My children, suddenly, miss their dad. The boy tells me very little; the girl is quiet. The good thing is that there is no more screaming], Coraje bravely shares, as we start noticing the importance of traditional family roles within the narratives.

The stories of survivors take on meaning both individually and as a collective, no matter their relationships to their abusers. Most survivors experienced motherhood while in their abusive relationships. On the other hand, financial dependencies complement the emotional ones. That is to say, women who are financially independent can also develop several relational dependencies with their abuser; the latter are often greatly embedded in motherhood. “El papá de mi hija es una figura pública... Una ya es amenazada, cohibida y comienza la violencia totalmente. Ya cuando son personas de alto nivel, se cuidan mucho... Ellos tienen poder, dinero, ellos tienen la influencia” [My daughter's father is a public figure... I have been threatened, restrained, and the violence starts completely... Once they are high-level people, they become very careful... They have power, they have money, they have influence], Resiliente shares, while referring to men and especially politically powerful men like her former abuser. “Recuerde en este país es bien fácil mandar a callar a alguien. Las muertes no se investigan y 98% quedan impunes” [Remember, in

this country it is very easy to shut someone up. Deaths are not investigated and 98% go unpunished], she shares, speaking accurately.

She recounts her experience and clarifies that she was never economically dependent on her former partner. However, she underlines the stark reality: despite her formal employment, she remains trapped by patriarchal violence, a distressing recurrence perpetuated by prevailing economic and social structures. “Uno de madre lo hace por los hijos, la fortaleza, los hijos son los que nos dan la fuerza. Mi hija me dio la fuerza, pero yo tomo la decisión” [As a mother, you do it for the children, the strength... the children are the ones who give us strength. My daughter gave me the strength, I made the decision], she states after filing a domestic violence report against her partner. “La vida de mi hija estuvo en riesgo. Una figura pública no va a dejar que se le manche el nombre” [My daughter’s life was at risk. A public figure is not going to let his name be stained], she explains.

Creativa’s story was filled with similarities as her experience of domestic violence intertwines with her role as a mother. Both control and motherhood intersected in a way that made it challenging for her to leave. “El último año estuvo desquiciado, desquiciado, me había quitado hasta el celular. No podía hablar con nadie. No podía hablar con mi familia. Yo estaba encerrada prácticamente” [The last year he was unhinged, unhinged, he even took away my cell phone. I couldn’t talk to anyone. I couldn’t talk to my family. I was practically locked up], Creativa says. She opens up about the years she spent in isolation, cut off from the outside world due to her partner. Continuing to recount her journey, she delves into the challenges she faced when attempting to separate by stating:

Yo ya había decidido dejarlo, yo estaba en eso, ya me iba, ya me iba. y en eso, una vez que me convenció, salí embarazada, entonces y ya dije yo, ya no me puedo ir, ya no lo puedo dejar... él siempre me decía que nosotros teníamos que estar juntos, que yo me iba a ir al infierno si yo le dejaba, que iba a agarrar maldiciones para los niños si yo lo dejaba, que yo iba a ser responsable de lo que pasará, entonces me hacía un montón de cosas. Me orillaba, prácticamente me obligaba.

[I had already decided to leave him [my partner], I was in that process, I was leaving, I was leaving, and then, once he convinced me, I got pregnant, and then I said, I can't leave him anymore. He always told me that we had to stay together, that I would go to hell if I left him, that he would curse the children if I left him, that I would be responsible for what happened, and then he would do a lot of things to me. He would push me around, practically forcing me.]

Having spent years thinking about separating, she always prioritized the children. She decided to file a second complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office, despite her fear and concern for her children's safety. She explains:

Mi hijo mayor en ese tiempo estaba echándome la culpa a mí, que yo le estaba quitando a su papá. Porque el papá le decía que yo los quería separar. Si me pegaba, era porque yo me lo merecía. Y le decía muchas cosas al niño.

[My oldest was blaming me, saying I was taking his father away. Because his father told him I wanted to separate them. If he hit me, it was because I deserved it. He told the boy many things.]

She, too, illustrates how her motherhood complicated the breakup. Throughout her narrative, she candidly expresses the burden of guilt that weighed on her. She also describes the many times she longed for stability in the relationship. At the root of her longing was a desire for the well-being of her family, especially for the sake of her children. However, the compelling force that led her to take action and report the domestic violence was the pursuit of her children's safety. Finally, after having endured 13 years of living alongside her addicted and abusive partner, she is now sharing her story from a place of freedom.

Much like *Creativa*, *Abnegada* had spent 12 years with her former abusive partner, where she experienced many “humillaciones, ofensas, golpes, físicos y psicológicos” [humiliations, offenses, beatings, physical and psychological], she explains, while including her daughters in her narrative: “Mis hijas sienten, porque ellas están aquí, ellas lloran. (Ehhh) Yo también me he sentido mal, en cierta forma... eh... me he sentido con ganas de salir corriendo, dejar, irme con mis hijas, irme lejos” [My daughters feel it, because they're here—they cry. (Umm) I've also felt bad, in some ways... I've felt like running away, leaving, going away with my daughters, going far].

Although economically dependent, *Abnegada* also feels the damage her daughters have experienced throughout the abuse. As she opens up, her narrative reveals that her former partner eventually left her for another woman, with whom he now has a son. His capacity to provide for her and her daughters dwindled, and he attempted to integrate his new partner into their shared household—a move halted by a court decree that deemed it a felony. It was this final transgression that helped *Abnegada* to take a decisive step: filing a report detailing the multitude of abuses she had endured.

Valiente was also tied to her abusive and criminal partner while being primarily responsible for her children: “Como mujer no valía, yo pensaba que el paso de mi vida por la tierra ya era suficiente, ya había nacido, ya me había reproducido, crecido, ya me había reproducido y entonces ya me tenía que morir” [As a woman, I was worthless, I thought that the passage of my life on earth was enough, I had already been born, I had already reproduced, grown, I had reproduced so I had to die], she shares. She continues to explain her mental state while in an abusive relationship. While recounting what she experienced, she goes on to discuss the profound isolation she endured. Her existence depended on her role as a mother. When she and her partner were dating, she became pregnant while simultaneously filing a domestic violence report. She shares:

No sabía que hacer, no sabía si tener la niña o abortar o si, osea no abortar o darlo en adopción. pero al mismo tiempo decía, es mi niña, es mi sangre no voy a tener el valor de darla. Tuve ese dilema, pero decidí que la iba a tener.

[I didn’t know if I should have the baby or get an abortion... not an abortion, or give her up for adoption, but at the same time I said, she’s my child, she’s my blood, I’m not going to have the courage to give her up, I had that dilemma but decided that I was going to have her.]

Although she eventually lost her child due to the violence she endured during her pregnancy, she was able to reach the only domestic violence shelter in the city. There, she began a process that was allowing her to heal from years of abuse.

While navigating the intricacies of her tumultuous years entangled in domestic violence, 24-year-old Amada shares, “El papá del niño pequeño me golpeo varias veces... me siento bien triste, porque cosas que he pasado feas en mi vida, desde mi niñez” [The toddler’s father hit me several times. I feel very sad, because I have gone through some ugly things in my life, since my childhood]. She opens up about her abusive family household, where she bravely reported her father for abusing her sister, which got her kicked out of her home and into violent and controlling relationships. “Me metí con los dos papás de mis niños, y los dos me salieron violentos, me golpeaban, me maltrataban” [I got into it with the two fathers of my children, and both of them were violent, they hit me, they mistreated me], she says, regarding the pain of her relationships.

The undeniable reality is that for survivors, abusive relationships are not centered around a single man or experience, nor are they primarily rooted in feelings of romantic love. Instead, for women, especially those living in impoverished conditions, being in a relationship with a man is the only socially and economically acceptable status. Troubling as they are, abusive relationships may also provide women with a means of economic survival. This fundamental aspect highlights the commonality of survivors who have endured multiple abusive relationships or who have children with multiple fathers (Cervantes & Sherman, 2021).

Finally, Guerrero endured motherhood and domestic violence in parallel. For 9 years, she shared a home with her abusive partner, a choice that was driven in part by his status as the father of her youngest child. Additionally, her older son had a different biological father, which evoked a sense of gratitude and deepened her commitment to her partner, who had embraced her along with another man’s child. She battled with his jealousy for years, but it was on her birthday that

she was left with limited options. Angered that she had spent her day celebrating with a female friend and neighbor, he confronted her. She illustrates their final scene by sharing what he said to her before proceeding to brutally abuse her and send her to the hospital: “Te voy a enseñar a respetar a los hombres. Vos querés caminar en la calle, como si fueras sola, soltera, no querés mando de hombre, perate que llegamos a la casa” [I am going to teach you to respect men, you don’t want a man’s control, wait until we get home], she shares. Then he proceeded to stab her with a machete in her arm, leaving her in a battle for her life. “No me quiero morir” [I don’t want to die], she repeated in our interview. “El intentó matarlo al niño también, cuando el niño venía de regreso, cuando él iba donde los vecinos a gritar auxilio” [He tried to kill the boy too, when the boy was coming back, when he was going to the neighbors to shout for help], she bravely shares.

On the way to the hospital, she felt the specter of death looming, and she said goodbye to life as she knew it. However, the thought of her children facing life alone gave her the strength to endure surgery and ultimately live to tell this story.

5.5 Making sense of the narratives

Long before the pandemic, the urban and peri-urban settlements of the Central District were already faced with significant socioeconomic inequalities such as less access to formal employment, water, electricity, quality education, and health (Díaz-Bonilla et al., 2021).

Residents in these peripheries live a life in which it is normal to experience shortages of basic services like water and electricity, as well as limited opportunities for income generation. This is a result of years of discrimination and marginalization (Ayes Rivera, 2019). That is to say, the feeling of exclusion goes beyond whether people manage to access services or protection

alternatives (Menjívar, 2023); it is present in the way they access essential necessities and the way they relate to one another as well as to the rest of the city.

Peri-urban residents are tied to a high dependence on the informal sector, and consequently to a stringent division of traditional gender roles (Ham, 2020a; Silva & Madureira, 2021). Women live according to this situation; their cultural daily life is characterized by domestic work, productive and reproductive roles, and little access to the informal or formal sector. They are also largely subjected to urban violence, which constitutes a high prevalence of male-dominated groups known as gangs, exerting control and instituting socially accepted forms such as curfews and mobility restrictions (Juan, 2011; Watkins & Melde, 2018). To understand this, it is important to acknowledge that “Las periferias eran precarias mucho antes de ser violentas” [The peripheries were precarious long before they became violent], says violence prevention specialist Karen Duarte (K. J. Duarte, personal communication, April 20, 2020). So, women have long learned to live with limited resources and they continue to adapt to their changing contexts, mostly by restricting their mobility and remaining in their primary roles as caregivers and domestic workers (Valentine, 1989).

Living conditions only proved to worsen with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in the country (Díaz-Bonilla et al., 2021), leading the population to face the health crisis within a complete shutdown of their only means for survival. The measures put in place to reduce the spread of the virus resulted in an excruciating situation of income insecurity. This is without a doubt the most immediate repercussion identified by peri-urban residents and survivors. During the first months of lockdown, income insecurity directly impacted women’s daily lives and well-being, heightening their domestic roles while limiting their access to food and basic services. Women in

urban settlements were forced to give up the few resources available to them, pushing them into greater dependency on their male counterparts. Many were forced to confine themselves with aggressive partners (Aguayo and Nascimento, 2018; Lagarde, 2016).

Scholars agree that the situation of domestic violence worsened as soon as the COVID-related measures were set up (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Howard et al., 2022; Kofman & Garfin, 2020; Usta et al., 2021). This seems like an undeniable fact, and one to which I respond by adding that the specific conditions exposed during the measures also directly impacted domestic violence reporting. Although the pandemic is not the reason the violence occurred, the measures established and recommended by the WHO accentuated the risk of domestic violence (Kaukinen, 2020).

To continue to engage in this discussion, it is important to acknowledge that the pandemic scenario was not itself the cause of domestic violence. If anything, the pandemic served as a catalyst to evidence the differentiated experiences women have generally endured. It should be clear by now that the phenomenon of domestic violence is not a new one. It is a historical one, and the pandemic helped to solidify a context where violent dynamics could easily be exacerbated and go unpunished. “Lo que la pandemia hizo fue revelar la pobreza que persiste en el país” [What the pandemic did was reveal the poverty that persists in the country], affirms Merly Eguigure, a frontline domestic violence worker and director of Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla (M.Eguigure, personal communication, 2020).

Amid their confined domestic roles and fixed locations, women found themselves in an unfamiliar scenario of constant coexistence with their partners. Compounded by these

circumstances, their roles as caregivers were amplified. Although this held true across all women, the impact was particularly pronounced for mothers. Their caregiving responsibilities increased, and their daily roles multiplied (Del Boca et al., 2020). Moreover, the pandemic induced an increase in educational costs; the latter emerged as an undeniable and constant challenge. In this context, women were not merely overseeing household tasks such as cleaning and cooking; they were also thrust into the role of primary educators for their children (Paz-Maldonado et al., 2022). They provided support for schoolwork and maintained communication with teachers through the only available platforms, which demanded economic access to mobile data. This situation forced male breadwinners or primary providers to secure additional resources to access data, a daunting task in an already precarious situation.

A noteworthy shift was the direct transfer of educational responsibilities into households, a transition that proved overwhelming for women. Furthermore, this responsibility was not evenly shared with their male partners (Bank, 2020; Paz-Maldonado et al., 2021).

For women survivors, the situation is even more challenging as unavailability of income usually ties them to their abusers. In the case of single survivors, it proved to increase their vulnerabilities, as most were facing the pandemic in increased poverty and with a tangible inability to provide for their children (Hoff, 2016; Kaukinen, 2020; Kofman & Garfin, 2020).

Eguigure explains:

El mayor riesgo es el confinamiento dentro de las paredes del hogar. Las mujeres que sufren violencia se acostumbran a vivir con su agresor cuando él no está en casa. Pero

cuando el agresor está 24 horas en casa sabemos que eso es un detonante para que la violencia explote en cualquier momento.

[The greatest risk is confinement within the walls of the home. Women who suffer violence get used to living with their aggressor when he is not [always] at home. But when the aggressor is at home 24 hours a day, we know that this is a trigger for violence to explode at any moment.]

She also shares, “Antes de la pandemia, los días más violentos para las mujeres eran los fines de semana, pero esto puede ser distinto durante la pandemia” [Before the pandemic, the most violent days for women were weekends, but in the pandemic, this may be different] (M. Eguigure, personal communication, 2020). Overall, the narratives begin to weave together their unequal economic backgrounds. As expressed through the women’s voices, the scarcity of all the resources needed to survive and their partners’ inability to provide and perform their breadwinning roles forced women into increased family tensions and financial dependency (Bárcena, 2020). This reality may serve as evidence for the concentration and increased reports of domestic violence experienced during the pandemic. When asked about poverty as a factor, frontline worker Eguigure responded:

La clase social es un elemento clave, pero hay que partir de la base de que la violencia no distingue de clase. Pero la respuesta estatal es mayor cuando la denunciante es de una comunidad no marginal; en zonas donde hay maras y pandillas, las autoridades no llegan.

[Social class is a key factor, but we must start from the premise that violence does not discriminate based on class. However, the state response is greater when the complainant

comes from a non-marginalized community; in areas where there are gangs, the authorities do not intervene.]

(M. Eguigure, personal communication, 2020)

With over 20 years of experience on the front lines, Eguigure helps us understand how social categories play a role in the stories that are woven together. Yet, she reiterates that class is not a causal element, but it still plays a role in the stories that are shared. It is important to reflect on the diversity of economic conditions that obviously play a role in the diversity of narratives. But it is also important, if not crucial, to recognize them as economic conditions and not as causes of increased domestic violence. “There is a difference between causes and correlations,” as Sylvia Walby so rightly explains (Walby & Myhill, 2001).

The underlying truth is that domestic violence is ultimately a function of the unequal valuations attributed to the gendered bodies of women. These unequal valuations manifest themselves in various ways; in particular, evidence can be found in the economic behaviors observed in urban and peri-urban areas. However, labeling these factors as direct causes runs the risk of erasing the real source of the problem: gender subordination (Graaff, 2021). The unraveling of domestic violence requires an acknowledgment that its core is rooted in the power dynamics and social structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Director of Centro de Derechos de las Mujeres Gilda Sierra reiterates that “The first risk factor is that of being a woman, this is not a new crisis; we have lived permanently in crisis. It is just a crisis that has become more acute” (G. Rivera Sierra, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

We gain a deeper understanding of the complex factors that contribute to this pressing issue by identifying gender subordination as the primary driver (Graaff, 2021).

6 THE POLITY

“La ley no nos protege. La ley lo que hace es que nos pone en bandeja de plata para que el agresor o el asesino termine.”

[The law doesn't protect you. The law put us on a silver platter for the aggressor or the murderer to finish.]

Valiente, Survivor of domestic violence

6.1 Introduction to the political city

Prior to understanding the political landscape that fell into place during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to reflect on the polity that historically surrounds the Honduran urban and peri-urban landscape, using as a reference the patriarchal state as characterized by Walby. This chapter underscores the systematic marginalization of women from state resources. The chapter aims to shed light on the state's subsequent involvement in women's experiences with violence and women's constrained representation within this realm (Walby, 1989).

Also important to the political regime are women's access to legal structures, the intricacies of legality, their interpretations, and, to no lesser extent, the profound ramifications that inform the concept of domestic violence in the country. The political regime focuses on the importance of understanding the legal frameworks designed to safeguard women's rights—in this case, how state institutions have played a role in shaping women's access to safety, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the chapter focuses on the legal handling, or oftentimes mishandling, of domestic violence in Honduras, placing women's experiences of the legal system at the forefront (Pintos, 2013; Walby & Myhill, 2001).

Women's voices help us unravel the operational aspects of the decision-making processes by which policymakers commission and enforce protective mechanisms within the urban and peri-urban landscape. The chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding the Honduran political system, albeit not through a legal lens, as I do not write with the expertise of a lawyer. Instead, the focus is on a sociopolitical perspective that allows us to interpret how these laws and structures are intended to be utilized by mestiza women.

To enrich our future analyses, it is important to consider that the work that follows does not seek to provide a static definition of peri-urban settlements in the Central District. Instead, it is meant to illuminate the characteristics shaping the research area, which served as a political backdrop for the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter embraces multiple converging perspectives in order to illustrate the political structure that is entangled in the diversity of processes that mestiza women endure. Focusing on peri-urban and urban households, my objective is to highlight the myriad factors contributing to the issue of women's safety—in particular, how urban households became unsafe spaces for them, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown. The selected narratives aim to unravel the complexities inherent in contemporary mestiza relationships (Usta et al., 2021).

The chapter begins by providing a brief political context of the peri-urban landscape, followed by an introduction to domestic violence as a legal term, sparking crucial reflections on domestic violence legislation and later its interpretations through the voices of respondents. Grounded in the day-to-day pandemic narratives shared by residents of Los Pinos and La Era peri-urban settlements, the chapter opens a discussion based on women survivors' experiences within the same political landscape.

6.1.1 The political structure of the urban and peri-urban settlements: An overview of the La Era and Los Pinos settlements

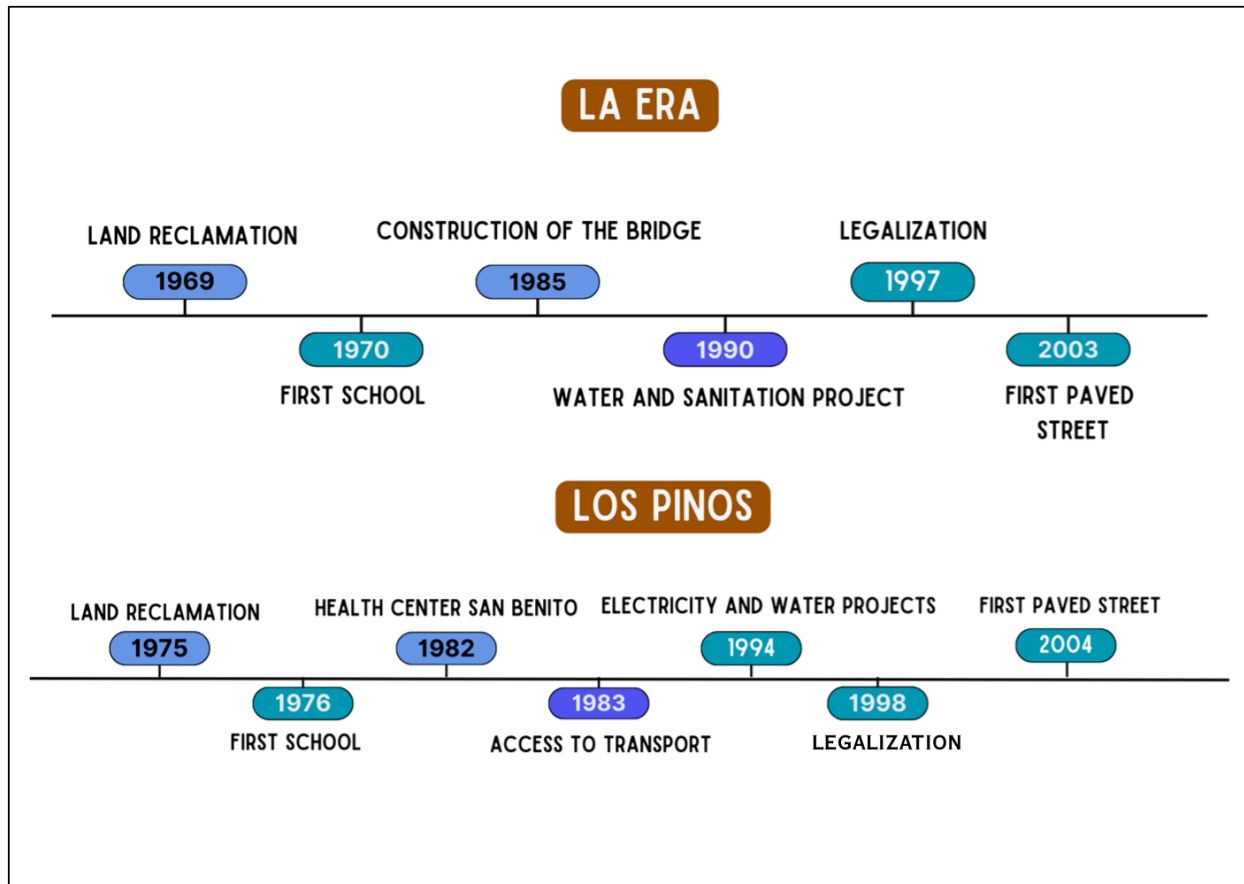
As well as being representations of pervasive inequalities, the peri-urban settlements also represent scenarios of deep political inequalities, which had a profound impact on residents' lived experiences before and during the pandemic. As outlined in the sections on the economic regime, these settlements began to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s as informal settlements inhabited by individuals migrating from rural areas in pursuit of economic opportunities. They

are still named based on their illegal origins. Informality permeates daily life. Informal employment, informal loans, and informal services all mark the realities of peri-urban residents. In other words, informality shapes residents' political context (A. Flores, personal communication, March 31, 2020; Peters et al., 2022).

As previously mentioned, originally established in areas with no legal recognition, residents of both La Era and Los Pinos have consistently advocated for their rights and access to essential services from the state. Peri-urban settlements have gradually, throughout the decades, integrated into the state's jurisdiction, maintaining constant demand for their rights (Coraje, personal communication, May 29, 2020; O. Maradiaga, personal communication, May 28, 2020).

The history of demanding access to public utilities such as water, rainwater drainage, electricity, waste collection, and, of most recent interest, mobile coverage has been a process that is constantly repeated. Every time internal migrants arrive in the existing peripheries, they must organize and advocate for the rights earned by previous generations of migrants. This is why not all peri-urban residents, even those within the same barrios, have access to the same basic services. However, by utilizing informal citizenship, political affiliation, community organizing, and advocacy they achieve their goals. Interestingly enough, the peri-urban geographies have a population that increases yearly; therefore, the struggle for recognition of their rights becomes a common occurrence (Anane & Cobbinah, 2022). For a more comprehensive illustration of this journey, please refer to the basic service timeline that follows.

Figure 5: Basic service timeline of the La Era and Los Pinos settlements



In both research areas, Los Pinos and La Era, the state is apparent through the existence of institutions and fundamental services, such as accessible schools, health centers, and provisions for water and electricity. However, institutions in the peri-urban landscape are constrained, marked by inadequate infrastructure, limited personnel, and poor service quality (Robayo-Abril et al., 2023). Consequently, citizens find themselves compelled to rely on inadequate and unequal services. To illustrate this better, I include an example that was highlighted by older residents throughout the interviews: they confirmed that before their long struggle for legalized education, their local schools were a result of community efforts, where mothers would take

turns to teach their children and care for them (A. Flores, personal communication, March 31, 2020; J. Hernández, personal communication, July 7, 2020; O. Maradiaga, personal communication, May 28, 2020). This showcases how the state's inefficiencies are frequently compensated for by self-organization and solutions devised by and within "informal" avenues.

Water, for instance, is often managed through a community board; these boards originated as informal community organizations. Water boards have transformed into settlements' local providers, as well as legal representatives. They usually source water from the state and charge inhabitants for its use and management. On the other hand, electricity is accessible, yet in limited supply, forcing residents to endure frequent power cuts. Moreover, the availability of both water and electricity is contingent on location, with recently incorporated peripheral areas lacking access and often having to advocate for necessities (Adeyeye et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2006).

In this context, neighbors and community members start to become their own providers. Residents in the peripheries organically evolve into *de facto* state providers, assuming roles that address the needs of their families and communities, offering childcare support to one another, and informal lending networks like *fiado*, an unofficial arrangement that allows residents to purchase essential goods with deferred payment options made available by small store owners (M. Eguigure, personal communication, 2020; G. Rivera Sierra, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

Paradoxically, although wounded by multiple political discriminations, peri-urban residents represent a great political asset in the country, because they represent a significant number of voters. Political parties have established grassroots institutions in these areas, given the high

population density and the residents' political engagement as a means to access state resources. The previous governing parties, the National Party and the Liberal Party, as well as the current governing party, Libre, have strengthened local structures (boards and political groups) to consolidate their political influence, offering incentives such as road repairs and food staples, among other populist practices, to garner support among voters (Bhanye et al., 2024).

Yet perhaps the most troubling aspect of informality in these areas is the influence wielded by gang members. The presence of gangs, known as *maras* y *pandillas*, in the settlements is prevalent. They have a profound impact on how polity is experienced. These gangs contribute significantly to the city's high homicide rates and overall violence. Additionally, they represent a high percentage of incarcerated citizens, commonly viewed as criminals by both state operators and civil society. Both settlements are often embodied as criminal peripheries, with their residents even suffering discrimination when applying for employment with companies, as most people associate the locations with crime and violence (Luitjens, 2020). A crucial recognition emphasized by both experts and residents is that gang members are integral parts of the peripheries—they are brothers, fathers, and partners to other residents. They actively participate in community engagement, and attend school and even church, illustrating their multifaceted roles within the peripheral social fabric (Coraje, personal communication, May 29, 2020; A. Flores, personal communication, March 31, 2020; J. Hernández, personal communication, July 7, 2020; O. Maradiaga, personal communication, May 28, 2020).

In addition to being highly surveilled and controlled by gangs, these areas are increasingly attractive to migrant caravans, which have received extensive media coverage. Despite the

achievements in political access, many citizens continue to be displaced by violence, resulting in limited access to political participation (Phillips, 2022).

6.1.2 Everyday life in the political peri-urban landscape

The high level of violence and criminal control, coupled with the state's absence in addressing the issue, has facilitated gangs in attaining almost complete control over the peripheries. In this sense, the intricacy of political access is closely interwoven with the peripheries' social dynamics, both tied, of course, to the prevalence of informality. In both Los Pinos and La Era, gangs control daily dynamics, establishing curfews and unspoken rules governing mobility within the barrios. Gangs often offer protection in forms of extortion, forcing residents to pay a weekly or monthly amount in return for less violence. Residents affirm that gang presence is evident in schools, which serve as the birthplace of gang membership for many young people. Gangs are also in control of public spaces such as soccer fields and entire streets and alleys serving as a playground for illegal activities such as drug and weapon smuggling. Even local transport in these areas is under the influence of criminal groups, providing income generation and serving as an important tool for gangs' extortion (Feixa et al., 2023).

The presence of criminal groups makes it challenging for residents to access or even look for legal and formal avenues of protection. That is to say, residents will not call policemen and policewomen or state operators for fear of repercussions from gangs (Lessing, 2021).

Unofficially, residents and experts acknowledge that individuals within gang-controlled peripheries are fearful of these groups yet sometimes turn to them to resolve community challenges and disputes. On multiple occasions, gang members have been sought out to intervene in cases of domestic violence; this is to avoid a police presence, underlining the complex

dynamics and uneasy alliances formed within these territories (Eguigure, Merly, personal communication, 2020).

For women, the repercussions of gang presence are experienced differently. Women's mobility is severely restricted, adding to their urban landscape a heightened criminality and gender-based violence, which often manifests in higher levels of crime, rape, assault, and femicide. Women tend to avoid transiting public spaces to ensure their safety (Gutiérrez-Adams et al., 2020).

Unspoken agreements regulate gender and social dynamics. In addition, these realities contribute to an increase in women's participation in migratory flows, displacing many from their homes due to violence (Valasik & Reid, 2021).

For mestiza women, lack of political access is intricately connected to their gender roles.

Although mestiza women theoretically have the right to move freely, vote, and access education, healthcare, and sexual and reproductive rights, as well as employment, substantial barriers persist. All this is evidenced throughout the narratives we are about to experience. In fact, reality is marked by limited access to protection against male violence (Luitjens, 2020; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017). One of the most glaring issues revealed by this research is the lack of safety offered by the state for women in peri-urban settlements (Menjívar, 2020). It is within these challenging conditions that residents were confronted with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.1.3 Understanding domestic violence in accordance with Honduran law

Prior to recognizing the political scenario that accompanied the pandemic narratives, it is important to identify and understand the political aspects of domestic violence. This section

delves into the legal framework surrounding domestic violence in Honduras. It is meant to illustrate how Honduran law conceptualizes and employs domestic violence, thereby impacting how mestiza women navigate and seek recourse within those parameters. This sets the stage for a detailed exploration of domestic violence legislation and its implications within the Honduran peri-urban context.

According to the Ministry of Justice, Honduran law establishes domestic violence as follows:

Intrafamily violence, family violence and domestic violence are terms used to refer to violence exercised in the field of family coexistence or assimilated by one of the members against others, or against all of them. It includes all violent acts ranging from the use of physical force to harassment, bullying or intimidation that occur within a household and are perpetrated by at least one family member against another family member. (Ministerio Público de Honduras, 2020)

Embedded within Walby's polity regime, the Ministry of Justice employs terms such as family violence, intrafamily violence, and domestic violence interchangeably. This interchangeable use underscores the gravity of the issue and its pervasive nature within Honduran society. However, beyond linguistic nuances, Honduran law recognizes the multifaceted nature of domestic violence, acknowledging its manifestations as physical, psychological, sexual, and patrimonial abuse. These definitions are clearly aligned with international standards set forth by the United Nations, highlighting global consensus as follows:

Domestic violence can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse can be physical,

sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic violence can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together, or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. (United Nations, 2021)

In addition, domestic violence in Honduras is part of special legislation contained in the Law Against Domestic Violence⁶⁹ or the Domestic Violence Act. This special law is the only protective law on violence against women in the country and it establishes its definitions in Article 5 as follows:

Physical Violence: Any action or omission that produces harm or impairment to the bodily integrity of the woman, not typified as a crime in the Criminal Code.

Psychological Violence: Any action or omission whose purpose is to degrade or control the actions, behaviors, beliefs and decisions of the woman, by means of intimidation, manipulation, direct or indirect threats, humiliation, isolation, confinement or any other conduct that causes emotional damage, diminishes self-esteem, including humiliating or

⁶⁹ The Law Against Domestic Violence was enacted in September 1997 and published on November 15 of the same year in the Official newspaper *La Gaceta* No. 28414, and it entered into force 3 months after its publication, in February 1998 (The Law Against Domestic Violence, Decree no.132-97, Reform decree: 250-2005.s).

humiliating treatment, surveillance, isolation, insults, blackmail, degradation, ridicule, manipulation, exploitation or threats of alienation of the children.

Sexual Violence: Any conduct involving threats or intimidation that affects the integrity or sexual self-determination of women, such as unwanted sexual relations, denial of contraception and protection, among others.

Patrimonial and/or Economic Violence: Any act or omission that implies the loss, transformation, denial, subtraction, destruction, retention of objects, personal documents, personal and/or real property, values, rights, or economic resources, including the impairment, reduction or denial that affects the woman's income or the non-fulfillment of food obligations.

(Código Penal, Artículo 179 A y B, n.d.; Ley Contra La Violencia Doméstica Reformada, 2006)

The Domestic Violence Act is meant to work as a preventive law that recognizes early signs of violence with the purpose of alleviating family burdens and conserving family structures. The Domestic Violence Act empowers victims to file complaints without bearing a heavy burden of proof. Thus, authorities are meant to intervene immediately. Also important to consider is that the act refers to domestic violence offenses that do not result in physical harm. These offenses typically include actions such as verbal abuse, coercion, manipulation, withholding of financial resources, and threats. All are considered as initial transgressions.

To better comprehend the legal framework established, consider an example: suppose you find yourself in an abusive relationship where your partner resorts to derogatory language, raises his voice, and even resorts to shoving you, with no greater harm. According to national experts, such actions constitute a first-time offense of domestic violence, warranting intervention aimed at educating the perpetrator during a 1–3-month community service period. Experts affirm that the act enforces rehabilitation of the abuser, addressing underlying issues within family dynamics. Perpetrators of domestic violence are subject to 1–3 months of community service, along with a maximum detention period of 24 hours. If the perpetrator fails to complete the community service, they face additional legal consequences, potentially leading to a 1–3-year prison sentence as per court judgment. This understanding is supported by insights from experts in the field (Cruz, Ana Lizeth; Eguigure, Merly; Rivera, Gilda, personal communication, 2020).

However, if the abuse persists, succeeding offenses are deemed criminal and are eligible to be handled according to the Penal Code. These subsequent offenses are subject to more severe penalties. Hence, under Honduran law, domestic violence seamlessly transitions into intrafamily violence: a second offense of domestic violence automatically qualifies as intrafamily violence. Consequently, the terms “domestic violence” and “intrafamily violence” are used interchangeably. The Domestic Violence Act identifies the point at which behavior becomes a criminal offense. However, substantiating such claims requires compelling evidence and testimonies, a process that often demands considerable time and political commitment for resolution. As domestic violence typically escalates into family violence, aggravating circumstances, involving physical harm, home intrusion, or drug-related factors, are considered (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM), 2004).

The penalties for family violence offenses range from 1 to 3 years of imprisonment, with a heightened term of 2 to 4 years for cases with aggravated factors. Additionally, sentences of less than 5 years may be commuted to a fine of 10 lempiras (US\$0.40) per day of the imposed prison term (Código Penal, Artículo 179 A y B, n.d.). For a more comprehensive illustration, please refer to the table below on domestic violence and intrafamily violence.

Table 5: The characterization of domestic violence and intrafamily violence according to Honduran law⁷⁰

	Domestic violence	Intrafamily violence or family violence
Concept	Any pattern of behavior associated with an unequal exercise of power, manifested through the use of physical force, psychological violence, economic abuse, sexual violence, intimidation, or persecution against women; includes: Physical, Psychological, Sexual and Patrimonial violence.	a) The use of force or intimidation from one individual that subjects their spouse or ex-spouse, the person with whom they cohabit or have maintained a concubinage relationship, or the person with whom they have conceived a child, with the purpose of causing physical or emotional harm or damaging their property. b) Violence exercised against common children or against the children of the aforementioned persons who are under parental authority, or against the minor or incapacitated person under guardianship or curatorship or against the ascendants.

⁷⁰ Information derived from the Penal Code of Honduras, corroborated with experts (Código Penal, Artículo 179 A y B, n.d.; M. Zapata, personal communication, February 2, 2024).

	Domestic violence	Intrafamily violence or family violence
Objective	To safeguard or restore the rights of women who suffer domestic violence, through precautionary measures.	To punish the perpetrator and achieve justice.
Legality	Not a crime (law of domestic violence).	A crime (Penal Code, Article 179-A).
Protection mechanisms	a) Prohibit the aggressor from entering the residence and workplace or places habitually frequented by the victim, provided that this measure does not interfere with the aggressor's employment or educational relationships. b) Detain the aggressor for a term not exceeding twenty-four (24) hours. c) Warn the aggressor that any acts of intimidation or disturbance against the woman or any member of the family unit will constitute a criminal offense. e) Temporarily confiscate any weapons found in the possession of the aggressor.	Criminal proceedings and public prosecution.

	Domestic violence	Intrafamily violence or family violence
	f) Allow the woman who left her home for reasons of personal safety to return.	
Penalty for the perpetrator / aggressor	a) Community service for a period of one (1) to three (3) months for non-compliance with one of the imposed protection mechanisms. b) Performing community service for a period of three (3) months to one (1) year if they again engage in acts of domestic violence, provided they complied with the imposed protection mechanisms.	Imprisonment for a term of two (2) to four (4) years.
Authorities	The Court or tribunal may act ex officio or upon the mere filing of the complaint. Domestic violence complaints can be processed without any formality, and until specialized courts and tribunals are established, the Family Court Judges, Departmental or Sectional Court Judges, and Justice of the Peace Courts shall hear and apply the provisions of the Law.	District Attorney or a private accusation. DA can only act after the appropriate investigation of the allegations has been made.

	Domestic violence	Intrafamily violence or family violence
	In urgent cases, the following entities may impose them: b) The Public Ministry. c) The General Directorate of Criminal Investigation. d) The National Preventive Police.	
Timing of action after reporting	Immediate (1–3 days)	6 months–3 years

Under these terms, domestic violence in Honduras can be approached through two potential avenues: a) the Domestic Violence Act, which is a preemptive route, with educational and quick guidelines, and b) a punitive avenue, which aims to punish aggressors more rigorously and identifies the crime of repeated behaviors of domestic violence (D. Flores, personal communication, May 28, 2022).

It is important to consider that the criminal process, via the punitive avenue, might not alleviate the threat of additional harm to the victim. Given the nature of this process, the focus often shifts from the victim to the accused, with the defendant's rights taking precedence. Consequently, the accused could potentially be released on bail during the proceedings, exposing the victim to further risk. Despite some advancements, the second avenue presents itself as challenging in reality. Starting a criminal process entails specialized professional work, legal assistance, and time, which mostly require economic resources as well as a great deal of strength on the part of the victims (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, 2004).

Throughout this research, it became evident that most if not all survivors initially choose the first avenue—that is, to file a report of domestic violence—with the aim of surviving the violence and separating from their aggressors. However, as a result of the escalation of violence and the prolonged time they have endured it, they quickly shift into the second avenue. More on how and why they do this is dealt with in this chapter through their own voices.

Also important for this research are the perceptions of domestic violence within the peri-urban landscape, which vary among respondents. Domestic violence opinions and perceptions are mostly intertwined with respondents' experiences (or lack of experiences) with the phenomenon

itself. Many primarily associate it with physical harm. Other forms of abuse, such as psychological and patrimonial violence, often go unnoticed or unchallenged. The absence of explicit penalties for these manifestations and of general understanding of the law significantly impacts the experiences of mestiza women. Moreover, legal concepts play a crucial role in shaping the understanding of domestic violence as a phenomenon, as concepts are often learned and perpetuated through socialization, experience, and access to legal resources.

6.2 Complete shutdown: Compromised mental health and a culture of fear as a result of the COVID-19 measures

In response to the confirmation of COVID-19 cases in Honduras on March 10, 2020, the Honduran national government promptly initiated a set of measures to address the spread of the virus. This entailed the declaration of a state of emergency across the entire country. Both rural and urban areas were transformed, characterized by social distancing measures. Rurality naturally preserved distance and space, as well as contact with nature. Meanwhile, the transformation of the urban Central District was particularly visible as much as audible, with it converting into a veritable ghost town, marked by stringent mobility constraints. The peri-urban landscape resisted the measures within its context of notable overcrowding. This was a drastic change, characterized by the closure of restaurants, stores, markets, public institutions, public transport, and entire enterprises, both formal and informal. The closure of schools presented a significant challenge for families, particularly impacting women, as it left entire peri-urban families struggling to remain confined without adequate measures, space, or resources to keep children indoors. The only stores open and available for entry were supermarkets and pharmacies.

In addition, the government delegated significant authority to the armed forces to collaborate with the Ministry of Health in combating the pandemic. Consequently, stringent restrictions were imposed, obliging adherence to strict stay-at-home orders. Within a high level of militarization of the city, residents were not allowed to freely roam the streets or even take a walk. In fact, citizens were only legally permitted to go outside once every 15 days to procure essential items such as food and medication. Access was regulated by a meticulous process tied to national identification numbers. Furthermore, a curfew was established in the city from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day and it ran during the entire period of data collection of this research. Repercussions for people who dared to violate it included arrest (Despacho de Comunicaciones y Estrategia Presidencial, 2020).

To ensure adherence to all the strict measures imposed, the state temporarily suspended constitutional guarantees such as freedom of mobility, freedom of speech, personal liberty, freedom of association and assembly, and the right to private property—representing a significant restriction on civil rights, outlined in articles 69, 71, 72, 78, 81, 84, 93, 99, and 103⁷¹ (Constitución Política De La República De Honduras De 1982, 1982).

Clearly, the measures adopted by the national government forced residents into strict social and physical distancing, while limiting their ability to express themselves, move, and associate with

⁷¹ See page 51 for the full description of the suspended legal articles.

one another (Despacho de Comunicaciones y Estrategia Presidencial, 2020), with potentially severe repercussions for non-compliance with these regulations.

The following are the narratives of women living in the peripheries of the city, which provide insight into the profound impact these measures had on their lived experiences during the pandemic and afterwards. Throughout all the interviews, the research team inquired about various aspects related to the COVID-19 measures, referencing a) access to biosafety resources such as masks, gloves, and disinfectant, and b) physical and social distancing. Narratives started revealing the impact on women's mental health, which later evolved into fear-infused narratives.

To begin to illustrate this, we hear from Yini again, who in the previous chapter shared how she struggled to access income security because the only source of employment in her household was immediately paused due to the measures. Like her, most peri-urban residents seemed to have no acceptable reason to leave their house. Following strict confinement inside her home, Yini learned to make masks for herself and her kids, by watching a video on the internet. “Hay que usar mascarillas, porque aquí nadie nos ha traído, rara vez han sido las veces que hemos conseguido entonces yo me pongo a hacerles” [We have to use masks because nobody has brought us any, it's rare when we have found some, so I make them], she states. When asked about her feelings regarding social distancing, she responds:

Me agarra a mi esta depresión, mejor me pongo a ver tele, porque siento yo que me deprimó con tanta cosa... Una situación difícil para todo el mundo. Yo he escuchado hay gente, no aquí verdad, en la tele que la gente se ha suicidado de la misma depresión.

[This depression hits me; I'd better watch TV because I feel like I get depressed with so many things... A difficult situation for everyone. I've heard that there are people, not here, but on TV, who have committed suicide because of the same depression.]

Within complete shutdown and adorned by military checkpoints located within the entrances of all barrios, as well as around the main roads of the city, mobility came to a halt. In turn, residents like Yini experienced a complete closing down of life, witnessing the shutdown of roads, food stalls, state institutions, schools, small businesses, informal commerce, and entire neighborhoods and even religious institutions.

Stay-at-home mother of two María Elena M. (32) from La Era also learned through the internet to make masks, with her sister-in law, re-using old clothes. In this way, she secured her access to biosafety resources. Her family depended on her husband's informal work as a construction assistant, yet they followed the imposed measures strictly. "Estamos parados. Antes estaba trabajando, cuando pusieron toque de queda no ha podido" [We are at a halt. Before he was working, when they set the curfew, he has not been able to], she shares. Together with their two children, they did not leave the house for two consecutive months, especially after curfew was imposed. After listening to her words, it became evident that there was little to do outside, given that everything was effectively shut, including any prospects for her husband's informal employment.

The situation was similar for stay-at-home mother María E. (55), who shares her experience of being locked down in a small residence with four of her 10 children. She was unable to secure proper biosafety measures, further limiting her mobility. She received a mask as a "gift" from the local health center; it was meant to be used once, but María E. used it whenever she needed to.

Scarcity, in this sense, also started becoming more widely and was a common characteristic throughout residents' narratives. As a single mother who had her first child at 15 and was still responsible for one child only 9 months old, she describes herself as reserved, with not much of a social life, yet social distancing measures started getting to her: "Tiene que estar encerrado uno" [One has to be locked in], she repeats "Tiene que estar encerrado uno" [One has to be locked in]. Used to limited contact with the outside world, she had become isolated from her family due to the distancing measures. She talks about her life before the pandemic. She used to meet up with her family, attend church gatherings, and stay busy buying essentials, all of which were part of her daily life and the daily life of most women. She also talks about her sense of helplessness once lockdown was imposed.

Agripina (47), a dedicated community leader and water board member, took proactive steps to ensure the safety of residents by organizing mask distribution in collaboration with various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Through her efforts, masks were delivered. Among those benefiting from her initiative was Berlín (43), a committed stay-at-home mother, who not only took the initiative to create her own biosafety measures with the help of a neighbor but also availed herself of the masks provided by Agripina. Both women offer insights to help us grasp the situation regarding mental health: "Con esta situación, les daba ganas de matarse. A veces me llaman a mí, y yo les digo que esa no es la solución" [With this situation, they [residents] feel like killing themselves; sometimes they call me, and I tell them that's not the solution], says Agripina. Despite the lockdown restrictions, Agripina continued her role as community leader, trying to organize several actions, including listening to residents' mental struggles, yet mental health among residents continued to deteriorate. "La gente se siente

desesperada... aquí hay varios enfermos de depresión” [People feel desperate, there are several depressed people here], shares Berlín.

It was evident across all narratives that people started dwelling on negative thoughts. The isolation spurred by COVID-19-related measures started breeding additional challenges concerning mental health. Through the interview process, we quickly, and inadvertently, learned about residents’ struggles with feelings and situations they labeled as depression, insomnia, and severe anxiety. In some interviews, severe cases of mental ill health were reported. According to Agripina (47), Lidia (39), and Sharon (29), around April 27, 2020, reports of a young man’s suicide circulated in the barrio. Residents of Los Pinos mourned his death, feeling empathetic for the tragic loss.

It is important to acknowledge that prior to lockdown, many peri-urban residents were accustomed to a life filled with social and community interactions. Not for enjoyment, per se, but of necessity, as residents are highly dependent on their family and community networks for accessing employment and other services such as childcare and even loans. However, with the onset of closures, barrios found themselves on the brink of collapse, as evidenced in residents’ deteriorating mental health.

Rapidly, women in both settlements expressed their feelings of depression and an overwhelming sense of helplessness, which soon intertwined with profound fear. The fear of contagion was present and constant within all women’s narratives. However, much like the women themselves, fear varied. Thus, fear itself also became diverse; that is to say, it manifested differently and had diverse origins for different women. For women who also happened to be mothers, fear of

contagion was particularly evident; this fear was directly related to their concerns about caring for their children, locating themselves as the primary caregivers. Conversely, other women's fear of contagion was associated with the specter of death and / or the threat of compromised health.

To elaborate, we take the cases of mothers María Elena A. (63), Isis (18), Doris (24), and Daniela (45), who all managed to secure masks, either through donations or by crafting their own, ensuring measures were followed to avoid contagion. Nonetheless, their stories revealed desperation and anxiety linked to the inability to provide and properly care for their children. Their fear was induced by the risk of their children being unhappy, desperate, malnourished, and even unsafe. Mothers confirmed they could easily skip meals, for instance, but they could not fathom their kids going through that.

“Mal, mal económicamente y mal emocionalmente” [Bad, bad economically and bad emotionally], mother of five Daniela shares when asked how she is coping with the measures. She explains how she gets by with the help of her eldest daughter, who manages to help bathe her siblings and cook lunch. “Mi hija mayor está mal emocionalmente, le pegan ataques de ansiedad” [My eldest daughter is bad emotionally, she has anxiety attacks], Daniela shares. “Son cinco niños y no están quietos, ellos quieren salir, gritar y no se puede” [There are five children, and they won't sit still. They want to go out, shout, and they can't]. Her daughter's struggle with mental health due to her heightened responsibility for the care of her siblings remained one of her mother's main concerns, filling her with despair. Although Daniela's husband had secured reusable masks for the entire family, they were fearful of contagion, and while they were locked inside, the female roles in the household were exacerbated. Meanwhile, Daniela's husband's male role remained static, as he looked for ways to provide for them. His role did not transform

into one of helping around the house or taking care of the five children.

For mothers, they were unable to foresee who would look after their children if anything were to happen to them. Consequently, a culture of fear linked to their motherhood characterized their narratives (Ham, 2020a; Robayo-Abril et al., 2023). The case of Cristina, although also involving fear of contagion, was a bit different. As she was a widow and single mother, isolating was not an option for her. At the time we spoke, Cristina worked at a hospital as part of the cleaning staff, which meant she possessed a special permit to travel free of mobility restraints. The permit is referred to in Spanish as *salvo conducto*. Luckily, she got masks and disinfectants at her work; nonetheless, the fear of contracting the virus accompanied her every move: “Al llegar a la casa lo primero que hago es bañar, quitarme la ropa y bañarme y lo baño a él también” [When we get home, the first thing I do is take a shower, change my clothes, and take a bath, and I also bathe him too], she explains, referring to her 5-year-old child, who stayed at her sister’s while she worked. Despite being afraid of contracting the virus, she understood that her situation was different. No one else could work for her and her child, leaving her no option but to try to follow the measures as best she could. “Uno a veces no quisiera ni salir, pero como lo voy dejar yo solo estar encerrado, y quién le va ir a dejar algo a la casa para comer” [One does not even want to go out, but how can I just leave him locked up, who will bring something home to eat], Cristina explains, referring to her role as the only breadwinner for her and her child.

For women like María Elena A. (63), who no longer cared for small children, or in the case of Alba (71), who was not a mother, the fear of contagion was also present. Yet their fear was associated with catching the virus at their age. They had repeatedly heard in the news that their

age put them at extreme risk of infection and even death. Thus, both opted to avoid going outside all together. “Ya no nos estamos saludando de beso” [We no longer greet each other with a kiss], says María Elena A., regarding her experience of social distancing. “No me gusta que mis hijos salgan porque muy peligroso. Yo no estoy saliendo. Si me da miedo” [I don’t like my children going out because it’s very dangerous. I’m no longer going out. Yes, I’m scared], she says, referring to her grown children. However, the antidote seemed to create other negative repercussions. Fear had left Alba (71) frozen inside her home; she was an older woman, as she described herself, and had already suffered respiratory issues in the past. Alba could not afford the risk of stepping outside. Well aware of the failures of the Honduran health system, compounded by reports on global news spreading stories of women like them, older women were strictly restricted to their small peri-urban homes.

In this sense, deteriorating mental health and fear emerged as factors shaping women’s experiences during the pandemic. This was complemented by news and stories of hospital collapses, unequipped facilities, photos of doctors using black trash bags as protective devices, and deaths with no funerals, which kept making national headlines. The increase in COVID-19 reports during the first few months contributed to the culture of fear, further isolating the peri-urban population (Nicoletti, n.d.). Furthermore, media outlets, news channels, political figures, and medical experts all advocated strict isolation measures, especially for people with specific criteria, including the elderly.

State narratives and messages centered on warning the population of potential deaths and extreme complications, underscoring the inadequacies of the healthcare system. At the same time, in informal settings, jokes, memes, and increasingly stringent recommendations started

appearing on social media groups, often imposing a normalized shame onto those who failed to adhere to the rules (Barranco et al., 2024).

Moreover, fear played a role in enforcing confinement measures among residents. This was despite the intentions behind these measures, which evidently failed to benefit peri-urban settlements, exacerbating their struggles for survival. Women's narratives often underscored a stringent adherence to the prescribed measures, which rapidly led to a division among residents—between those following the rules, and those not following them. Women frequently expressed discontent with individuals, primarily men, who disregarded these measures, citing concerns for their own and their children's health. Consequently, fear also facilitated the emergence of a culture of community policing, where residents resorted to shaming one another for non-compliance.

Sharon (24) was well aware of the isolating impact the measures were having on her community. “Hay personas que padecen de depresión y el encierro las hace que se desesperen. Se murió una persona de la depresión, la noticia salió que por el COVID” [There are people suffering from depression, and being confined makes them desperate. Someone even died from depression, the news stated it was due to COVID], she shares. Nonetheless, much like Lidia (39) from Los Pinos, and community leader and pastor Carla from La Era (31), she was upset with people violating the measures. They continuously complained about young people, or males in general, getting together to play card games, and drink, disregarding the measures, and putting them all at risk.

Most respondents understood the enormous burden of confinement on peri-urban households, especially regarding the repercussions over income inaccessibility and its undeniable connections with the mental health issues that arose (Graziano da Silva et al., 2021). Yet, they believed the measures needed to be followed strictly, criticizing those that did not and creating a division among residents. Carla better explains:

Hay bastante oposición en cuanto a las medidas, si es correcto o no. Pienso que falta todavía, emm... el poder hablar más abiertamente sobre consecuencias, porque la gente—haga esto, haga lo otro—sabemos que es nuestra salud y nuestra vida la que está en juego. Pero la gente todavía está a la expectativa de que, como es el Gobierno, el Gobierno nos tiene que resolver todo. Incluso hay tintes políticos: “Es para meternos miedo,” “para que no haya elecciones,” “para esto y aquello.” Entonces no le dan la importancia.

[There’s a lot of resistance to the measures, whether they’re right or not. I think there’s still a lack of open conversation about consequences, because people—do this, do that—we know it’s our health and our lives at stake. But people are still expecting that since it’s the government, the government has to solve everything for us. There are even political overtones: “It’s just to scare us,” “so there won’t be elections,” “it’s for this and that.” So they don’t take it seriously.]

According to peri-urban narratives, several neighbors had their cars confiscated and received fines, and the police had sent many of them to community service for breaking the rules. Yet, peri-urban residents were still going out in order to find some sort of income or food, further putting themselves and their families at risk (D. Gutiérrez et al., 2020b).

Women demonstrated a thorough understanding of the measures established. They expressed strong conviction in their commitment to adhering to them, often describing their different cleaning routines. However, many, if not all, faced significant barriers to accessing masks and disinfectants, exacerbated by the limited access to water within peri-urban living conditions (Landa-Blanco et al., 2021). Thus, masks and disinfectants quickly became commodities. For political parties and community boards, providing them was a way to show up for their followers and their neighbors. A scant supply of disposable masks was sporadically provided on select occasions, and these were mainly obtained through various community-based organizations and their access to State or Party-based organizations. Some residents received masks through acts of charity from fellow community members or churches; occasionally, residents from Los Pinos reported receiving them from their local health center. National institutions, and international organizations such as COPECO⁷² and the Red Cross, showed support through solidarity bags and COVID-19 kits. A majority of peri-urban residents resorted to crafting homemade masks from cloth scraps to serve as protective measures. Nevertheless, disposable masks were out of reach for peri-urban residents and consistent access to masks was virtually nonexistent.

In addition, peri-urban settlements were more susceptible to COVID-19 infection due to conditions such as water scarcity, inadequate sewerage services, and housing that exposed people to environmental risks, as well as overcrowding (Allen et al., 2006; Zambrano et al., 2020).

Social distancing for the peri-urban population was particularly challenging due to space

⁷² *La Secretaría de Gestión de Riesgos y Contingencias Nacionales* (COPECO) is the Honduran government agency responsible for disaster risk management, emergency preparedness, and response coordination. It plays a central role in national contingency planning and humanitarian relief during crises and natural disasters.

limitations and lifestyle. Although aligned with global parameters, the measures adopted by the government did not respond to the reality of 70% of Honduran citizens. Physical distancing, quarantine, and confinement had severe impacts on their mental health, exposing them to a myriad of burdens (Ham, 2020b) while shaping a culture of deep fear.

Regrettably, legal requirements did not equip residents in peri-urban landscape with the resources to battle the virus, nor the resources to follow the measures established. In fact, the measures proved to cripple the informal economy, and people's mobility and overall autonomy in fending for themselves, all characteristics of peri-urban living (Zambrano et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the measures disproportionately affected women and girls, leaving them particularly vulnerable and exacerbating the demands of their traditional female roles, such as caregiving and domestic labor. On the other hand, men's roles, even when they were confined, did not translate into an equal share of the domestic labor required.

Moreover, women who survived domestic violence found themselves in even more precarious situations, at risk of being revictimized. The following are accounts from survivors, shedding light on the culture of fear inflicted by the pandemic-related measures (Usta et al., 2021).

6.2.1 Surviving complete shutdown: Women's capacity for confinement amid their struggles to fulfill their roles as mothers and sole providers

Survivors of domestic violence seemed to be well acquainted with confinement measures. In fact, survivors showed resilience throughout their narratives regarding lockdown. Without a doubt, their strength was largely forged by their past journeys with abuse: in one way or the other, survivors had been subjected to mobility restrictions and strict confinement before, and all

by their abusive partners (Gibbons et al., 2021). They were no strangers to social distancing; in fact, I'd argue they were long acquainted. Yet for most survivors, resilience was also accompanied by a recollection of the abuse, or at least of a result of the abuse, which represented an extreme vulnerability in their mental health and a fresh remembrance of fear (Hudson et al., 2020). In addition, most women survivors, after filing for domestic violence, become even more isolated and are forced to face challenges such as the pandemic unaccompanied. Left as the sole providers for their children, they are placed in an even more vulnerable position.

“Obviamente, uno se preocupa; yo no duermo, son la una o las dos de la mañana y no puedo dormir” [Obviously, one worries; I can't sleep, it's one or two in the morning and I can't sleep], says Coraje; although she had lived through those feelings before, she explained how the shutdown had deeply affected her. Stressed and carrying around a new sense of despair: “Destapo un hoyito y tapo otro. No he tenido leche para los niños, ahorita nadie le presta” [I uncover one hole and cover another. I don't have milk for the children; right now, nobody is lending any money], she shares, while describing how she was adding sugar and salt to water to try to nourish her children. Separated from her former partner and abuser, she explains she used to receive support from her in-laws, yet after the separation she was left stranded.

After filing for domestic violence, Coraje became the main provider for her two children. “Mis hijos, ya como están estresados ya no aguantan el encierro” [My children because they're stressed and can't stand being cooped up any more], she explains, while sharing that on the days she manages to work, someone helps her with childcare, yet her children do not leave the house. During the interview, she shares how careful she is when going outside, trying to avoid infection

as best she can, adhering to the stay-at-home rules as much as possible. “La niña me ha dicho que esta harta... se pone histérica, bien rara.” [My girl has told me she’s fed up... she gets hysterical, very weird], she shares in a worried tone. Although she was well accustomed to staying inside, her children were not. Her children used to enjoy the playground in the schoolyard, and their stress due to confinement added levels of anguish Coraje had not dealt with before.

Added to that, she openly shared her discontent regarding the restricting mobility measures. However, this was not due to the confinement itself, as she was well acquainted with that, but to people breaking the rules on confinement and putting others like her and her family at risk. To mitigate the spread of the virus, a system was implemented based on national identity number, which restricted movement for all citizens. This system allocated specific days for citizens to venture outside based on the last two digits of their identification numbers. These numbers rotated each day. Coraje was certain people were not following the measures, and thus believed the measures did not make sense. This, she reiterated, added to the culture of fear: “No me parece. Aquí hay pulperías chinas, y a veces parecen días normales, una exageración de personas... hay personas que abusan” [It doesn't seem right to me. There are Chinese grocery stores here, and sometimes it seems like a normal day, with an exaggerated number of people... there are people who take advantage], she shares, regarding the lack of respect for the measures.

In a great feeling of despair, she had even reached out to her former partner, asking him for cleaning supplies that she could no longer afford. Although an alcoholic with severe aggression problems, her former partner seemed to represent the only source of help she could get during the strict lockdown. The feelings associated with despair, although familiar, had a completely

different root cause for survivors during the lockdown: in the past, those feelings were aroused based on the fear of potentially being wounded by their abusers, but the feelings that arose through confinement were tied to their roles as sole providers for their children. Through domestic violence reporting, survivors cut ties to their abusers, but most also thereby cut ties to their only source of income, leaving them further isolated and alone.

This was also true for Valiente, who, after filing a domestic violence report, became a survivor and, in the same instant, the sole provider for her children. Before that day, Valiente and isolation had long been friends. “La verdad estoy acostumbrada, yo he vivido encerrada” [The truth is, I’m used to it, I’ve lived locked up], she explains, while sharing details of her time with the father of her daughter, who constantly abused her while separating her completely from her family and friends. Valiente lived in an abusive partnership for many years, growing accustomed to social distancing. “Cuando vivía con el papá de [mi hija], él compraba todo, yo no iba ni a la pulpería” [When I lived with my [daughter's] father, he would buy everything; I didn’t even go to the corner store], she says. She managed to work sometimes and perfected her route from work directly to her house. On the days she didn’t work, she never left the house.

She got used to the lifestyle and thus was well acquainted with lockdown measures. Nonetheless, what left her fearful and heavy with feelings of desperation was watching her children struggling. “No quiere hacer absolutamente nada, no quiere hablar, se tira al piso, se tira al mueble” [She doesn’t want to do anything at all, she throws herself on the floor, she throws herself on the couch], she shares, referring to her daughter. Much like her daughter, she was also desperate; in fact, she was hopeless. “Me siento desesperada... estoy sentada, si no es en la cama, me siento en el suelo o en el mueble. Es horrible estar pensando que no tiene ni un peso”

[I feel desperate... I'm sitting, if not on the bed, I'm sitting on the floor or on the couch. It's horrible to think that I don't have a single penny], she explains. Social distancing in this sense was distressing because it had completely removed her opportunities for providing for her children. She did not care about having to remain inside, yet she kept questioning how she would feed her children. With no job, nor a partner to support her, she was left stranded during lockdown.

This was also the case for Resiliente, who had also become a survivor and the sole provider of her children in one day. Strictly adhering to the rules, she was struggling with her mental health. Although accustomed to being alone, Resiliente found herself grappling with the imposed measures. She shares, “Me está afectando grandemente como psicológicamente... imagínese a la mujer encerrada con su esposo. Estoy asombrada como se ha elevado el porcentaje de la violencia doméstica” [It's affecting me greatly psychologically... imagine a woman locked up with her husband. I am amazed by the increase of domestic violence].

The fear of contagion left her in a state of despair. She needed to protect her children as much as she needed to feed them. Luckily, she was employed and could access masks from her employers, as well as some essentials for her children. Yet, much like Coraje, she did not trust that people were following the measures, evidenced in the increased number of cases and number of people in the streets. According to her, it was evident that confinement measures were being ignored and the streets filled with people desperately trying to provide for their families.

This disturbed her deeply due to her increasing fear of contagion. Her health was a priority: as the only caretaker and provider of her children, she could not afford the risk, and nor could her family. All survivors, although relatively accustomed to mobility restrictions, had little to no help

in providing for their children. They were mostly left alone with the burden of sole caregiving and providing, and the additional burden of the imposed confinement. Motherhood in general, for women who were not survivors of domestic violence as much as those who were, took a toll on women's mental health due to their exacerbated roles and inability to provide. Their children's burden quickly became theirs (García et al., 2023). For survivors, the sole action of reporting put them at greater risk of isolation, seclusion, and single motherhood (Sweet, 2021).

Like Resiliente, Guerrero was almost accustomed to lockdown. Before the pandemic, she explains, she lived an isolated life. Her former partner had long affected her mobility and freedom, among many other things. She was no stranger to feeling trapped and alone, yet measures had pushed her over the edge. “Ayy bastante, tensa” [Ayy pretty, tense], she says quickly, after being asked how she was doing.

She expands:

Estoy padeciendo de insomnio, pensando, no puedo dormir, pensando en cómo voy a pagar el recibo de la luz, cómo voy a pagar el agua, pensando mañana cómo voy a vender aunque sea unas dos bolsitas de frijoles, para poder hacer para la comida de mañana.

[I'm suffering from insomnia, thinking, I can't sleep, thinking on how I will pay the electricity bill, how will I pay for water, thinking on how I'm going to sell at least two little bags of beans, to prepare food tomorrow.]

She spent most of her nights wondering how she would feed her children. “Me pongo mal, me pongo a llorar” [I feel bad, I start crying], she says, openly narrating her pandemic nights.

Guerrero had experienced insomnia before: “Después de lo que pase, del trauma que pase, quedé

padeciendo de insomnio por temor, pero no como ahora” [After what I went through, the trauma I experienced, I ended up suffering from insomnia out of fear, but not like this], she shares, referring to the trauma she experienced as a result of enduring years of domestic violence.

Guerrera was a survivor, and she identified as such. Her story evidenced how she had tricked death to stay with her children. She had endured excruciating abuse and physical pain from her former partner for years, a man who attacked her so brutally she ended up in the hospital. She understood more than anyone what it meant to be close to losing her life. Yet the strict lockdown was still extremely hard. There and then, she was faced with her memories and the inability to provide for the children she once survived for. She found herself isolated, her fear rekindled, worrying about meals as much as about the virus. “No salgo, paso encerrada” [I don’t go out, I’m locked up], she says, while explaining her cleaning routine, in which she used bleach to disinfect her entire one-room apartment. She did not see anyone, not even her sister. When forced to go out for essentials, she had a routine: she left a bucket of water and chlorine in the entrance and soaked her shoes and washed herself completely before coming in. She was terrified. Unable to access proper masks, she had a couple of disposable ones, meant to be used once, whereas Guerrero used them over and over again, they were no longer functional.

Yet, even with access to biosafety resources and measures, fear was still predominant. With access to masks, gloves, sanitizers, and bleach to clean her house, Creativa was starting to pay off her debts when the lockdown was imposed. “Ya estaba comenzando a respirar un poquito. Con esto se me paró todo, y realmente si me ha afectado. Si me ha afectado” [I was starting to

breathe a little. But this has put a stop to everything, and it really has affected me. It has affected me], she shares. After her abusive relationship stopped, her abuser was sent to jail, and he could not support her or the children any longer. “No paga nada de mis hijos. No paga comida, no paga nada. Entonces a parte de eso tengo que pagar las deudas que contraje estando con él” [He doesn’t pay anything for my children, he doesn’t pay for food, nothing. And apart from that, I have to pay off the debts I incurred while being with him], she shares.

Meanwhile, Guardiania, like many women in her situation, was extremely worried about contagion. She was also concerned because her former partner was displaying all the symptoms. “Le dieron 72 horas de reposo, y él vino a pasar con nosotros.” [They gave him 72 hours to rest, and he came to stay with us], she explains. He continued to work and developed difficulty breathing. On May 11, he went to the public hospital, where he eventually tested positive for COVID-19. Despite the household’s willingness to comply with the measures, the local health authorities asked them to wait, contrary to established protocols. After a positive test, a special team was supposed to conduct a household search, but no help ever arrived. On May 21, her daughter showed symptoms.

Amid the overwhelming situation, Guardiania needed assistance, yet processes seemed unclear, and solutions were not available. Isolated with two positive cases in her household, she started contemplating giving her former partner another chance: “Hablamos y me dijo que iba a cambiar, que le diera una segunda oportunidad, que lo disculpara, que todo eso había pasado, porque el andaba bajo los efectos del alcohol y que yo era una gran mujer” [We talked, and he said he would change, asked me for a second chance, apologized for everything that had happened because he was under the influence of alcohol, and he told me I was a great woman],

she says. And so, within the city's complete shutdown, she gave her abuser a second chance.

The case was similar for Abnegada. While addressing her struggles with social distancing, she described herself as a family person. “No me siento bien, pienso que uno tiene que acatar y más que todo cuidarse verdas al salir” [I don't feel good, I think one has to comply, and above all, take care of oneself when going out], she explains, while confirming how she followed all imposed measures. “Mi familia, mi madre, mi hermano, si ha sido bien difícil, imagínese tanto tiempo de encierro, de no verlos” [My family, my mother, my brother, it's been very hard, because imagine how much time of lockdown, of not seeing them], she says, while reflecting on the forced lockdown. She describes the measures as a mixture of positive and negative; she understood the importance of avoiding the spread of the virus, yet she missed her family. Her routine was taken away, and she had very few things left to look forward to. She mentioned repeatedly how she missed her mother, brothers, nieces, and nephews. Although she felt the measures were contradictory, and eagerly criticized the lateness of the shutdown, affirming that cases could have been avoided, she understood social distancing as an act of kindness.

Lockdown had allowed her time to ponder and reflect. “También nos ha enseñado muchas cosas, de que tenemos que ser más solidarios, más cariñosos, más amables, estar en comunicación con nuestros hijos, con nuestras parejas y pues a estar disfrutando más que todo, en cierta forma, en casa” [It has taught us many things, we have to be more supportive, more loving, kinder, to communicate with our children, with our partners, and to enjoy being at home], she shares. Having survived years of violence with her former partner and abuser, she was left with an

opportunity for reconciliation. After all, he provided her and her children with masks and resources to avoid contagion, when no one else did. He provided protection she longed for, particularly within confinement.

Many women trapped within Honduran peri-urban landscape faced the virus within a precarious health and economic system. Aware of the limitations of state institutions, women's fear was rooted in a historical accumulation of disappointments with their access to public services, including their experiences of reporting domestic violence, which will be dealt with in more depth later, as well as their experiences accessing local health providers and political institutions in general, particularly during crisis scenarios. Confinement measures in this case proved to further isolate women, especially those women who had survived domestic violence, leaving them alone and at greater risk (Castro, 2020a; Simba & Ngcobo, 2020). With no additional measures for protection, or even mechanisms to ensure provision of income and childcare, women survivors were easily drawn to reconciliation, often the least secure option. Thus, in some instances the cycle was repeated, leading women back into abusive relationships, (Potter et al., 2021).

While the measures were initially established with the purpose of preventing the spread of the virus, it became evident that they responded solely to medical criteria, neglecting crucial social and mental health considerations (Ham, 2020b). Having the primary goal of averting the collapse of an already fragile healthcare system, these measures have proven unjust for peri-urban women, a demographic that relies on free movement and social interactions for access to income, healthcare, childcare and essential services, all of which were disrupted (Anane & Cobbinah, 2022).

6.3 Living on the outskirts: Informality, community organizing, and access to sexual and reproductive rights

By now, it is clear that the legal measures implemented to manage the health crisis disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable populations on the outskirts of the city, particularly women and women survivors of domestic violence. Consequently, women were exposed to increased risks of domestic and family violence, with limited avenues for protection. Moreover, with the state's presence primarily confined to humanitarian aid efforts such as food assistance and populist political gestures in the form of biosafety measures, informal practices started to flourish (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

In both settlements, La Era and Los Pinos, besides accessing donated supplies, residents survived the first months of lockdown by sharing food and asking for small loans from their families and friends. María Elena A. (63), Cristina, Daniela (30), and Isis (18) openly share how they got by thanks to the help of friends, family, neighbors, and even co-workers. “Mire yo a veces le pido a mis hijos que me den” [Look, sometimes, I ask my children to give me], says María Elena, referring to food. She was thankful her family supported her during the hard times. “Bueno a veces he pedido [dinero] ahí en el trabajo, a la mayoría de mis compañeros del trabajo” [I've asked [for money] at work, from most of my co-workers], shares Cristina, who illustrates her debt to the people she worked with.

For Daniela (30), loans came in the form of resources; she and her family were getting by thanks to her neighbors: “Mi esposo tiene que andar con un balde azul en todos los sectores para que le regalen agua” [My husband has to carry a blue bucket so that people will give him water], she shares, explaining how her husband goes out every day to ask for essentials, ensuring he at least

brings the minimum on his return. For single mother Isis, her church proved to be crucial: she was always on her pastor's list, and received food donations that helped her survive the strict lockdown and her unemployment. Family and community ties played a crucial role in mitigating the disproportionate vulnerabilities exacerbated by the pandemic. Neighbors and family members continued to be indispensable in peri-urban settings, serving as invaluable sources of support for securing food, informal employment, childcare, and other essentials (Harkins, 2020).

Community leaders such as Agripina, president of the water board in Los Pinos, play a pivotal role in peri-urban landscape. She was responsible for securing essential food staples and biosafety resources for all residents during the lockdown period. During the interviews, she demonstrated a keen awareness of the pressing priorities her community was confronting. Agripina prioritized food provisions, recognizing the dire circumstances faced by children and single women in Los Pinos. Her deep understanding of the residents' circumstances and vulnerabilities, coupled with her widespread acceptance among residents, positioned her as a trusted figure. Residents relied on her for assistance, reaching out to share their concerns and seek help, highlighting the crucial role of community leaders in times of crisis.

“Lo que se necesita es apoyar a los líderes comunitarios, porque nosotros buscamos apoyar” [What is needed is to support community leaders, because we seek to provide support], Agripina states, underscoring the critical importance of community leadership efforts in political decision-making. Additionally, residents' narratives reveal the proactive initiatives undertaken by their community leaders. For example, in Los Pinos, in sectors where water had been installed, residents were allowed to suspend their payments and continue to receive water services.

Moreover, beyond managing the water board for her settlement, Agripina also played a great part in promoting COVID-19 measures. She was in charge of the provision of daily guidance on precautionary measures. Residents mentioned she was the reason they could access masks avoid the spread of the virus.

Simultaneously, in La Era, community leaders and pastors Carla and her husband Moises, from one of the 15 churches in the settlement, emerged as prominent figures in resident narratives. Drawing on their extensive experience as development practitioners, they mobilized resources to address the community's pressing needs, mostly ensuring access to food essentials. They contacted established networks, and during the period the interviews were conducted they successfully secured donations of rice supplies, which they distributed strategically within the community. Carla explained they prioritized single mothers and the elderly. Throughout the lockdown period, Carla actively engaged with her contacts, even securing a substantial donation from a Buddhist organization that provided food assistance to residents.

Intriguingly, peri-urban settlements demonstrated a remarkable capacity for self-organization in response to pandemic-related challenges. In both settlements, security checkpoints with resident volunteers were established at entry points. All residents were screened for compliance with mask-wearing protocols, and vehicles were disinfected to prevent the introduction of the virus into their neighborhoods. This was completely different from the gated communities that are present in the central city, where people did not even know the names of their neighbors, and private security guards were assigned the role of enforcing the COVID-19 safety protocols. The latter illustrates an important difference in social fabric and community dynamics (Harkins, 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Interestingly, for residents living on the outskirts of the established

settlements, those who lived further away or were located in newer areas of the settlements, this was not the case. Narratives were filled with references to the absence of community organizing, for example from María Euceda and Yini. “No he visto nada, que vengan a ayudar” [I haven’t seen anyone to come and help], Yini shares.

During lockdown, in the San Miguel and Los Pinos settlements, residents’ only contact with their local health centers consisted of megaphone announcements made by healthcare workers, emphasizing handwashing, mask-wearing, and adherence to stay-at-home measures. However, for community leaders the burden of state absence was palpable. Both female leaders, Agripina and Carla, felt the weight of the lockdown acutely. They were inundated with calls requesting donations, seeking alternatives and support. Collective demand exceeded their capabilities and stretched their networks thin. They found themselves unable to meet all urgent needs (Gerada, 2021).

Consequently, they began to voice their dissatisfaction with people not following the measures and making things worse. Carla recounts how people were hesitant to comply with the measures despite receiving essential food supplies she had worked hard to procure from the national government. “No miran las cosas positivas, lo que está beneficiando al pueblo, sino lo que hay detrás” [They don’t see the positive things, what is benefiting the people, only what is behind], Carla explains how people's opposition to following the measures is linked to their mistrust of the government.

This significant opposition she refers to is vividly portrayed in a narrative shared by residents about a confrontation with the National Authorities within the first months of lockdown. La Era

contains a burial ground where members of the community are laid to rest, a well-known symbol acknowledged in all interviews. Allegedly, during the lockdown, people were clandestinely burying individuals who had passed from COVID-19 or other diseases during the night. This was in defiance of the established regulations prohibiting burials. Thus, on May 7, 2020, the national police came into the settlement, heavily armed, in search of the offenders.

This dilemma underscores a common confrontation with authorities that peri-urban residents often face—one characterized by violence, and repercussions from their own way of living.

Carla explains the situation:

Supuestamente era algo pacífico, y se pusieron a levantarse en contra de la policía, y comenzaron a gasear a quienes fuera, sin importar, esa son acciones de represión del pueblo, de una comunidad que ha estado sin agua, que ha estado sin alimentos, que viene a que le vengán a sembrar muertos.

[Supposedly, it was peaceful, but then people began to revolt against the police. They started throwing gas at anyone, without caring. These are acts of repression against the people, against a community that has been without water, without food, and now they come to plant the dead among them.]

She recounted how police officers came into her vulnerable community, which was in deep need of support, with no support in hand. “Hasta mi casa llega aquel humo de bombas lacrimógenas” [The smoke from tear gas bombs even reached my house], she shares, while explaining the situation they endured. Many residents were unaware of the reason for the police presence, yet they all suffered the consequences.

María Elena M. (32), a resident and mother of two in La Era, living close to the funeral home explains: “El jueves creo, hubo un relajo, ¡usted viera! Yo no salí, yo estaba en mi casa, pero desde aquí se miraba o en las noticias, bien fumigadas” [I think it was Thursday, there was chaos, you should have seen it! I didn’t go out; I was at home, but from here you could see it, or on the news, completely fumigated], she explains. “Ella es prematura, bien complicada. Se me ahogó la bebe” [She is premature, very complicated, the baby choked], says María Elena M. She could hear the protests and was worried about her baby, who started choking on the tear gas. “Los policías tirando bombas lacrimógenas, ahí estuvo como tres horas ese relajo, ¡viera! Andábamos llorando” [The police were throwing tear gas—there was chaos for about three hours, you should’ve seen it! We were crying], she laughs. The event made headlines in the local news, portraying the settlements as hubs of opposition, illegality, and non-compliance with measures. Settlements like La Era struggled with being trapped and suffering unemployment. In addition, residents had been forced into a confinement they could not afford.

With limited state resources, peri-urban settlements confront challenges using their own means, relying on neighbors and leaders, relying on each other, as clearly exemplified by leader and pastor Carla. “Al ver los demás vecinos a la acción, ‘No los vamos a dejar solos,’ y comenzó a salir gente como ruido” [When the other neighbors saw what was happening, they said, “We’re not going to leave them alone,” and people started coming out like a wave], she recalls.

When confronted with unfair or unrealistic measures, as the mobility restrictions proved to be, residents still needed to confront them. Their relationship with state resources continues to occur from a standpoint of desertion, being constantly abandoned but always punished for their decisions and lifestyles, further solidifying the opposition Carla mentions. Such settlements

constantly grapple with their own informality, branded as negative and illegal (Wilkinson et al., 2020). When community solutions fail to address needs, it underscores the state's failure, leaving citizens vulnerable and viewing basic services as privileges, especially during times of crisis (Peters et al., 2022). This is clearly evidenced in the state of precarity that women, in particular, were left to endure, especially in relation to their additional needs and their sexual and reproductive rights' (Hussein, 2020).

Stay-at-home mother of five Daniela (30) shares, regarding the situation of her eldest daughter: "Ahorita, por ejemplo, le vino el período a ella y no hay dinero para toallas sanitarias, y tuvimos que cortar camisitas para que usara. Y le venía bastante, por el estrés" [Right now, for example, she got her period and there's no money for sanitary pads, so we had to cut up little shirts for her to use. She was bleeding quite a bit due to stress].

Although health centers were open and available within walking distance for both settlements, they had no quality services regarding COVID-19 infections or services for women. Quality contraceptive methods, or resources for additional needs such as sanitary pads, are not resources woman in peri-urban landscape commonly have access to. The reality of women's access to additional or sexual and reproductive rights during the lockdown was limited and difficult.

"Nosotros hemos tomado todas las medidas para estar sanos y llevarla y que se me infecte, ni quiera Dios" [We've taken all the precautions to stay healthy and take her, but she gets infected, God forbid], Daniela explains, referring to her idea of accessing a health center to potentially get sanitary pads for her daughter.

Single mother Doris (24) helps illustrate women's scenario regarding access to sexual and reproductive resources. "Si está el centro de salud, yo esuche no esta funcionando, pero la verdad

no sé. No nos ha tocado que hemos estado enfermas” [The health center is there, I heard it’s not functioning, but honestly, I don’t know. We haven’t had the experience of being sick], she says while explaining she only visits the health center when there is a disease or an illness present. When asked about family planning methods, she answered, “No, yo no planifico. Fíjese que no tendría acceso. Bueno, yo antes iba a Ashonplafa,⁷³ fui al centro, usan esos métodos de salud, no usan métodos por la iglesia” [No, I don’t use birth control. I wouldn’t really have access. I used to go to Ashonplafa, I went to the center, they use those methods, they don’t use church methods], she shares. Like her, many women in peri-urban landscape view family planning as a benefit, a privilege even. Moreover, sexual and reproductive rights are considered to be highly connected to religious views, and not to the state. María L. (40) sheds light by stating:

Fíjese, como no en Los Pinos, como pertenece a la iglesia católica, dan el collar. Porque yo, de verdad, no lo he usado. Yo iba a Alonso Suazo a ponerme una inyección de tres meses. Pues me la había puesto antes. La mandamos a comprar en la farmacia para ponérsela nosotras. Entonces, sin transporte, imagínese, no voy a pagar un taxi.

[You see, not in Los Pinos, because it belongs to the Catholic Church, they give out the necklace. But I honestly haven’t used that. I used to go to Alonso Suazo to get a three-month injection. I had gotten it before. We sent someone to buy it at the pharmacy so we

⁷³ Ashonplafa is a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Honduras that contributes to improving the quality of life of the population by ensuring access to comprehensive health services, particularly in sexual and reproductive health.

could apply it ourselves. But without transportation, imagine that, I'm not going to pay for a taxi.]

However, despite the center's lack of direct affiliation with the church in terms of funding or management, the influence of religious views and leaders in peri-urban settlements is profound. María, like many other women, used methods approved by their local church. In addition, all had been forced to attend a bigger public hospital in the center of the city where she used to get a 3-monthly injection. Yet without income, or transport, she was not able to access family planning during lockdown. Women in peri-urban landscape, deeply tied to religious narratives, rely on services available outside their peripheries (Sassen, 2002).

Mother of three Pamela further explains, “No tengo acceso, no tengo marido, entonces no planifico” [I don't have access, I don't have a husband, I don't need to plan]. Like her, some women do not prioritize family planning if they are single or separated. Uptake of contraception was even more limited during the lockdown, when essentials such as food and water became the priority.

The peri-urban populations face a deficit in quality services, with existing health centers requiring substantial investments in infrastructure, equipment, and medications to ensure adequate care (Carmenate-Milián et al., 2017; de Oliveira, n.d.). In addition to high religiosity, which will be discussed further in Chapter 8, women were confronted with the profound implications of many of the services tailored to them being redirected to address the demands of the pandemic (Simba & Ngcobo, 2020). Overall sexual and reproductive health services are particularly vulnerable within crisis scenarios (Hussein, 2020), and peri-urban experiences serve as evidence of the notable absence of strategies to address the needs of women.

6.3.1 Surviving informality: Families and friends as a way to autonomy

In survivor interviews, little to no mention was made of community organizing. Many couldn't identify any community leaders or community-based organizations to turn to for assistance during lockdown. Interestingly, the only organizations survivors recognized were associated with their diverse experiences reporting domestic violence. During lockdown, most women had been contacted by feminist organizations that had provided them with help and guidance in the past.

Additionally, many relied on their families as their primary support networks, regarding provision of essentials such as food and water, as well as emotional support. In the realm of peri-urban and urban dynamics, where the fabric of community interdependence is clearly woven, *Guardiana*, *Creativa*, *Abnegada*, and *Valiente* all answered 'No' when asked whether community organizations were present to assist them with fundamental or supplementary needs. Their narratives, echoing the struggles of countless individuals navigating life after surviving domestic violence, confirm the absence of community-based organizations established solely to support vulnerable women survivors. In probing this refusal, we start delving into the essence of their own agency.

Guardiana helps illustrate this: "Aquí donde nosotros vivimos, vivimos en la calle principal, incluso a la par de un mercado... y no hay nada" [Here where we live on the main street, right next to a market even... there's nothing]. Although strategically well located in the urban landscape, she did not identify any type of organization that could support her needs. The same was the case for *Abnegada*, who explains:

Fíjese que yo vivo como en un callejón, un callejón sin salida... y aquí los vecinos, fíjese, ellos son bien precavidos, bien reservados. Ellos tienen su precaución en el aspecto de que no salen mucho. Este es un callejón bien, bien como solo.

[You see, I live in a kind of alleyway, a dead end... and the neighbors here, you know, they're really cautious, very reserved. They don't go out much. It's a very, very quiet alley.]

Even before the pandemic, she describes her home as being in an isolated location. When talking about small community initiatives, such as waste collection, she says that everyone is responsible for their own waste. It is collected twice a week and nobody touches anyone else's trash or reminds others about the collection system. For Abnegada, the lack of community organizing added to the culture of fear that arose during the lockdown. “Cada quien hace lo que quiere hacer, los niños jugando en la calle pelota, en la noche en un campito de atrás, gente haciendo fiestas. osea, normal” [Everyone just does what they want, kids playing soccer in the street, people having parties at night in the field out back. I mean, normal], Valiente shares, highly afraid and simultaneously criticizing the lack of order that her barrio represented, forcing her to further isolate and avoid going out altogether

On the other hand, Community organizing in the urban and peri-urban landscape was instrumental in assisting with COVID-19 protocols. Resiliente shares, “Aquí en la colonia hay tres entradas y hay personas en cada entrada, hay personas con cloro desinfectante. Los patronatos se unen, toman las medidas, caminan de casa en casa” [Here in the neighborhood there are three entrances and there are people at each entrance, there are people with disinfectant

chlorine, community boards unite, take measures, they go to each house]. In her case, the neighborhood committees came together to take measures to avoid the spread of the virus. Similar actions were evidenced by resident narratives in La Era and Los Pinos. Yet community organizing focused on distributing food donations rather than addressing the deeper issues affecting Honduran urban communities, such as the rise in domestic violence evident through the increased number of cases reported on local news.

In the context of survivors' support networks, women frequently highlighted the role played by their families and friends. Particularly notable was the support they found among fellow survivors, which proved invaluable, especially during the periods of lockdown. Guardiania, for instance, shared about her bond with friends from church, particularly one who had endured similar experiences, emphasizing the significance of shared understanding and guidance: "Ella me ha estado ayudando" [She has been helping me], she explains. "Siempre me dijeron que lo dejara, que me alejara de él. Pero a mí, por el momento, que él me insulta por teléfono, que siga un proceso judicial" [They always told me to leave him, to stay away from him. But for me, at this point, with him insulting me over the phone, I just want to continue with the legal process], she says.

Despite seeking assistance from authorities and following legal advice, some survivors encountered significant challenges. Guardiania, for instance, found herself in a precarious situation when authorities advised her to delay taking action until after the pandemic, leaving her vulnerable and ultimately allowing her abuser into her home during confinement. However, she remained connected with other survivors as a protective measure.

Similarly, Coraje found support while sharing with another survivor: “La muchacha que me cuida a los niños tiene problemas también, y por más que le digo... Yo le compartí a ella mi experiencia. Antes se quedaba a dormir aquí, y ella miró y me dijo que le denunciara” [The young woman who takes care of my children has problems too, and no matter how much I talk to her... I shared my experience with her. She used to sleep here, and after seeing it, she told me I should report him].

These accounts underscore the importance of open dialogue and support networks in empowering survivors to seek help and take necessary steps toward safety. This also sheds light on the fact that support networks are rarely found within state institutions or resources. Moreover, survivors like Coraje recognize the psychological toll of remaining silent about their experiences and the importance of finding outlets for expression. Despite lacking adequate legal support, she found solace in sharing her story with friends and family, thereby breaking the silence surrounding domestic violence and creating a supportive environment for others. During her interview, she volunteered several times to share her story with other women going through domestic violence.

For survivors, finding refuge in shelters can offer safety and relief from the constant threat of violence. This was the case for Amada, who remained in the shelter during the lockdown.

Amada’s description of feeling liberated on entering a shelter underscores the critical role these spaces play in providing survivors with a sense of security and hope for resolution, and even justice. “Me sentí libre, me sentía libre, ya no pensaba en las cosas que me iban a hacer, ya no sufrir maltrato, ni nada” [I felt free, I was feeling free, I no longer thought about what they were going to do to me, no more abuse, nothing], she bravely shares.

Family planning was not discussed at all in the conversations held with survivors, including access to sexual and reproductive rights. Regarding access to healthcare services in general, women survivors, like residents, did not view health centers as safe spaces to address their additional needs. Instead, survivors of domestic violence often only sought medical assistance from local health centers when faced with illness or health concerns. This pattern was particularly pronounced in the case of Valiente, whose primary motivation for seeking medical attention was the health needs of her children. Valiente articulated her worries, explaining:

Tengo una hija que es asmática. Yo tengo un hijo que sufre de anemia falciforme. Mi hija por lo general siempre se enferma de las amígdalas. Mis hijos, de alguna u otra manera, cualquier cosa los puede enfermar—sus defensas no son normales.

[I have a daughter who has asthma. I have a son who suffers from sickle cell anemia. My daughter usually always gets tonsillitis. My children, in one way or another, can get sick from anything—their immune systems aren't normal.]

The looming threat of the virus heightened Valiente's concerns for her children's well-being, compelling her to adopt strict confinement measures as advised by health authorities. She expressed her determination to shield her children from potential harm, stating, “No voy a enterrar a mis hijos. Yo no voy a enterrar a mis hijos. Mis hijos me tienen que enterrar a mí, pero me tienen que enterrar de vieja, no ahora” [I'm not going to bury my children. I'm not going to bury my children. My children must bury me, but they must bury me when I'm old, not now].

Consequently, Valiente restricted her movements to essential outings only, grappling with fear and anxiety each time she ventured outside for necessities. Her children were strictly confined

indoors, deprived even of brief excursions for fresh air or sunlight, as Valiente prioritized their safety above anything else. Emotionally overwhelmed by her responsibilities as the only caregiver for her children, Valiente tearfully reflected on her role:

Yo soy la mamá, el papá, yo soy el doctor aquí también. Yo soy todo. (Nudo en la garganta.) Si yo me enfermo, ¿qué pasa con mis hijos? Si yo me enfermo y termino en un hospital, ¿quién va a estar con mis hijos?, ¿quién los va a cuidar? ¿Y si yo muero? ¿Qué pasa con mis hijos? Si mis hijos se enferman, ¿qué voy a hacer yo sin mis hijos? A mí me ha afectado mucho, y tengo miedo.

[I'm the mother, the father—I'm also the doctor here. I'm everything. [Chokes up] If I get sick, what happens to my children? If I end up in a hospital, who's going to be with them? Who's going to take care of them? If I die, what happens to my children? And if they get sick, what would I do without them? It has affected me deeply, and I'm afraid.]

Despite shouldering these immense burdens, Valiente took proactive measures to educate her children about the importance of confinement and guided them on staying healthy during the pandemic, emphasizing the collective responsibility within their family unit. Valiente's narrative underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by survivors of domestic violence, especially for mothers, who often navigate complex caregiving roles amid ongoing trauma and adversity. Her unwavering dedication to her children's well-being highlights the resilience and strength inherent in survivors' instincts, as they strive to safeguard their families in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The only survivor compelled to seek assistance from her local health center, Guardianiana, encountered a distressing situation when her former partner and abuser was wrongly diagnosed. Despite presenting with all the COVID-19 symptoms, he was advised to undergo treatment for bacterial pharyngotonsillitis, not testing positive for COVID-19 until visiting a public hospital outside her barrio, and thus he inadvertently spread the virus within their household and infected one of her daughters as well as herself. Guardianiana recounted her frustration with the health center's response, recalling, "Yo comencé con los síntomas, y yo fui el 13 de mayo a emergencia al Clipper [centro de salud], porque yo no aguantaba la fiebre ni el dolor de cuerpo, y no me quisieron atender" [I started having symptoms, and I went to the Clipper [health center] emergency room on May 13 because I couldn't stand the fever or body pain, and they refused to treat me], she recounts. Remarkably, this mirrored the advice she received when reporting domestic violence—advice to wait. In the midst of a pandemic, Guardianiana found herself forced to await assistance.

Guardiana described her experience as follows: "Me presenté a emergencia de pediatría con la niña, y le digo, también lastimosamente salió positiva, pero lo que está haciendo el seguro es una verdadera negligencia médica" [I went to the pediatric emergency room with my daughter, and unfortunately she also tested positive. But what the health insurance is doing is truly medical negligence], she said, lamenting the missed opportunity to prevent her child's infection, had proper treatment been administered correctly. Exposed to the virus due to institutional oversight and the limited recourse for protection while dealing with both health and safety concerns, survivors like Guardianiana are left to fend for themselves.

In the absence of adequate support from state institutions, survivors turn to one another, seeking support and assistance within their own community networks, often feminist networks, which represent their only source of the support, assistance, and information survivors need when reporting domestic violence. In the cases of all the survivors we interviewed, feminist collectives represented their lawyers, friends, and psychologists. Guardianiana's experience sheds light on the systemic challenges faced by survivors in accessing essential services during times of crisis. Her story underscores the critical need for comprehensive support mechanisms that address the intersecting vulnerabilities of 1) women, and 2) women survivors, including access to timely and accurate healthcare interventions and protective measures. As survivors navigate these complex realities, their resilience and resourcefulness in forging supportive networks highlight the resilience inherent within survivor communities.

6.4 Domestic violence reporting: A political struggle for survival

In Honduras, the National Emergency System (SNE 911) recorded more than 7,000 reports of domestic and intrafamily violence throughout the country, of which 4,245 occurred in the first 15 days of mandatory quarantine. On March 15, when the government decreed the state of emergency, 522 reports of gender-based violence were filed in the first weeks (15 days) of mandatory of lockdown (National Emergency System 911 2020). Similarly, 17 femicides occurred within the same time period, and an approximate of 49 femicides in the first 5 months of the pandemic year of 2020 (March- July 2020). According to experts the pandemic violence represented a 16% increase in the levels of patriarchal violence that mestiza women already endure. All this took place with limited access to protective mechanisms.

Furthermore, on gaining insight into the pandemic's toll on residents, with their constrained access to economic, basic, and overall public resources, we embarked on an exploration of their perceptions regarding the increased domestic violence we refer to.

Intriguingly, despite the evident surge in reporting, residents did not acknowledge this as an issue that occurred in their barrios. In fact, when questioned about this phenomenon, most residents acknowledged the increase in domestic violence yet hesitated to accept that it was an occurrence within their own settlements.

We hear once again from Daysi (24), Lidia, Alba (71), Berlín, and María Elena M. (32), who all asserted that this was not an issue happening in their peri-urban scenario. Lidia shares, “No he escuchado, sería mentirle. Ni he escuchado a gente que golpea” [I haven't heard anything, it would be a lie. I haven't heard of anyone hitting others].

Alba and Berlín even found reasons for the absence of domestic violence within their settlements: “Problemas de violencia no he escuchado, como uno encerrado no se da cuenta de nada. No he escuchado nada” [I haven't heard of any problems with violence; when you're locked up, you don't notice anything. I haven't heard anything], says Berlín. Meanwhile, Alba explains that the absence of violence in her settlement is tied to the presence of religious institutions, “No hay ruidos violentos ni peleas porque todos van a la iglesia.” [There are no violent noises or fights because everyone goes to church].

During the interviews, some women did acknowledge instances of fights and violence; for example, Pastor Carla, Doris (24), and Alba openly described noises and fights during lockdown. However, they did not associate this violence with domestic or family violence. Doris explains:

Se llevan bebiendo en la calle y pasan de pelear y pelear, casi todos los días. Se ponen a beber en enemistades. Ayer estaba viendo una pelea desde aquí, desde mi casa, porque yo iba así a la orilla de la calle. Hombres siempre.

[They're always out drinking in the street and constantly fighting, almost every day. They drink with enemies. Yesterday I was watching a fight from my house because I happened to be walking near the edge of the street. Always men.]

Both she and Carla note that such altercations had occurred at least twice a week since lockdown started, attributing them to people, mostly men, being unable to cope with the lockdown. Women avoided getting involved by adhering to strict confinement because they were not aware that reporting was an option.

Alba vehemently insists there is no violence in her barrio due to its religious nature. However, she discloses, “Pero justo al mediodía de hoy asesinaron a un muchacho frente a la escuela de la comunidad. Nos da miedo porque uno no quiere salir para terminar con un tiro en la cabeza”

[But just at noon today, a boy was murdered in front of the community school. It scares us because we don't want to go out and end up with a bullet in the head]. Her comment reveals the violence associated with gang control and presence, viewed as an isolated event; residents like her are unable to solve, report, or involve themselves in such instances.

On the other hand, Agripina (55), community leader from Los Pinos, speaks openly about the issue of domestic violence, acknowledging, “Si, hay mujeres que han sido violentadas” [Yes, there are women who have been abused]. Nonetheless, she attributes the issue to the pandemic situation, linking it to food shortages and reinforcing traditional gender roles by explaining, “Ha

habido más problemas, es cierto. Yo conozco. Pero como no hay alimentación, las parejas se pelean por eso” [There have been more problems, it’s true. I know it. But because there’s no food, couples fight over that]. Traditional gender roles are normalized and replicated throughout the peripheries. The fact that lockdown limited men’s ability to fulfill their main role as providers seemed to be considered the cause of the spike in domestic violence.

Agripina shares that she often receives calls asking for help, mostly about food shortages. However, one pandemic day, a woman from her community called her to report that her husband had started beating and humiliating her. In response, Agripina recounted her own past experiences and advised the woman to reconcile with her husband, trying not to anger him and understanding his situation: “Algunas buscan ayuda, pero otras no. Otras aguantan. No se van de la comunidad; los problemas se solventan a través de la conciliación” [Some seek help, but others don’t. Others endure. They don’t leave the community; problems are resolved through reconciliation].

Despite having accepted her survivor status in the interview, and evidencing her proficiency in community organizing, Agripina seems unaware of available solutions for domestic violence. Like many other community residents and leaders, she does not view domestic violence as an issue to be addressed by any grassroots, community or even governmental organization, unlike rights such as to food or even COVID-19 measures. Instead, she perceives domestic violence as a domestic matter, meant to be resolved within peri-urban households.

To further illustrate this, we hear once again from Yini in La Era. In discussions regarding the prevalence of conflict and shouting in her settlement, she acknowledges the problem and highlights the evident disputes among couples, particularly noticeable in the constant screaming

heard during confinement. She reflects on a prevailing reluctance among residents to report such incidents, attributing it to ingrained patriarchal attitudes. “Yo digo que no es miedo, es como machista.” [I wouldn’t call it fear, it’s more like machismo], she remarks; according to her and Agripina, people prefer to endure and not report violence

Yini offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics that keep women tied to abusive relationships, citing factors such as alcohol consumption and the sense of confinement as exacerbating factors. Another key element is women’s evident economic dependencies. She elucidates, “Tal vez a eso le tienen miedo, porque denuncian y a las 24 horas ya están libres. Entonces dicen, ‘Ah, me viene a dar duro’” [Maybe that’s what they’re afraid of, because they file a report, and 24 hours later he’s free again. So they say, “Now he’ll come hit me harder”], she explains. The fear Yini describes is rooted in the limitations of the Domestic Violence Act, which mandates a mere 24-hour separation between the aggressor and the victim after reporting. Based on her experience of friends and neighbors, she emphasizes that this brief respite often fails to protect victims adequately, as aggressors may retaliate with increased violence on their release. In addition, separation often means the aggressor will not be able to provide for his family.

Drawing on the insights of frontline workers in domestic violence, Yini underscores the inherent limitations of the current legal framework, which prioritizes temporary separation over long-term protection for victims. This is added to a lack of mechanisms to protect women economically, based on the fact that sometimes—not always, but often—peri-urban and urban residents replicate traditional gender roles, placing men as primary providers (D. Gutiérrez et al., 2020b).

Feminist collectives advocate utilizing the Domestic Violence Act to secure immediate separation from aggressors and seeking refuge in safe spaces such as shelters, to save women's lives, contrary to conventional advice that promotes reconciliation. Nonetheless, reporting does alert the aggressor, which local feminist collectives often caution against, yet justice operators do not. Most local frontline workers have witnessed firsthand how reporting violence can lead to its escalation. To expand on this: just a kilometer away from La Era, within the San Miguel District, survivor-turned-activist, Dalila, helps us understand the problem: "A las víctimas se les sugiere denunciar, pero si ella me dice 'No quiero denunciar,' pues no las obligamos a hacer algo que no quieran" [Victims are encouraged to report, but if she tells me, "I don't want to report it," we don't force them to do something they don't want to], she explains. According to Dalila, most women are hesitant to report, and feminists understand and support their autonomy, accompanying them regardless. Yet when women do report, the advice is to use the 24-hour separation period to leave the household and find a place where the aggressor cannot find them. The optimal option is a shelter, yet there is not always sufficient space.

Dalila also helps us understand the role of the feminist collective, which is different from that of state authorities:

Recuerde que la ley contra la violencia doméstica no concilia, mientras que violencia intrafamiliar sí concilia. Yo, por esa razón, lo primero que uso es la violencia doméstica. No es que no queremos, pero los jueces van a la conciliación, pero en violencia doméstica la ley no permite la conciliación, y ahí estamos vigilantes.

[Remember that the law on domestic violence doesn't allow conciliation, whereas intrafamilial violence does. That's why I always file it as domestic violence first. It's not that we don't want to act, but the judges lean toward conciliation. But in domestic violence cases, the law doesn't permit conciliation, and that's where we stay vigilant.]

According to experts, most justice operators tend to follow their traditional, often religious view on families, often promoting reconciliation, no matter how harsh the violence endured. In addition, reconciliation is faster, she explains: “El proceso se termina más rápido: concilio y ya termina. Y la violencia doméstica tiene que estar ahí en el juzgado, y sigue uno en la fiscalía. Los penales... los fiscales no están sensibles al tema” [The process ends faster—you reconcile, and it's done. But with domestic violence, it stays in the court, and you keep going through the prosecutor's office. When it comes to criminal matters... the prosecutors are not sensitive to the issue].

As a frontline worker and peri-urban resident, she sheds light on two crucial aspects. First, she underscores the recommendation by experts to use the Domestic Violence Act: they emphasize its prompt action in separating victims from perpetrators during violent incidents. However, she also highlights the potential heightened risk faced by women as a consequence, emphasizing the importance of more and sufficiently funded shelters for victims of domestic violence. Second, Dalila emphasizes the common scenario where women are forced to remove themselves from their homes, often isolating from neighbors and support networks, in an effort to avoid being found. Moreover, she stresses that reconciliation should not be advocated in cases of violence, as it often exacerbates the situation, leading to more severe physical harm for victims. This stands in contrast to the initial offenses addressed by the Domestic Violence Act, which necessitates a

distinct reporting process. The latter illustrates the urgent need for reforms in addressing domestic violence, especially from a grassroots perspective, highlighting the importance of comprehensive legal protections and support mechanisms that prioritize the safety and well-being of residents and survivors.

Most women interviewed are unaware of the feminist collectives available around their barrios, like Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla, which Dalila works for. Interestingly, all female residents were able to identify state alternatives, whether from reading or hearing about them, and their responses were consistently accurate. Most recognized the police station as the primary protective alternative, with many also aware of the option to call 911. Others acknowledged that women could seek assistance at their local health centers, while others, mostly according to their own experiences of domestic violence, shared a multitude of alternatives, naming the municipal government, the Women's Office (OMM), and specific police stations as options for reporting domestic violence.

Moreover, despite the availability of alternatives, some within walking distance, many residents view the issue not as something requiring community intervention but rather as a matter to be resolved within family structures. Some even listed the church as a protective mechanism, hoping for reconciliation to preserve traditional family structures, mirroring the approach of the Domestic Violence Act, which aims to conserve family dynamics (Wheeler et al., 2021).

Perhaps the emphasis on reconciliation stems from the continued role of men as primary providers for peri-urban and urban households, compounded by the deeply engrained religious ideas of families. Furthermore, survivor experiences have taught us that reporting domestic

violence often demands significant emotional and time resources, while leaving women isolated and economically vulnerable (Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023).

During the lockdown, community volunteers emerged to aid settlements in accessing food supplies and masks and implementing community protocols to prevent the spread of the virus. Yet similar structures were not activated in cases of domestic violence, proving that the phenomenon is not viewed as a community issue, let alone an issue where the state carries significant responsibility. Missing in resident narratives is the critical role of community-based organizations in advocating for survivor-centered approaches, with options that prioritize long-term safety and empowerment for women. The latter could potentially aid women victims and even save women's lives. Nonetheless, domestic violence is not recognized as a collective matter but rather as an individual one (Ritchie & Eby, 2007).

Moreover, women who have bravely reported domestic violence have often faced challenges. The 24 hours of detention mandated under the Domestic Violence Act is a practice that, according to experts and victims, often further enrages the perpetrator, proving to be ineffective in rehabilitating abusers (Cruz, Ana Lizeth, personal communication, 2020; Eguigure, Merly, personal communication, 2020; G. Rivera Sierra, personal communication, March 20, 2020). Additionally, residents' experiences of domestic violence reveal two significant points: first, physical harm is commonly associated with domestic violence, while other forms such as verbal, sexual, and patrimonial abuse are not; second, women typically report violence after enduring several incidents of domestic and intrafamily violence, if not years of abuse, rather than first offenses (Eguigure, Merly, personal communication, 2020). To gain deeper insights into this, we turn to survivors as they recount in detail their experiences of reporting domestic violence.

6.4.1 Surviving reporting: The state as perpetrator

In this section, we delve into the brave narratives of women survivors of domestic violence. Through their detailed accounts, we explore the intricate processes and challenges they encounter when accessing state resources. By untangling their lived experiences, we uncover, within their diversity, the array of challenges that women consistently face in navigating the legal system. These challenges often manifest in being left to fend for themselves (Leyton et al., 2023). Abandoned by the state and the very operators entrusted with their protection, they are often exposed to revictimization (Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023). During the pandemic, all their vulnerabilities were exacerbated, leaving them further unprotected. Despite these barriers, the following narratives reveal a vital role played by alternative support networks, such as family, friends, shelters, and other survivors, offering a reflection of autonomy for mestiza women.

To better comprehend this, we hear from Guardiania again. She began experiencing violence before the lockdown started. She recalls:

A mí me empezaron a llamar a la 1 de la mañana, a las 3 y media de la mañana, y me decían cosas. Yo al principio no le tomé importancia a las cosas, pero todo un día llamándome de diferentes números... Me decía que seguro yo tenía otra pareja... me insultó, diciéndome “hija de p...” “sos una m...” y así, palabras bien fuertes.

[They started calling me at 1 a.m., then again at 3:30 in the morning, saying things to me. At first, I didn't pay attention to it, but they kept calling me all day from different

numbers... He told me I probably had another partner... he insulted me, calling me “son of a b...” and “you’re a wh...”, really harsh words.]

She shares her story about how her partner and his lover would call to harass her. For 10 consecutive months, she endured numerous threats and violent messages on her mobile phone. Although she blocked numbers, they persisted by obtaining new ones to continue their harassment. Allegedly, her partner’s lover contacted her, threatening both her and her daughters. Shockingly, she received photos of her daughters with tombstone carvings and a... cross, symbolizing their deaths.

Determined to seek justice, she decided to report all initial offenses to the police station in the center of the city, Core-7,⁷⁴ in accordance with the Domestic Violence Act. There, she presented all evidence, including screenshots and phone numbers. She explained: “Yo denuncié, presenté la foto, presenté los audios y los mensajes, porque tengo infinidad de mensajes que me siguen llegando. Las voces y todo, pero me dijeron que tengo que esperar que pase la pandemia” [I filed a report. I submitted the photo, the audio recordings, and the messages—because I keep getting so many of them. The voice recordings and everything. But they told me I have to wait until the pandemic is over].

Guardiana’s narrative serves as evidence of the context of domestic violence, particularly pertinent because it occurred in the prelude to the COVID-19 lockdown. The escalation of abuse,

⁷⁴ Metropolitan Police Station #1 (Core-7); refers to a centralized police stations focused on crime reporting.

marked by incessant harassment and subsequent threats, underscores the initial offenses meant to be identified by the Domestic Violence Act. They were also meant to be stopped by reporting, in order to rehabilitate the abuser. Yet this was not true in Guardiana's case.

Despite her assuming the primary provider role, her partner continued to contribute to the cost of the apartment and food. However, when confronted about the threats made by him and his lover, he reacted aggressively. “Él me iba a agredir así... no, no logró tocarme, porque se metió la mamá de él” [He was about to attack me... no, he didn't manage to touch me because his mother stepped in], she shares. Like Guardiana, his mother had also endured verbal abuse from the perpetrator, including threats and insults. After this incident, Guardiana took action to separate; it was necessary as she felt the betrayal of 7 years of relationship. Realizing the escalating threat she faced; she returned to report the incident. “En parte es violencia psicológica” [It's partly psychological violence], she explains. “Lo quieren hacer ver como que uno no vale o lo quieren hacer ver como que uno es menos que ellos” [They want to make you feel worthless or make you feel like you're less than them], she adds, understanding the motive for the abuse. However, despite making the report, there was no 24-hour separation, and amid the lockdown and his illness, he quickly returned, seeking forgiveness. Thus, Guardiana chose to give their partnership another chance.

Her story underscores the significance of family support in mitigating the adverse effects of domestic violence. It also sheds light on the challenges that reporting entails. Even when a victim decides to report and follow the bylaw, achieving meaningful redress and accountability within the domestic sphere is complicated. At the same time, Guardiana's decision to report amid the

pandemic evidence the multifaceted nature of victims' agency and the complexities inherent in negotiating autonomy and safety within abusive relationships.

In most survivor interviews, the focus lies on women who have endured prolonged experiences of domestic violence, many of whom had reported their abusers, several times, even prior to the onset of lockdown measures. To evidence this, we delve into the story of Coraje, Recalling a key incident, Coraje shares her harrowing journey:

Un día vine de donde mis papás. Él me quería tocar, pero yo ya no quería ni que me tocara. Cuando me decía que por qué no me dejaba, que seguro yo tenía otro, me decía cosas groseras. Ese día me levantó la mano, me agarró del cuello, y mis niños comenzaron a gritar.

[One day I came back from my parents' house. He wanted to touch me, but I didn't want him to even lay a hand on me. When he asked why I wouldn't let him, saying I must have had someone else, he started saying obscene things. That day, he raised his hand at me, grabbed me by the neck, and my children started screaming.]

When she resisted, he resorted to manipulation, insinuating infidelity, and verbal abuse. The fear of that moment still vivid in her memory. In a desperate bid for survival, she fought back, leaving a mark on his face, and then bravely reported the incident to the police. "Como dos horas y media en la patrulla. Me sentía horrible, pensé que me iba a ver la gente" [It took about two and a half hours in the patrol car. I felt horrible, I thought people would see me], she shares, highlighting the overwhelming sense of shame that accompanied her throughout the car journey.

The police requested her assistance in locating her abuser. This is not a legal requirement, and it subjected her to further revictimization and involved her in their legal obligations.

Because of her apprehensions about leaving her children alone, and despite the humiliation of being seen in such a vulnerable state, Coraje made the decision to bring her children with her to file a report at the Women's Prosecutor's Office. She shares:

Yo me sentí mal cuando puse la denuncia, me sentía sola. No quería exponer a mis niños a eso, pero lo bueno es que no me separé de ellos. Una compañera me ayudó dándoles comida porque me tomó varios días. Yo pensé que era rápido, pero no.

[I felt bad when I filed the report, I felt alone. I didn't want to expose my children to all of that. But the good thing is I wasn't separated from them. A friend helped me by giving them food because it took several days. I thought it would be quick, but it wasn't.]

She admitted to the emotional burden reported entailed. At the same time, she acknowledged the support she received from a compassionate coworker who provided support during the arduous process, by feeding her children. Following her visit to the Public Ministry, she was directed to the on-duty prosecutor's office, where efforts were made to apprehend her abuser for a 24-hour period. However, she soon realized further challenges of reporting in Honduras, with the statute of limitations only covering the past 6 months, leaving years of manipulation and violence unaccounted for.

“Luego me dejaron en el refugio y me llevaron los niños al refugio” [Later, they dropped me off at the shelter and brought my children there too], she recounts. During her initial days at the shelter, uncertainty clouded her mind as she wondered whether her abuser was aware of her

whereabouts. She started fearing repercussions, and she was also missing work, and thus she decided to leave the shelter a week later. She returned home and contacted her abuser. Despite warnings from experts and friends, Coraje found herself grappling with conflicting emotions, haunted by the disparaging remarks of her mother-in-law:

Me dijo que por qué había denunciado si ella estaba enferma. Ella me decía antes que yo era una masoquista, me dijo que era pendeja, que lo dejara. Pero cuando yo me puse seria y lo denuncié, ya no le gustó. Y se enojaron conmigo. La mala fui yo.

[She asked why I had reported him if she was sick. Before, she used to say I was a masochist, she called me stupid, and told me to leave him. But when I got serious and reported him, she didn't like it. And they got mad at me. I was the bad one.]

Coraje shares how she experienced a sudden change in attitude from people she once considered supportive. Reporting left her feeling abandoned and isolated. Alone and uncertain of her next steps, Coraje sought refuge with a friend, staying over at her house, and even obtained a restraining order. Over the next 2 months, she diligently attended therapy sessions every Tuesday, navigating the challenges of securing special permits from her employer to maintain her job while seeking healing and justice, in parallel.

For Resiliente, reporting was also necessary. After receiving multiple death threats, she sought guidance from the National Commission for Human Rights (CONADE), then turned to the specialized court for domestic violence. She candidly reveals that her abuser is a public figure, with significant power. He had connections in the legal sphere, making her even more vulnerable. She explains:

Siempre existe el tráfico de influencia. Que la persona sabe, si sabe que estamos con las organizaciones, entonces la gente frena un poquito... Una es presa fácil si la persona tiene poder. Recuerde, en este país es bien fácil mandar a callar a alguien.

[There's always influence trafficking. When someone knows we're connected to organizations, people back off a little... You're easy prey if the person has power.

Remember, in this country, it's really easy to silence someone.]

Despite the palpable fear for her life and well-being, Resiliente remained determined to end the cycle of violence. “Lo importante es quitarse este temor, y pues no queda de otra” [The important thing is to overcome this fear, there is no other way], she asserts, driven by her maternal instinct to ensure the safety of her family. Interestingly, Resiliente never cohabitated with her perpetrator; he was married to another woman, and their illicit affair resulted in the birth of her daughter, whom he opposed having. He even resorted to offering Resiliente money to persuade her to undergo an abortion. According to Resiliente, the violence escalated dramatically after her decision to keep her child. Her abuser was profoundly affected by the news, leading to a surge in threats that left her unable to sleep. She initially reported the abuse while pregnant and, with no resolution, was compelled to file a second time, just 40 days after her baby was born, seeking protection from human rights authorities, mere weeks before the pandemic.

Navigating the legal system, Resiliente filed for domestic violence through the punitive avenue, diligently gathering evidence and seeking support. Being employed by Congress, she had access to female lawyers who lent invaluable assistance to her case. However, despite the presence of three individuals from different organizations providing support and witness testimony at her

hearing, Resiliente's underlying anguish persisted: "Nunca me he sentido en riesgo, en mi vida. En ningún momento había acudido a una organización para salvaguardar mi vida... La vida de mi hija estuvo en riesgo" [I had never felt at risk in my life. At no point had I ever gone to an organization to protect my life... My daughter's life was at risk], she reveals.

Reflecting on the stages of domestic violence, Resiliente acknowledges the progression from psychological coercion to risk of death in a limited amount of time and urges others to recognize the signs early on. "Desde el primer daño psicológico lo mejor es separarse de la persona" [From the first psychological harm, it's best to separate from the person], she advises, imparting wisdom gleaned from her own experience. Her story sheds light on the intricacies of navigating legal frameworks, societal stigmatization, and personal trauma in the pursuit of justice. It explores the various stages of reporting, from responding to initial threats to seeking protection for survival, while also examining the broader systemic challenges inherent in addressing domestic violence within the legal system.

As with her story, Abnegada's provides evidence that reporting does not necessarily represent safety for the victim. Before the lockdown, Abnegada filed for domestic violence in court after discovering her abuser's infidelity, which shattered their 6-year relationship. She recalls a time before his affair when things were calm, and he provided for her and her daughters. However, once his affair was exposed, he could not maintain the same level of support. He had fathered another child with his lover, a son he wanted. Despite the betrayal, Abnegada hesitated to report him, fearing the consequences of his threats and the financial strain she would face without his economic support. She shares:

Mis hermanas mujeres, ellas me dicen que por qué no lo meto preso, por qué aguanto, por qué aguanto tanto. Pero es por lo mismo, porque yo sé que suena como feo y suena como tonto, pero él ha sido la persona que me ha dado, en cierta forma... que yo dependo de él en la economía.

[My sisters, they ask me why I don't have him locked up, why I put up with it, why I endure so much. But it's because of the same thing. I know it sounds bad, and it sounds stupid, but he's the one who, in some way... has provided for me. I depend on him financially.]

She struggled to find employment due to her lack of experience and feared being unable to provide for her children or afford their education. When her abuser attempted to bring the other woman into their cohabiting space, Abnegada reached her breaking point and filed a complaint for psychological violence. Despite his justifications tied to economic resources, the court ruled against him, stating that he could not maintain two families in the same residence.

Abnegada explains the steps of reporting, starting with filing a complaint with the Public Ministry and proceeding to the domestic violence courts. While the process was arduous, it helped her recognize the extent of manipulation and abuse she had endured for so long. However, reporting only further angered her abuser, leading to more violent outbursts, such as cutting off the cable service and the electricity and forcing Abnegada to leave her home. “Él actuó muy violento, venía muy enojado, venía muy molesto, me trato bien feo, me dijo unas cosas bien feas” [He acted very violently, he was very angry, very upset, treated me very badly, said some really nasty things], she shares.

Reporting did not ensure her safety; paradoxically, it made her even more vulnerable to his multiple abuses. Holding tightly to her belief in God, she survived. Despite the challenges, she found solace in her faith in God and sought support from friends and neighbors. She reflects, “Gracias a Dios que ahora me siento segura. Una, primeramente porque creo en Dios. Yo sé que todas las cosas que me han pasado... yo sé que Él me ha ayudado en ese aspecto” [Thank God, now I feel safe. First, because I believe in God. I know that everything I’ve been through... I know He has helped me with that]. Abnegada began to recognize the earlier signs of abuse that she had initially overlooked.

For Creativa, gaining access to state resources was a years-long ordeal. Despite her initial attempts, the assistance provided did little to alleviate the violence she endured. Like countless other survivors, she found herself repeatedly reporting her situation. She had endured psychological, sexual, and physical torment inflicted by her former partner and abuser. He was an alcoholic who not only deprived her of sleep but also continuously abused her. “Yo quería salir corriendo, por mis hijos y con mis hijos” [I wanted to run away, for my children and with my children], she shares. The cycle repeated itself every day, without fail, taking a toll on her mental and physical well-being. Despite being the primary provider for their household, she found herself trapped in a dilemma regarding reporting the abuse. She expresses the profound desire she had to escape, driven by her love for her children and the desperate need to protect them. However, conflicting emotions of compassion restrained her. She felt as though accusing him would equate to failing him, internalizing the notion that she somehow deserved the abuse. His manipulative rhetoric, insisting that enduring such treatment was a part of marriage, further compounded her dilemma.

After enduring years of suffering in silence, she eventually reached a breaking point. Four years prior to the pandemic, she mustered the courage to report the multitude of violent offenses to the Public Ministry, with little to no resolution. Two years later, she sought help through a radio show, where a compassionate Christian listener directed her to Ciudad Mujer.⁷⁵ Although she filed approximately six official complaints and obtained a restraining order, her abuser remained undeterred, perpetuating the cycle of violence. She shares:

Yo tuve que ir con la policía, porque supuestamente estábamos con orden de restricción y él—no, sin novedad. Y así estuve. Yo cada vez que se me acercaba, yo buscaba un policía, porque yo ya estaba decidida a dejarlo, a no tener nada, y a no volver con él nunca.

[I had to go with the police because we supposedly had a restraining order, and he—nothing, no consequences. That’s how it was. Every time he got near me, I looked for a police officer, because I had already decided to leave him, to have nothing to do with him, and to never go back.]

⁷⁵ Ciudad Mujer (Women’s City) is an initiative spearheaded by the office of the First Lady, which serves as a platform envisioned as a nexus for articulated services. It operates through dedicated care centers where 16 public institutions come together in coordination. These institutions are committed to delivering services catering to women’s needs, including domestic violence reporting and attention. A constant criticism stems from the platform’s operational model, which primarily guides women to preexisting protective mechanisms rather than offering direct services.

Her journey toward her freedom was fraught with obstacles, including strained relationships with loved ones and a pervasive sense of shame. However, she was determined to protect her children, who served as her guiding light. Even in the face of despair, she chose to fight for them.

Constantly finding herself alone and without refuge, she grappled with the complexities of seeking independence while navigating the conflict she was in. She had not spoken to her mother in months; she was ashamed of calling her without having resolved her abusive relationship.

Later, she found solace in a shelter where, together with her children, she received much-needed support from a psychologist. Through this process, she came to realize the profound impact of domestic violence on her family, particularly on her son. He required extensive assistance to navigate the psychological trauma inflicted by his father's manipulative behavior. "Él le decía, 'Mira hijo, ella no quiere orar, ella tiene la culpa, ella deja que entre el diablo.' O sea, así como me manipulaba a mí, lo manipulaba a él" [He told him, "Look, son, she doesn't want to pray, it's her fault, she lets the devil in." Just like he manipulated me, he manipulated him], she states.

Embarking on a journey of healing and self-reflection, she became acutely aware of the pervasive nature of domestic violence, which transcends individual suffering and becomes family violence.

Like her, some women endure years of violence before seeking help or reporting their abusers. This was the case for Guerrero, who nearly lost her life before finding the courage to report her perpetrator. While she fought for her life on the way to the hospital, Guerrero's sisters took the initiative to file a report with the police station in the center of the city. As she was hospitalized for a week, she recalls how everyone, including herself, feared for her death. "Yo sentía que me iba muriendo" [I felt I was dying], she bravely shares. Her injuries included a profound wound in

her jugular vein, a condition from which few people recover. The bleeding seemed endless. In the operating room, the doctor's words were grim: "Si usted cree en Dios, ore porque yo no creo que usted quede viva" [If you believe in God, pray, because I don't think you'll survive], Guerrero recalls, crying. So then and there, she began a conversation with God, pleading for the chance to stay alive for her children. And so she did.

Following this traumatic event, the police arrived to take her statement. After spending a week in the hospital, she was transferred directly to a shelter, where they provided invaluable support during her recovery. Guerrero's wounds began to heal, she and her children received the psychological care they all needed, and they found safety in the shelter. Despite her abuser being in prison after being found hiding at his mother's place, Guerrero remained fearful, knowing he could still pose a threat. "No sé la reacción de la familia en contra mía, más que todo, y de mi hija después de la sentencia" [I don't know what reaction his family will have, especially toward me and my daughter after the sentencing], she admits. She expresses concerns about possible retaliation from his family, highlighting the ongoing fear and uncertainty she faces. During lockdown, Guerrero remained isolated, strictly avoiding contact to ensure her well-being, driven by both the threat of contagion and the fear of detection.

In the case of Valiente, reporting did not end her cycle of violence. In fact, she went from one abusive relationship to another. With no possibility of finding a rehabilitated man, she found herself caught in a system that often failed to protect her. From a desire to "formalize a relationship," as she describes it, she quickly found a different abusive partner, this one associated with criminal activity. "Soy un imán para los problemas" [I'm a magnet for trouble], she states. Unfortunately, breaking away from one perpetrator does not always put an end to the

cycle of violence; if underlying vulnerabilities are not addressed, the pattern can persist.

Despite Valiente's courage in reporting earlier abusive experiences, several further instances of extreme violence were inflicted on her, she explains, including being hit with beer cans and threatened with a machete.⁷⁶ She reflects on the inadequacies of law enforcement responses. Like Guerrero, she filed a report more than once; but in the hospital, when the police asked for a statement, they asked her abuser about it, who in turn lied and fabricated an allegation of assault. Although she told them the truth and showed them her wounds, she was left unprotected. Her experience highlights the alarming reality that many women face when attempting to break free from abusive relationships using legal reporting as a protective mechanism. She shares:

Los policías solo hablaron con él y después llegó a la casa. Muchas veces, muchas veces, [mi pareja], hasta embarazada, me pegaba. ¿Y sabe qué hice yo para salir de eso? Porque tampoco esa vez la policía hizo nada. Y eso que hasta la hermana de él me quiso ayudar, a pistear y todo eso. Mi vecina llamó a la patrulla y declaró que él a mí me pegaba... ¿Sabe qué hice yo? Porque con él vivía en aguantar, un mes para ahorrar dinero. Y el día que se fue a trabajar, yo me fui... y me vuelvo a meter, y me alejo de todo eso... Después me meto con esta persona que es [mi otra pareja], y con él era peor.

⁷⁶ A machete is a weapon, a type of heavy knife originating in Central America and the Caribbean. Its design and functionality have made it an integral part of various cultural practices and daily tasks in agriculture.

[The police just spoke with him and then he came back home. Many times, many times, [my partner] hit me, even while I was pregnant. Do you know what I did to get out of that? Because even then, the police did nothing. And his sister even tried to help me, with money and all that. My neighbor called the patrol and reported that he was hitting me... Do you know what I did? I was living with him just holding on, and I waited a month to save up money. And the day he went to work, I left... and then I went back in, and I pulled myself out again... Then I got involved with someone else [my other partner], and he was even worse.]

Unresolved, the alarming violence continued, and even escalated, leaving Valiente unprotected. The talk that the police gave her abuser did not change anything regarding his violent behavior. During her pregnancy with his child, she endured relentless abuse at his hands. Despite the gravity of the situation, and even when a concerned neighbor bravely reached out to the national police, no meaningful change occurred.

For Valiente, the lockdown only exacerbated her disadvantaged situation. As an unemployed single mother, she grappled with the constant fear of not providing for her children. Faced with such circumstances, once she was able to leave the shelter, she found herself considering the possibility of seeking refuge in another country, all in the hope of a safer and more stable future for herself and her children.

Despite the grave risks involved, the cycle of violence often persists. Valiente confirms that she only managed to further enrage her abuser every time she filed a report. Every time he was detained and then released; he attacked her even more.

La ley no le protege, y la ley te deja los casos a medio palo y no le dan seguimiento, y los archivan y ahí se quedó todo... No pasa nada. La ley en nuestro país no nos protege. Por eso hay mucha mujer muerta, porque la ley no nos protege. La ley lo que hace es que nos pone en bandeja de plata para que el agresor o el asesino termine.

[The law doesn't protect you. The law leaves cases half-finished, with no follow-up, they get shelved, and that's the end of it... Nothing happens. The law in our country doesn't protect us. That's why so many women end up dead, because the law doesn't protect us. What the law does is serve us up on a silver platter so the aggressor or the killer can finish the job.]

According to Valiente, justice operators often leave cases halfway, not following up, or not giving proper attention to victims. Her case reveals a deep sense of empathy for women who decide not to report. Survivor narratives serve as a reminder of the resilience inherent in mestiza women and the transformative power of seeking help and support (Sweet, 2021). In fact, all the survivor narratives help us identify several findings, including the fact that reporting abuse through either the Domestic Violence Act or the Penal Code often exacerbates the aggression of the perpetrator and puts women at greater risk (D. Flores, personal communication, May 28, 2022). This, compounded by various challenges within state resources, such as inadequate training for personnel on how to properly handle domestic violence cases, leads to a revictimization process for survivors (Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023).

Nonetheless, all narratives reveal evidence of the importance of support systems. Family, friends, and even fellow survivors play a crucial role in providing profound assistance to victims,

offering emotional support, practical help, and a sense of sorority in navigating the arduous journey toward justice. A friend could potentially save women's lives (Mahapatro et al., 2021).

6.5 Making sense of the narratives

The narratives surrounding the measures enforced by the national government underscore a shift toward strict social and physical distancing practices. Through the lens of women residing in peripheral areas, a deeper understanding emerges of the profound impact these measures had on their mental health (Sediri et al., 2020). Their narratives highlight a culture of fear disseminated and endured. This is tied to an almost authoritarian adherence to the measures imposed to mitigate the risk of contagion and its associated dangers, especially in the first few months after the measures were established (Mejía et al., 2023).

While the prevailing culture of fear permeated women's narratives, among residents and survivors alike, a culture of criticism also emerged. Women's narratives included criticism of men who did not follow the imposed regulations, revealing a significant opposition within peripheral settlements. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of women articulated their experiences through the lens of motherhood, emphasizing their commitment to protecting and providing for their children at all costs. It became evident that for single mothers existing vulnerabilities were exacerbated, giving rise to feelings of depression and helplessness, and an overwhelming fear of contagion, transforming daily life into a pandemic-like state of existence (Fauci & Goodman, 2020; Nash et al., 2021).

Interestingly, women survivors were no strangers to isolation; in fact, they all recognized it as a familiar concept stemming from their experiences of domestic violence. Their prior exposure to

prolonged periods of social distancing provided them with a degree of preparedness; however, the inability to provide, particularly for single survivors, took a toll on their mental health. This complicated their experiences, revictimizing them and reigniting insomnia and feelings of depression and fear—all of which were deeply intertwined with their traumatic pasts (Mejía et al., 2023; Sacco, Caputo, Ricci, Sicilia, De Aloe, Bonetta, Cordasco, Scalise, Cacciatore, & Zibetti, 2020; Sweet, 2021).

Regarding access to healthcare services, the narratives reveal that mestiza women do not perceive health centers as safe spaces in which to address any additional needs. Instead, they view these facilities solely as places to seek treatment when sick, further underscoring the pervasive sense of distrust and vulnerability experienced within these areas. Even before the pandemic, women were accustomed to encountering limited healthcare facilities. However, with the onset of lockdown measures, the available resources further declined. Moreover, the pandemic led to reduced sexual and reproductive services, which were rapidly deprioritized as non-essential services. The latter point highlights the neglect of crucial aspects of women's health during times of crisis. Additionally, women's perspectives on family planning remain deeply rooted in traditional and religious roles (Pacheco-Montoya et al., 2022; A. E. Smith & Boas, 2020). Those who did discuss family planning often cited the influence of the church and adhered to “church-endorsed methods,” reflecting the influence of societal norms on women's reproductive choices. Studies claim an effect of limited access to sexual and reproductive rights on women's autonomy and exposure to higher violence (CEPAL, 2020; Hussein, 2020; Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres CDM, 2018).

This chapter allows a deep exploration of perceptions surrounding domestic violence among women residents, which, to say the least, reveals a complex interaction of denial, awareness, and attribution. Despite a growing awareness of the prevalence of domestic violence in the country, many women denied its occurrence within their settlements. Through their narratives, it becomes evident that women who have not personally experienced domestic violence tend to view it as an isolated event rather than a systemic issue. Religious beliefs also influence these perceptions, with some attributing the absence of domestic violence to religious values and proper family dynamics (Leyton et al., 2023; Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023). Remarkably, even women in leadership positions advocate for reconciliation, positioning domestic violence as a household and family matter rather than as a concern that demands state or collective intervention (A. Cantillano, personal communication, June 30, 2020; Wheeler et al., 2021).

This nuanced understanding highlights the need not only for targeted interventions that challenge all these internalized beliefs, but also for interventions that may lead mestiza women to recognize and address domestic violence as a broader societal issue, in turn requiring or demanding collective action. Moreover, survivor interviews serve as evidence of women's precarious access to political and state resources, particularly during times of need. Through their stories, several findings are revealed, including:

- 1) Initial offenses, such as threats, insults, and psychological violence, as outlined in the Domestic Violence Act, are vastly underreported. Yet, even when reported, they are often deemed non-urgent by the authorities enforcing the law (Eguigure, Merly, personal communication, 2020; D. Flores, personal communication, May 28, 2022; Moreira & Da Costa, 2020).

- 2) The reluctance to report domestic violence is rooted in diverse reasons that include but are not restricted to economic dependencies; they also include emotional and societal-based dependencies, promoting traditional family ties (Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023).
- 3) There is a fear of being shamed and revictimized, as women are often exposed to a culture of blame.
- 4) Women are exposed to badly trained state representatives who promote their personal ideas of family and a culture of blame directed toward the victims rather than the perpetrators (Das et al., 2021; Espinoza Turcios et al., 2023; Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023).

The survivor narratives exposed a troubling pattern of police officers advocating for reconciliation, even in cases of severe harm and violence. This patriarchal attitude not only undermines women's agency but also fails to provide adequate protection mechanisms. Perhaps most alarming is the revelation that women at great risk of escalated violence and potential death must plead for intervention from authorities, often needing to report multiple times before action is taken (Bucheli & Rossi, 2019).

These findings offer valuable insights into the nature of the forgiveness that female survivors are often criticized for. In the face of a system that fails to protect them, forgiving and attempting to navigate their relationships with their abusers may seem like a more sustainable option than risking further harm by pursuing ineffective complaints. As depicted in survivor narratives, reporting incidents under the Domestic Violence Act can often exacerbate the anger of the aggressor. Feminist frontline workers and experts confirm this very fact, highlighting the fact

that they often recommend 24-hour detention with the goal of permanently separating victims from their aggressors, rather than as a tool to rehabilitate the perpetrators, as the law originally stated. (Duran, 2023; Menjivar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023).

On the other hand, women who choose to report through the criminal justice system often find themselves inadequately protected. Despite seeking justice through legal channels, they encounter significant gaps in safeguarding measures. Mestiza women's stories underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms within law enforcement and judicial systems that prioritize the safety and well-being of domestic violence survivors (Dickson, 2023).

Central to the narratives of women shared throughout this study is the indispensable role of support or community networks. While formal grassroots organizations may not always be readily available or equipped to address issues involving women, the significance of individual support from neighbors, sisters, in-laws, and friends cannot be overlooked. In fact, narratives are filled with encouraging characters, especially in crisis situations, who become crucial in saving women's lives. This also underlines mestiza women's autonomy, allowing us to see that women survivors are not necessarily left to fend for themselves, even though they possess the capacity to do so (Harkins, 2020; Mahapatro et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic proved that political priorities did not include the needs of mestiza women. In fact, for women, residents, and victims and survivors of domestic violence, the situation was worsened in terms of access to judicial protective mechanisms (Castro, 2020a).

There was a suspension of tasks within the judicial branch until June 4, 2020, when an agreement

ordering a “gradual and responsible process of reintegrating in-person work”⁷⁷ was reached within the judicial branch. Domestic violence courts and mixed courts, as well as civil peace courts in municipalities, were instructed to handle domestic violence cases during the suspension of activities within the judicial branch. On the other hand, domestic violence courts remained partially open, allowing for the filing of complaints while following a strict imposition of safety measures. Available mechanisms for seeking assistance included women’s organizations and feminist collectives. These groups ensured the dissemination of their personal phone numbers for emergency situations. While reporting was available at all times through the emergency number 911, it is important to note that actual operators were often overwhelmed with responsibilities related to COVID-19 measures, which sometimes hindered their capacity to promptly attend to cases of domestic violence (A. Y. Coello, 2020; Televisión Nacional de Honduras TNH, 2020).

In addition to the insufficient attention and inadequate protective measures afforded to women, the imposition of a 6-month statute of limitations for reporting domestic violence is highlighted as almost absurd. This temporal constraint fails to acknowledge the extensive time over which most women endure domestic violence. Moreover, it overlooks the significant time victims require to recognize psychological and patrimonial forms of violence such as insults, threats, economic manipulation, and even sexual assault within partnerships. By enforcing such a restrictive time frame, this measure effectively discredits the entirety of women survivors’ experiences, further alienating them from the justice system (Leyton et al., 2023).

⁷⁷ A normalization and reactivation process comprising five phases was established, with the first phase commencing on June 8, and concluding by the end of the month.

Another crucial finding reveals the role of shelters for women survivors. While norms in other cultures often dictate that perpetrators depart from households, leaving women and children within their patrimonies and social networks, in Honduras the reality is different. Mestiza women rely on shelters as the only cost-free spaces available for them. The shelters are vital for safeguarding against the threat of femicide (Fauci & Goodman, 2020; González, n.d.).

Furthermore, these shelters serve as essential providers of specialized psychological support, offering services to women and children grappling with the trauma induced by family violence. Nonetheless, women's shelters in Honduras remain underfunded. It is important to acknowledge that the only shelter⁷⁸ in the Central District, the one referred to by the women we spoke to, is run by a women-led civil society organization, receiving minimal (20%) funding from the state (Cruz, Ana Lizeth, personal communication, 2020).

Another interesting discovery derived from these narratives is the significant role of children in the reporting process. Despite the socioeconomic pressure for women to maintain traditional family roles and, often, remain with perpetrators, when children become witnesses to or victims of violence within the domestic sphere, their role as incentives emerges. Their exposure to violence motivates mothers to take action, recognizing the urgent need to break the cycle of abuse for the sake of their children (Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Fauci & Goodman, 2020).

⁷⁸ The Quality of Life Association operates the only available shelter in the Central District, known as the Asociación Calidad de Vida. It has a maximum accommodation capacity of 22 beneficiaries and their children. This shelter stands as a testament to women's leadership and grassroots activism, driven by a commitment to support survivors of domestic violence. The primary funding comes from international organizations, and support from the state remains limited. However, key state institutions such as the police force and domestic violence courts often refer women in need to seek refuge at this shelter.

As we navigate the complexities of addressing domestic violence, acknowledging the influence and resilience of children serves as a crucial step toward fostering safer environments and allowing women to make decisive choices for themselves and their families. Finally, a crucial takeaway underscores the imperative to change societally influenced patterns in political and legal structures. Through the narratives untangled throughout this chapter, it becomes evident that breaking the cycle of violence extends beyond separation from merely one perpetrator. If the system is also a perpetrator, then any real protection, or rehabilitation, can rarely be ensured. Women survivors often find themselves grappling with exacerbated social, economic, and psychological vulnerabilities, which leave them even more susceptible to enduring further or similar forms of violence. In this sense, it is imperative that state resources prioritize not only the rehabilitation of abusers but also comprehensive support and rehabilitation programs for victims. In other words, efforts should aim to transform the underlying conditions that give rise to violence in the first place, starting by addressing the patriarchal attitudes replicated by state operators, including pressure for reconciliation, ill treatment of victims, and victim-blaming (Menjívar, 2020; Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023; Menjívar & Drysdal Walsh, 2017).

7 THE SOCIO-CULTURE

“En la iglesia, hasta el mismo sacerdote nos dice: ‘el hombre es el pilar de la casa.’”

[At church, even the priest tells us: ‘the man is the pillar of the home’]

Guerrera,

Survivor of Domestic Violence

7.1 Introduction to the social and religious city

To continue delving into the notions and understandings regarding domestic violence in the peri-urban landscape of the Honduran Central District, it is important to consider the social aspects that construct the dynamics that unfold throughout this research. This chapter focuses on Walby's society regime, initially illustrated through practices regarding intimacy and sexuality. This regime is better understood with the acknowledgment of the neocolonial imposition of heterosexuality, and the gendered relations that follow that imposition. It is complemented by the division of gendered bodies into the dichotomic identities of female and male. Also extremely important for this regime are intimate relations among the conventionally accepted genders and how they are experienced, perceived, replicated, and accepted within society (Walby, 2020).

To understand sexuality in such terms is to understand the social practices that condone the current dynamics among the genders, including sexual abuse and violence toward women. More importantly, the chapter aims to shed light on the social actors that encourage current attitudes surrounding women. Sexuality in this sense becomes a powerful tool for the subordination of women, and thus sexuality and intimacy transform into key social dynamics that help replicate current inequalities. These dynamics help us explain the rise of domestic violence within the pandemic scenario (Walby, 1989, 2020).

Furthermore, to gain deeper insights, I delve into the primary social actors portrayed within the narratives of women in the peri-urban context. In this sense, I define social actors as groups and / or organizations that play significant roles in shaping residents' social dynamics, to which I refer interchangeably as their social fabric (Lupova-Henry et al., 2021). In this exploration, the chapter predominantly exposes the role of religious actors and religious narratives, as well as their

impact on women, especially on topics regarding family and motherhood and their connection to domestic violence (Leavitt et al., 2021) I argue that women's value in society is highly interlaced with their ability / responsibility to maintain and establish heterosexual partnerships, and with them traditional family structures. This is compounded by the limited access to social alternatives and spaces for safety, freedom, and autonomy. The chapter also unveils the autonomy that nonetheless persists within women's lives (Erez et al., 2022).

Also important within the societal regime are the main discourses and patriarchal practices, including the role of upbringing, social narratives, and the predominant social interactions that shape women's daily practices and pandemic experiences (Walby, 2021). Following the established structure, the chapter focuses on the everyday pandemic narratives of individual residents from the peri-urban settlements of Los Pinos and La Era, serving as a pathway to understand women survivor's experiences. Their insights are complemented by my own descriptions, aiming to make sense of the knowledge that stems from their lived realities.

Lastly, this chapter invites a deeper reflection: instead of signaling the many actors that are involved in the phenomenon of domestic violence, I encourage readers to engage in a twofold process: first, to comprehend the interconnectedness of relationships and social dynamics, and their profound effects on mestiza women's lives; and second, to consider our individual roles within these narratives, acknowledging how our own actions and attitudes contribute to the broader social fabric that continues to accept and condone domestic violence (Malo, 2019, p. 201; Walby, 2005).

7.1.1 The societal structure of urban and peri-urban settlements: An overview of society in the La Era and Los Pinos settlements

To illustrate societal conditions, it is crucial to name and describe the social actors present in the narratives of peri-urban residents. Through their actions, interactions, and relationships, social actors contribute to the development of social norms, values, and institutions that bind the fabric that gendered bodies live through. There is no exception to the norms regarding the value accorded to attitudes toward women and girls (Hovy & Yang, 2021).

By signaling the social actors, the chapter also aims to tell the stories of their interactions, which are typically woven into the social fabric. These serve to illustrate mestiza women's experiences when communicating, connecting, and socializing within the specific peri-urban realm. The social fabric then encompasses the various social relationships, networks, norms, values, and institutions that bind women together and contribute to their overall resilience (Tanner et al., 2020), as well as their life within their own pandemic and peri-urban society. To narrate this, I also briefly introduce spaces. This is to identify the social actors I refer to. The chapter also serves as a thorough depiction of the scenarios within which the interactions are interwoven, portraying the current scenarios where the maintenance of the social fabric occurs (Vallet et al., 2020).

With that in mind, it is important to acknowledge that the peri-urban fabric is maintained as a reflection of internal migrant stories and results from their informal origins. As established in the previous empirical chapters, since their arrival, citizens have lived well within informality, organizing themselves through different groups, which are referred to in this chapter as social actors, in order to claim their rights over the land they inhabit, and the essential rights of living

within their land. Coincidentally, they also serve as examples of social dynamics. As settlements have significantly limited and basic services, they have opened a door to input from grassroots and community organizations, highlighting the role of these organizations in providing residents with access and unity, which provide autonomy and are often the only solution within peri-urban living

Furthermore, the process of mapping social actors for this research occurred in two different ways: first, through interviews with experts from the peri-urban research area and the direct consultation with community leaders—the information collected is illustrated in the figures presented in this section; and second, through interviews with residents and survivors, resulting in the focus displayed in the next section.

Figure 6: Overview of social actors and spaces in La Era and Los Pinos



The following figure provides an overview of what is being discussed.



In the case of La Era, there is a large public soccer field, one cement court inside the Mormon church, and one public court for public use. The mentioned spaces are typically associated with male youth groups as visible social actors. The soccer field is predominantly utilized by young men and boys for soccer matches. Soccer and soccer players / teams are seen as drivers for the entire peri-urban communities. There is also a bus and a taxi used by both women and men, in order to access public transport. There is a cemetery that serves as an important community symbol, where residents who die can be buried, and people often walk by it and visit their loved ones. There is also a community center that often provides courses such as hairstyling or nail workshops for women.

In addition, the settlement also includes the presence of the following organized groups and state actors:

- A **health center called Centro Integral de Salud San Miguel**, within walking distance in the sector of San Miguel, to which La Era belongs, offers residents general healthcare services.
- In the broader district of San Miguel, there exists the intersectoral **Mesa of San Miguel**, functioning as a community board tasked with addressing the everyday issues that arise within the district.
- A **water board** functions as a grassroots organization to provide and manage water services to the community, using water supplied by the state.
- A **parents' association** deals with schools and topics related to parenting in the area.
- The **Libre Collective**, a political collective for the governing party Libre, helps disseminate the Party's actions.
- The **youth network "La Era"** is known for organizing and managing youth-related services and activities.

The following are the schools located in La Era:

- 1) Annex of Institute Carlos Flores
- 2) Escuela Melida de Jesús Muñoz
- 3) CEB⁷⁹ Miguel Andonie Fernández
- 4) School Jubileo Internacional (private)

⁷⁹ Centro de Educación Básica (CEB) is the term used in the Honduran education system to refer to a public school that offers education from early grades through ninth grade.

- 5) Escuela International Christian School (private)

The following are the religious institutions in La Era:

- 1) Iglesia de los Santos de los Últimos Días—Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
- 2) Iglesia Católica—Catholic Church
- 3) Iglesia Misionera Templo Bautista—Missionary Baptist Temple Church
- 4) Iglesia Montes de Sion—Mount Zion Church (evangelical)
- 5) Iglesia El Gran Yo Soy—The Great I Am Church (evangelical)
- 6) Iglesia El Cordero—The Lamb Church (evangelical)
- 7) Iglesia de Dios, Prosperidad y Familia—Church of God, Prosperity, and Family (evangelical)
- 8) Iglesia Padre Nuestro—Our Father Church (evangelical)

Los Pinos residents are established within a mountainous region filled with pine trees, hence its name, as a testament to its natural surroundings. It has two big public soccer fields, primarily allocated to men. Interestingly, the role of soccer is enduring and key for cultural mobilization, gathering large numbers of residents to matches. There is one more soccer field located at a public institute (school), which can be used by other residents for sports but not as often. There are two small parks, referred to by residents as common green areas, and one park called Haz lo justo, which translates as “Do what is fair.” Within both settlements, soccer fields, and public space in general, have been strongly connected to gang surveillance and control, often used by gang members to sell drugs and manage different operations. Yet soccer continues to be a common activity appreciated by most peri-urban residents.

In addition, the settlement also includes the presence of the following organized groups and state actors:

- The **water board** in Los Pinos is an important grassroots organization; with two distinct offices, it provides water management for the entire community, using water supplied by the state.
- The **local health center, Centro Integral San Benito**, provides residents with basic health necessities such as aid in the case of the common flu and chronic diseases and, in some cases, sexual and reproductive information.
- The intersectoral or coordinating **Mesa of Los Pinos**, known to conglomerate all social and local actors that come together for the improvement of life through community projects, includes the following organizations:
 - The **local emergency committee**, referred to as a CODEL, trains residents to deal with natural disasters.
 - The **patronatos** are two boards or community boards that are legally constituted.
 - A **youth group** called Jóvenes Los Pinos—Los Pinos Youth Network embraces youth services and activities. The **CDA—Centro de Alcance** or Community Development Association, in the community context of projects supported by USAID, offers several programs for at-risk youth.
 - The **NGO Asociación Compartir** provides residents with an array of social programs, encompassing educational monitoring, tutoring, arts and culture, and other vocational workshops.

The following are the schools located in Los Pinos:

- 1) Centro de Educación Básica (Basic Education Center) Hernana Herrera Molina
- 2) Escuela-School Jaime Romero Zúñiga
- 3) Escuela-School Melida de Jesús Muñoz
- 4) Instituto Técnico-Technical High School Los Pinos
- 5) Kindergarten Alduvin Díaz Bonilla
- 6) Kindergarten Rosa Elena de Lobo
- 7) Kindergarten Carita Feliz

The following are the religious institutions in Los Pinos:

- 1) Iglesia Católica San Francisco—Catholic Church of Saint Francis
- 2) Iglesia Católica Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles—Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Angels
- 3) Iglesia Centro de Adoración Cántico Nuevo Los Pinos—New Song Worship Center Church of Los Pinos (evangelical)
- 4) Iglesia Bautista de Los Pinos—Baptist Church of Los Pinos (evangelical)
- 5) Iglesia Palabra Viva—Living Word Church (evangelical)
- 6) Iglesia de Dios, La Familia de la Fe—Church of God, Family of Faith (evangelical)
- 7) Iglesia Católica Guadalupe—Catholic Church of Guadalupe
- 8) Iglesia Manantial de Vida—Spring of Life Church (evangelical)
- 9) Iglesia Adventista Los Pinos—Seventh-day Adventist Church of Los Pinos (evangelical)
- 10) Iglesia de los Santos de los Últimos Días—Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
- 11) Iglesia La Roca—The Rock Church (evangelical)

While both settlements have legally established patronatos (community boards), it is claimed that they are not active. More influential roles are predominantly played by the intersectoral boards that actively encompass all members. In addition, different religious institutions play an important grassroots role, although this also depends on the perceptions of their congregants. Furthermore, all non-religious institutions and spaces are exceeded by religious institutions, both in number and in influence, as the peri-urban landscape is highly connected to religious actors. La Era has eight different churches, while the district of San Miguel has many more. Los Pinos has 11 churches.

Although Honduras, since its colonization, has been a predominantly Catholic country, the peri-urban landscape serves as compelling evidence of the growing influence of Protestant (evangelical) and other faith-based organizations such as that of the Mormon Church. Religious institutions, together with their vibrant music, safe and renovated spaces, and strict practices, have become emblematic for peri-urban women (Hoksbergen & Madrid, 1997).s

Within these settlements, religious institutions provide most community engagement, offering dominical schools or children and highly transited spaces for families, youth groups, and in some cases even women's groups. They are also known to be welcoming to all community members, including gang members and their families. In fact, in the last couple of years they have constituted an important space for gang rehabilitation (Wolseth, 2011b). According to informal records, when community members or religious leaders negotiate with gang members, religious conversion is considered an acceptable reason for gang members to resign from criminal activities and often minimizes violent repercussions. It is also known to cooperation agencies that religious leaders are often used as negotiators when gang disputes arise

Finally, by examining the role of religion, as well as other social actors, in shaping gender roles, community dynamics, and social structures, this dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between religion, society, gender, and peri-urbanization in contemporary Honduran society.

7.2 Religiosity in the peripheries: God as the ultimate social resource among other peri-urban actors

The following section addresses the social actors mapped in the interview processes. As soon as an institution or actor was mentioned in an interview, it was mapped for this study. Indeed, the interview structure, while flexible, emphasized the identification of various social actors when addressing specific inquiries. For instance, at the very start of the conversations, while we explored how women accessed food, the mapping of actors would swiftly occur. This converged with mapping the state as a food provider in crisis scenarios. Interestingly, all women interviewed in peri-urban areas had received at least one donation of food from the government, recognizing their presence in either a military or a state capacity.

All women acknowledged the provision of food staples, albeit limited ones, received during the initial months. Remarkably, narratives concerning access to food predominantly intertwined with religious elements, with women often expressing gratitude and associating access to food with divine will and power. Residents often repeated the phrase “Gracias a Dios” or “de la mano de

Dios”⁸⁰ when asked about access to food, water, or electricity. María L. (40), mostly dependent on her husband’s work as a construction worker, shares, “La comida no falta aquí en la casa. Todo en mano de Dios... Es una bendición de Dios. Dios no nos deja morirnos de hambre” [There’s always food in this house. Everything is in God’s hands... It’s a blessing from God. He won’t let us starve]. Although supplies were limited, most women interviewed remained thankful to God’s will and the provision of essential resources.

As the stories unfold, another important social actor during the pandemic is unraveled: the water board. Rooted in resident mobilization and serving as a supplier of essentials of the state, the water board, especially in Los Pinos, is an important grassroots organization, one that did not abandon residents during the pandemic. Despite being scarce and sometimes only accessible on a monthly basis, or at best every 12 days, water remained accessible to peri-urban residents at no cost, or at a cost that could be met later when residents could access income again. This one fact connected to water access underscores the importance of the peri-urban social fabric. Residents navigated challenging circumstances with determination and resourcefulness, managing to survive with scarce resources. However, the infrequent availability of water posed significant challenges for residents, with careful rationing and planning required for them to meet their basic and pandemic-related needs. Berlín states, “Sí, gracias a Dios tenemos agua, luz y todo. Yo ahorita tuve que mandar a pagar agua porque ya lo tenía encaramado. Siempre se le va acumulando; hay que pagarlo por miedo de que lo corten, tarde o temprano” [Yes, thank God we

⁸⁰ “*Gracias a Dios*” translates as “Thank God,” and “*de la mano de Dios*” as “by the hand of God.” These expressions reflect a reliance on divine intervention in the absence of material support.

have water, electricity, everything. I just had to send someone to pay the water bill because it was already overdue. It always keeps adding up, you must pay it out of fear they'll cut it off, sooner or later], she explains.

Although the water provided by the water board is supplied by the state, the management is rooted in community and resident mobilization, and thus residents rarely associated the provision of water with state presence. Additionally, the decision not to cut water altogether, even in the absence of payment by peri-urban residents, was also attributed to residents' actions and not those of state institutions.

Furthermore, from the distribution of essential supplies to the provision of services, religious narratives permeated every facet of support and assistance received during these challenging times. We hear from Yini, once again, who carefully states that she received a donation from her church as well as from the military. Together, those staples provided the limited subsistence she describes as her pandemic experience. Like her, many women received food staples from their affiliated churches, helping us map religious institutions as food providers during the crisis. Consequently, this highlights the multifaceted presence of religious institutions, not only in the inherent religiosity permeating the narratives, but also in their active role in ensuring food staples.

Interestingly, when asked about social and / or community actors, women primarily associated them with organizations that offered aid, particularly those that accompanied them through the challenges posed by the pandemic, notably pertaining to food supply. Insufficient food supply continued to be argued by women as the most prominent challenge posed by lockdown. Thus, women tended to link institutions with entities that directly supported them during the crisis, as

exemplified by Isis, who quickly responds, “Aquí solo hubo una ayuda de la iglesia El Gran Yo Soy. La mesa de San Miguel no ha dado comida” [Here, there was only help from the church El Gran Yo Soy. The San Miguel board hasn’t provided any food], she clearly explains. Like many congregants, she received a rice donation from her church, while the community board that was meant to help in a community crisis did not offer any help in those terms, shaping her perception.

The second significant inquiry that led to mentions of social actors was regarding women’s access to public healthcare. In both settlements, interviews quickly helped map the state as a provider of healthcare, as local healthcare centers remained open during the pandemic. All women in peri-urban landscape could locate the nearest public health centers, yet most accessed them only when necessary. For most women, health centers are available for sickness or emergencies only. For mothers especially, they seemed prominent. For Cristina, her local health service proved crucial for her child’s well-being. Born with a physical challenge, way before the pandemic, he was looked after by her local health providers. “Le salieron pegaditos para los deditos de la mano... Ahorita ya está bien, gracias a Dios” [He had all his little fingers glued together in his hand... Right now, he is okay, thank God], she confirms.

For women who did not have any illness or a child in need, there was no need to attend or even mention local health providers. It is also important to consider that avoiding contagion represented a social pact that was highly enforced within peri-urban landscape, especially by mothers. Yet for mothers who needed them, the healthcare centers remained open. María L. (40) better explains: “Pues ahorita solo el centro de salud que esta ahí si uno se enferma. Mi hijo estuvo con dengue y si me lo atendieron, le dieron la atención. Con sus prevenciones con mascarilla, gel y metro de distancia” [Well, right now, the health center is there if one gets sick.

My son had dengue, and they did attend to him, gave him the care he needed. They took precautions with masks, hand sanitizer, and keeping the distance], she explains. The latter confirms that women and their children could access health centers during the pandemic.

Furthermore, a sound that seemed to fill the peri-urban streets was that of loudspeaker announcements provided by local health centers, disseminating the measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Granted, the measures, as discussed in the previous chapter, were not inclusive of peri-urban residents or their socioeconomic realities. In fact, they failed to grasp peri-urban sovereignty and quite paradoxically limited them completely by impeding their mobility. Nonetheless, access to public health was available (Duque Franco, 2014; Ham, 2020b). Although presence and care seem to have been limited according to resident perceptions, varying only when residents were exposed to illness and had individual experiences of health practitioners, peri-urban health centers were evidenced throughout all the women's interviews. I argue that women's decisions not to attend them were mostly linked to the fear of contagion. We heard from Daniela (30): "Está el centro de salud San Benito, pero a mí me da miedo llevarla. Hay varios casos [COVID]. Nosotros hemos tomado todas las medidas para estar sanos, y llevarla y que se me infecte, ni quiera Dios" [There's the San Benito health center, but I'm afraid to take her. There are several [COVID] cases. We've taken every precaution to stay healthy, and taking her there could infect her, God forbid], she shares, regarding her decision not to go to a health center with her daughter, who desperately needed sanitary pads for her period during the pandemic.

Moreover, the question on education helped map the state as a provider of public education. In a complete shutdown of schools, teachers became accessible only through social media platforms, predominantly WhatsApp. This was far from being a complete online education system and consisted of a back and forth of homework for children and an additional burden for mothers. Nonetheless, the state, in the form of education providers, remained available. Access to education was limited and precarious, much like anything else regarding the pandemic in peri-urban landscape, yet it existed, and as such, helped evidence the precarious role of the state—one that proved to further replicate traditional gender roles, forcing breadwinners to ensure more income for access to mobile data, which defined public education during the pandemic. while forcing caregivers into an extended role as educators (Bank, 2020). This experience, notable throughout all the women's narratives, especially mothers, also helped evidence the limited role and presence of educators during the pandemic. Due to social distancing measures, teachers were only available through messages, underscoring their importance in navigating educational challenges during times of crisis.

While evidence derived from these research narratives suggests the presence of state institutions in peri-urban areas during the pandemic, not all women were able to identify or acknowledge the state's presence within their barrios. In fact, a significant majority denied the existence of any social actors providing them with assistance. "Aquí o hay nada de eso. No hay nada, nada" [Here, there is none of that. There is nothing, nothing], Yoselín (31) says vehemently. Also, Daniela (30) reiterates, "No hay nadie aquí, es que donde vivo, está olvidado de toda la colonia" [There's nobody here, it's because where I live, it's forgotten by the entire barrio], she says, explaining how she resided in a secluded sector within Los Pinos. The latter also exemplifies the differences between areas only a few kilometers apart. Although all women interviewed within

both settlements had access to the solidarity bag, as well as limited access to water, the state as an active actor was rarely present in their narratives. Daniela helps us understand:

Pues mire, primero nos dieron el saco del Gobierno. Con ese saquito vimos la manera de vender pastelitos de perro,⁸¹ hicimos remendio, y mi esposo se pone a cortar monte, anda de casa en casa preguntándole a los vecinos qué necesitan para hacer 30 o 40 lempiras.

[Well, look, first we got the bag from the government. With that little bag, we figured out how to sell pastelitos de perro, we did some mending, and my husband started cutting grass, going house to house asking the neighbors what they needed done to earn 30 or 40 lempiras.]

Daniel shares how her husband tried to make an approximate of US\$1.20 to \$1.60, per day, pointing to the insufficiency of the food staples and the constant reliance on their autonomy to survive.

I argue that the phenomenon of complete state denial can be attributed to several factors including women's perceptions of the state as limited and failed. This is based on vast historical evidence to support their perceptions. Needless to say, the circumstances generated by the pandemic also serve as a potential factor. Women linked institutions to food provision and essential services, due to the extreme scarcity experienced and those actors that did not respond

⁸¹ Pastelitos de Perros is a typical Honduran fried food that made with a corn dough with smashed potato or minced meat inside.

to immediate needs, on the continual basis that was required, were neither considered nor mapped by women as prominent social actors (Cohen, 2013).

Other institutions briefly mentioned within narratives included Recross, COPECO,⁸² and COHEP,⁸³ who helped ensure biosafety measures. When asked for domestic violence alternatives, some women consistently mapped the healthcare centers, police stations, and 911. Finally, all interviews revealed that residents were able to organize themselves to ensure COVID-19 protocols were being met, mapping another important social actor: neighbors and / or peri-urban communities. Neighbors within the settlements represented the community at large, emerging as silent yet active social actors. They manifest in narratives through contributions of food, care, money loans among friends and family, and a myriad of opportunities where support was offered to numerous women. The latter is exemplified by the role of two community leaders: pastor Carla from La Era, and water board president Agripina from Los Pinos. Both women collaborated with international and governmental organizations to secure food supplies in their communities. Both emphasized the importance of prioritization, particularly focusing on single women, widows, elderly population and households with young children.

Nonetheless, communal support is also intricately interwoven with the prevailing religiosity that permeates ideas of community and solidarity, particularly in times of crisis. I contend that religious institutions play a particularly crucial role (Crahan, 2019). Unlike other mentioned

⁸² COPECO: the Permanent Contingency Commission of Honduras is an entity created to coordinate public and private disaster relief efforts in the framework of the National Risk Management System of Honduras.

⁸³ COHEP: the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise is the largest business trade organization in Honduras.

institutions, churches did not just make a brief appearance, donate, and depart; they ingrained themselves in the fabric of daily life, becoming a constant presence, echoing every sound within the barrio. As attested by women's interviews, another important sound that accompanied their pandemic experiences was that of loud Protestant music, referred to as *alabanzas*.⁸⁴ Much like neighbors, religious institutions are deeply rooted in the settlements (Jeandrevin, 2022). In particular, religion is deeply intertwined with the community and pandemic experiences.

Virtually all aspects of the pandemic, whether they were state services, donations, actors, or beliefs, were profoundly intertwined with women's religious narratives. This reveals religious institutions as providers of hope. Lidia (39) shares:

Nosotros hemos tratado de mantenernos positivos ya que conocemos de la palabra de Dios, hay que seguir adelante. La gente aquí en la colonia que yo vivo sufre por falta de alimentación. La mayoría que yo he sabido aquí, la gente está tratando de ser positiva.

[We've tried to stay positive because we know God's word, we have to keep going. People here in the neighborhood where I live are suffering from a lack of food. From what I've seen, most people here are trying to stay positive.]

⁸⁴ "*Alabanzas*" is a Spanish word that can be directly translated as "praises" or "praiseworthy hymns." It refers to expressions of admiration, adoration, or reverence, often directed toward a deity or a person.

Its significance transcends mere provision of services and essentials; rather, it embodies a way of life within peri-urban pandemic communities (Vaggione & Machado, 2020).

7.2.1 Surviving violence: The role of family, community, and religious narratives in autonomy

For women who have survived domestic violence, their access to social support is evidently restricted, because of the constraints imposed on them by their abusers. This limitation is frequently rooted in their past abusive experiences, where isolation served as a tool used to control them; consequently, women who have endured domestic violence often find themselves with limited opportunities to engage with social actors or support networks (Goodman-Williams et al., 2023).

In reality, the mapping of social actors in survivor interviews primarily occurred when they disclosed their experiences of reporting domestic violence. The following survivor narratives help us map actors considered amid the pandemic crisis. Some are more silent, and others are arguably more active, and all are linked to the religious narratives that help describe the survivors' beliefs and simultaneously serve as support during crisis times.

For Guardiana, who was dependent on her former partner, a policeman, the police institution was only present in relation to her abuser. Her contact with the police was evidenced when she spoke of reporting domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Act, where she exposed the constant threats, she received from her partner's lover. She backed this up with texts, voice notes, and further evidence of the constant verbal abuse she was exposed to, but the case was ignored.

Actually, she was told to return after the pandemic. “Me molesta porque es una verdadera negligencia” [It bothers me because it’s true negligence], she explains.

Guardiana’s experience of the health center amid the pandemic was of similar dissatisfaction.

When attending her local health center as soon as her abuser was showing COVID-19 symptoms, she reported it as specified in the protocols disseminated. Nevertheless, he was misdiagnosed and sent home, resulting in the virus spreading to her daughter and compelling her abuser to quarantine in the same household. In addition, she was instructed to await contact from health authorities, which never happened. “Se vuelve como bien incómodo... no hay quien le ayude. No hay seguimiento” [It becomes really uncomfortable... there’s no one to help you. There’s no follow-up], she explains. In fact, her entire pandemic experience involving state institutions was marked by profound disappointment, significantly shaping her perception of social actors. She served as the main educator for her two daughters, with limited access to water, and experiencing some minor electricity cutbacks. Her former partner still represented the main breadwinner of their household. When directly asked about organizations in her barrio she replied, “Cero, aquí no hay organizaciones, no hay nada” [Zero, there are no organizations here, there’s nothing].

Yet through her openness, we could identify her family as a prominent feature in her life story. Her mother had taken one of her daughters to avoid her contracting the virus. Guardiana felt it was best as her older daughter suffered from a condition involving low red blood cell count, and to protect her she separated her from the virus in her house. “Estoy sufriendo, luchando que mi hija salga adelante, que ocurra un milagro en la vida de ella” [I’m suffering, fighting for my daughter to get ahead, for a miracle to happen in her life], she explains regarding her daughter’s

delicate condition. Although she was unable to map actors, besides her abuser, to help her endure the crisis, her narrative mentioned two other important actors that accompany her journey.

First, as a committed mother, Guardiania was also an active member of the school community of both her daughters: “En la escuela soy presidenta de grado. Tengo muchas actividades... al igual en el kinder. Entonces siempre he sido, he tenido esa dinámica, pues. Me he ocupado en el kinder” [At school, I am the class president. I have many activities... same in kindergarten. I’ve always been like that, I’ve always been involved], she recounts, narrating her life before the school shutdown.

In addition, religious intuitions permeate her story from beginning to end, playing a crucial role both as a social actor and as a tool in hard times. Guardiania confessed to having shared her abusive history with other church congregants, including one in particular who also happened to be her daughter’s teacher: “Es un amor de Dios” [She is love from God], she says, referring to her. She explains how her friend was also a survivor of violence. “A pesar de su forma de ser, ella fue una persona que su esposo le levantó la mano, le gritaba. Su esposo es militar... Ahorita la ley los separó, él no se puede acercar a ella también” [Despite her character, she was a woman whose husband raised his hand against her and yelled at her. Her husband is in the military... Now, the law has separated them, and he is not allowed to approach her either], she explains. he had also found a friend in one of her daughters’s classmate’s mom. They went to the same church. Other than strength, she had also found in church an all-women’s group rooted in the same faith, as well as other fellow survivors of domestic violence, who served as advisors, guiding her to report and advising her during her journey to emancipation. This not only allowed

her to feel supported but also pointed her toward the legal protective mechanisms available to her.

“Aquí no hay organización de la comunidad” [There is no community organizing here], she says Coraje, referring to groups or organizations she could refer to during the pandemic. Like many survivors, she had become a single mother as soon as she reported her former partner and abuser for domestic violence. While sharing her mixed feelings about ending her relationship, she also shared stories of reporting that help us map the actors prominent in her journey:

Mi hermana escuchaba como me trataba, una vez ella llamó. a la policía, que llegaron 3 horas después pero el ya se había calmado y yo me había encerrado en otro cuarto. Entonces ella siempre me decía que ese hombre me podía matar.

[My sister heard how he treated me; once she called the police, who arrived 3 hours later, but he had already calmed down, and I had locked myself in another room. So, she always said to me that man could kill me.]

She confided in her sister every time an alarming event occurred, revealing family as an early alarm system and protective mechanism. Like many women in her position, she reported, many times, abuses and events. Once the apartment manager where she lived lent her a phone to report. “Él escuchó gritos y me preguntó, y le dije que me amenazó, pero usted sabe que la gente no se puede meter” [He heard yelling and asked me, and I told him he threatened me. But you know people can’t get involved], she explains, regarding one of the aggressive events, evidencing common limitations on neighbors when it comes to domestic violence. On another occasion, she was sent to a clinic due to the multiple abuses she describes: “Salieron doctoras, entonces yo ya

las conocía, y comencé a llorar, ‘y me dijeron: todas pasamos por esto’” [Some women doctors came out, I already knew them, and I started crying. They told me, “We’ve all been through this”], she says, illustrating the common occurrence of cases like Coraje’s within the public healthcare system.

Although many actors were actively part of her stories, she still felt profoundly isolated. Her support network was intricately entwined with her abuser. Living far from her parents, who resided in a rural area, she found herself drawn closer to her abuser’s mother after having her youngest daughter. This maternal figure had extended support to her. However, the moment she reported the abuse, this support disappeared. She recounts that she was portrayed as a villain by her former family. She reflects:

Me duele lo de la familia de él. Pensé que me apreciaban de verdad. Quedamos con el televisor y la cama, y les dolió que se me quedó. Cuando yo parí mis hijas, me ayudaron. Entendí desde ese día: el hijo es el hijo, no era sangre de su sangre. Me vieron con la ropa que me dieron en el refugio, en unas bolsas de basura de esas negras. Yo no sabía para dónde agarrar. Entonces eso sí me dolió. Ni modo. Yo entendí que no tenía que regresar ahí.

[What happened with his family still hurts. I thought they truly appreciated me. We were left with the TV and the bed, and they were upset that I kept those. When I gave birth to my daughters, they helped me. But from that day on, I understood, a son is a son, and I wasn’t blood. They saw me wearing the clothes I was given at the shelter, in those big black trash bags. I didn’t know where to go. That really hurt me. But oh well. I realized I couldn’t go back there.]

Her numerous encounters with reporting domestic violence had led her through various state institutions, from the national police to the Public Ministry and Prosecutor's Office, even involving health practitioners. However, none responded from the start in a manner that could offer her a resolution, exposing her to years of abuse. Frustrated by the lack of effective support, she reached out to a friend living in Spain for assistance. Through this connection, she was able to find temporary shelter with another woman, underscoring the crucial role of sorority and women's networks for survivors. Her case further highlights the inadequacy of state intervention, as survivors often rely on family and community structures for autonomy.

Highly critical of the state's performance during the pandemic, Valiente states that despite being an active voter for the party in governance, she recounts how some people received up to four bags of food while she was left with nothing. "Yo ayuda del Gobierno, no he recibido" [I haven't received any help from the government], she reiterates, expressing her isolation, which was exacerbated during the pandemic crisis. Valiente did not recognize any social actors who acted while she was socially distancing. In fact, she expressed how she was left without a social circle due to her former abuser's links with criminal organizations. She had secluded herself completely, emerging from years of abuse with no community or friends. Her only contact was her mother, who sometimes served in her role of grandmother for the children prior to lockdown. Valiente says:

Aquí yo no conozco a nadie. Son muchas cosas. Solo una sabe el miedo que tiene—vivir el día a día, sin tener un sueldo fijo, sin ningún tipo de apoyo. No tener familia cerca... pucha. Hay personas que pueden decir: "Voy donde mi mamá", o "mi mamá me ayuda",

o “donde mi hermano”. Pero vivir sola, tener que solventar todo sola, y además estar a cargo de tres niños... eso es muy duro.

[Here, I don't know anyone. It's a lot. Only you know the fear you carry—living day to day without a steady income, without any kind of support. Not having family nearby... damn. Some people can say, “I'll go to my mom's,” or “my mom helps me,” or “to my brother's.” But living alone, having to manage everything alone, and on top of that being responsible for three children... that's very hard.]

Originally from a rural area, she migrated to the city to get away from her first abusive partner, father to her first two children. He mistreated and harassed her for years, forcing her to migrate. While away and distanced from her family she fell into yet another abusive relationship. She describes her bad luck with men as a pattern that follows her, “No sé, mala suerte, no sé... o agarrar lo primero por salir del paso, o no sé cómo se puede llamar a eso” [I don't know, bad luck, maybe... or just grabbing the first thing to get through the moment. I don't know what to even call it], she explains. After years of more abuses and offenses, she found solace in the only women's shelter in the Central District, where she found out she was pregnant with her third child. Doubtful and in pain, she recalls having to visit her abuser in prison in order for him to meet his child, following his legally stated rights.

While narrating her journey toward freedom, she discloses two important actors: 1) the feminist collective through the women's shelter, and 2) the public health system. She describes having suffered horrible stomach pains throughout her entire relationship, which forced her into often attending clinics and hospitals. “Me imagino que es de tantos golpes que recibí” [I imagine it's

from all the beatings I received], she explains. Nonetheless, although a constant patient, she was never redirected for help by health facilities.

Opening up further about her story, she also recalls how a friend named María would always help her look after her girls. She remembers her with gratitude, evidencing the role of friendship in survivor stories. Her story also points toward the risk of confinement for women survivors, who mostly depend on informal groups for survival. Nonetheless, even after surviving, and after seeking refuge, there is still a lack of communal space for survivors to come together and share their post-violence experiences. Although not enduring violence anymore, women survivors display a diversity of needs. Such a space / actor / institution should not only facilitate the end of harmful patterns but also provide guidance tailored to their individual needs during challenging times.

Like her, many women survivors find themselves unable to identify any organizations offering support. This was the case of Creativa, who could not point to any organization that could potentially provide her with help during the pandemic. She had secured food and essentials for her and her children thanks to her employment and her strong adherence to faith. Yet her story of abuse evidences her isolation and some crucial actors. “Me pasaba amenaza y amenaza. Me quitó el celular. Yo no tenía contacto con nadie” [He used to threaten and threaten, He took away my cell phone, I had no contact with anybody], she recounts. His actions extended even to separating her from her mother, when he accused her mother of manipulation, thus isolating her further and increasing his impunity. To avoid confrontation, she often distanced herself, desperately attempting to find a way to help him despite the toll it took on her and her children. “Yo busqué la manera de ayudarlo, pero él ya me estaba matando, prácticamente a mi y a mis

hijos” [I looked for ways to help him, but he was practically killing me, me and my children], she laments, referring to his substance addiction and alcohol abuse.

Like countless survivors, she bravely reported numerous incidents to various authorities, including the Public Ministry, where she was employed, and the national police, who frequently visited her home. However, each event was treated in isolation rather than as part of a larger pattern of domestic violence—or, further than that, as a potential femicide case. In one harrowing instance, her abuser publicly threatened her, in front of their entire congregation at church, yet no one intervened.

Her journey toward liberation culminated in her seeking refuge at the only women’s shelter run by the Central District’s Asociación Calidad de Vida, after hearing a broadcast on a Christian radio station advising victims of abuse to seek help at Ciudad Mujer. Subsequently, a hearing, at which she was accompanied by experts and members of a Honduran feminist collective, resulted in her abuser being physically prohibited from approaching her and their children except under supervision. Because she recognized the escalating danger, she acknowledges her best option was to seek refuge in the shelter. Her story helps us identify civil society organizations in the form of feminist shelters and the potential role of the media as prominent social actors in domestic violence stories.

In the shelter, she and her children received crucial support from psychologists, particularly her older son, who initially harbored resentment toward her for separating him from his father.

“Realmente Dios me los puso a mis hijos porque no hubiera podido. Si no los hubiera tenido a ellos, no hubiera tenido la fuerza para levantarme, salir de ese hoyo, porque sí fue horrible”

[Truly, God gave me my children, because I wouldn’t have made it without them. If I hadn’t had

them, I wouldn't have had the strength to get up, to climb out of that hole. It was horrible], she reflects gratefully, evidencing the role of God, family, and children as source of support and strength for women survivors.

In the absence of effective state intervention to stop the abuse and provide sustainable protection, she turned to a feminist organization for sanctuary. For several months, they provided her with shelter and the social rights she needed to recover. It was through their unwavering support that she finally found the courage to confront and acknowledge the violence she had endured.

Coincidentally, this was also the case for Amada, who was in the shelter when the interview process started. She had found refuge in feminism, an outlook that did not blame her for anything that had occurred to her. Receiving proper treatment, she could bravely open up, tracing the abuse that had started way before she met either of her partners. “A los 16 años me salí de mi casa, y así he andado... Me siento bien triste, porque cosas que he pasado feas en mi vida, desde mi niñez” [I left home when I was 16, and I've been drifting ever since... I feel really sad because I've gone through some terrible things in my life, starting in childhood], she shares, with a mixture of resilience and sorrow. Reflecting on her journey, she recounts the painful episode of having to report her own father for abusing her sister. “Yo lo denuncié y él no se entregó a la policía” [I reported him and he didn't surrender to the police], she recounts. Instead, he took his own life, viewed by her family as the result of her profound betrayal, so they then turned their backs on her, leaving her feeling isolated and abandoned and ultimately pushing her to run away.

At 23 years of age, she found herself ensnared in yet another cycle of violence, this time with the father of her first child, then perpetuating the pattern with subsequent partners. “Me siento

segura aquí en el refugio. No me hace falta nada” [I feel safe in the shelter, I have everything], she acknowledges, emphasizing the vital role of the women’s shelter in providing her with the support and sanctuary she so desperately needed. In the absence of community or familial structures, feminist organizations like Asociación Calidad de Vida, that still constitute the only women’s shelter in the Central District, can serve as invaluable spaces for women seeking refuge from abuse and oppression.

Remarkably, Amada’s path to the shelter began through an unexpected avenue—a widely watched news program called “Habla como Habla” (“Speak as You Speak”), abbreviated to “HCH.” Known for its populist appeal and aimed at the masses, the show unexpectedly became the catalyst for her journey to safety. After reaching out to inquire about job opportunities, she was directed to Ciudad Mujer, which swiftly referred her to the shelter, where she found solace, support, and a renewed sense of hope.

For Resiliente, her description of her experience of reporting family violence also evidenced certain actors important for her story. Unlike Amada, she was her own provider, a working woman in Congress who, despite her abuser’s power and popularity, found both the courage to report and the support of her colleagues to do so.

Her work allowed her to contact and strategize with justice operators that work with domestic violence. Before, during, and after her hearing she felt supported by these women, who guided her and allowed her to access information, while helping her identify the violence she was exposed to. Her case reveals the social actors in paid work in community networks, who are potentially protective in cases of women victims of domestic violence. “Completamente

satisfecha” [Completely satisfied], she replies when asked about her experience of reporting. Interestingly, Resiliente is the only survivor who was content with her experience of reporting. This is tied to her connections in work that, luckily, made her feel safe.

Like most survivors, a religious narrative was present from the beginning of the story. She proudly states, “Me opuse a perder mi hijo. Solo Dios tiene derecho a poner y quitar la vida de un ser humano” [I refused to lose my child. Only God has the right to give and take a human life], she says, while explaining that her abusive relationship started once she was pregnant. Her abuser tried to coerce her into having an abortion, which she refused to do. Coincidentally, her children represented a source of strength and support, which she constantly repeated while insisting on the importance of reporting. In addition, she was extremely open in sharing her experience of women in similar situations, once again revealing survivors to be protective and supportive actors for women.

For Abnegada, who describes living in a dead-end alley, where people barely talked to each other, and no institutions accompanied their days, social actors were limited. In her case, her entire family was aware of her abusive relationship, yet no one really intervened. “Usted sabe que no todas las familias van a meterse a problemas de hogar, a problemas ya de matrimonio” [You know not all families are going to intervene in problems in the home, in problems of a marriage], she explains, while sharing the advice they constantly gave her: “Me han dicho por qué no lo dejo, que por qué sigo con él. Y pues lo que yo les puedo decir es que al dejarlo no tengo para dónde agarrar” [People have asked me why I don’t leave him, why I stay. And what I tell them is: if I leave him, I have nowhere to go.] This is a common conundrum in survivor interviews: due to the dependencies highlighted through their diverse stories, most do not want to

be left alone or become single mothers to their children, which forces them to avoid reporting even though they are aware of their abusive situations.

Abnegada recalls an incident where she asked for her brother's help. "Mi esposo le sacó el cuchillo a él, y comenzaron a amenazarse, verbalmente. Entonces yo me puse a pensar, si el a mi... si él le está haciendo eso a mi hermano, de sacarle eso, que irá a hacer conmigo" [My husband pulled a knife on him, and they started to threaten each other verbally, So I started to think, if he ... if he's doing that to my brother, pulling a knife on him, what will he do to me], she explains, relating how she found the courage to report shortly after that. "Yo creo en Dios y Dios ha sido mi fortaleza, ha sido mi equilibrio, ha sido mi fuerza para yo salir adelante, y salir adelante por mis hijas" [I believe in God, He has been my strength my balance, He has been the strength to move on and move forward for my daughters], she reiterates. "Yo se que todas las cosas que me han pasado, yo sé que él me ha ayudado en ese aspecto. y otra digamos... de que a mi me respalda la ley" [I know that everything that has happened to me, I know he has helped me in that aspect. And secondly because let's say... I am backed by the law], she says, while explaining that the judge had backed her up, refusing to let her abuser bring another woman into their household and enlightening him on his legal responsibilities for providing for them.

Although supported by legal institutions and her family in some ways, it was her religious narrative that really supported her through the entire process. "Yo confió en un Dios grande, que está arriba, que va a hacer justicia y aparte en la justicia terrenal de las autoridades" [I trust in a great God, who is above, who will bring justice, and also in earthly justice from the authorities], she says, attaching her case to divine power. As with other women survivors, her stories provide

evidence that religious narrative is a prominent social actor, one of support and strength during hard times.

Also unable to identify any supportive organizations during the pandemic, Guerrero followed measures strictly and was unaware of the services that remained available during the pandemic. Yet while she was opening up about her abuse, we could rapidly map important social actors. “Mis hermanas me decían que porque yo aguantaba, que lo dejara, si yo le tenía miedo. Yo hablaba con mis hermanas a escondidas de él” [My sisters used to ask me why I put up with it, why I didn’t leave, if I was afraid of him, I used to talk to my sisters behind his back], Guerrero shares, evidencing that her family was an early alarm of domestic abuse. This highlights the crucial role of families as support and protective mechanisms.

She used to secretly confide in her sisters about her abuser, which he later discovered, resulting in his confiscating her phone. Determined to stay connected with her family, she approached a neighbor on their way to work, requesting to borrow her phone for a quick call to her sisters. “Cada vez que usted quiera hablar, no se preocupe, y si yo no tengo salgo, solo timbrelas a sus hermanas para que ellas le devuelvan la llamada” [Whenever you need to talk, don’t hesitate. If I don’t have mobile data, just ring your sisters, and they’ll call you back], the neighbor kindly suggested, also extending generosity by providing food for her and her children. This same neighbor and friend later offered to bake her a cake for her birthday, a date her abuser had neglected, which she gratefully accepted, evidencing the important role of neighbors and community.

Unfortunately, this seemingly innocent gesture spiraled into one of the most harrowing incidents she had ever faced, leaving her fighting for her life in a hospital bed. When she had informed her

partner about the planned celebration over the phone, he had remained silent. Yet, as she recounts, the violence erupted once he arrived, scolding her on the streets, his words laced with fury and contempt. She recounts what he said to her: “Ya vas a ver, te voy a enseñar a respetar a los hombres” [You’ll see, I’ll teach you to respect men].

The memory vivid in her mind, she recalls how he pushed her into their home with her children. While she was preparing to cook dinner for her two children, he violently attacked her: “Viene y me grita la niña: ‘¡Mami, cuidado!’” [My little girl came running and yelled, ‘Mommy, watch out!’], she recalls. Reflecting on the dynamics of the incident, she vividly remembers catching sight of her sister-in-law, who was also a neighbor. Guerrero remembers seeing her and desperately calling out for help, only to be met with the chilling sound of her locking her door. Guerrero tearfully recounts:

Me sentí mal porque dije yo... al ver ella, me va a venir a auxiliar, se va a venir a meter o le va a decir cálmate, algo. Ella se encerró. Y dije yo, me morí. Yo pensé que ella podía defenderme y lo que hizo ella fue encerrarse.

[I felt awful because I thought... when she saw, I believed she would come help me, step in, or at least tell him to calm down, something. But she locked herself in. And I thought, I’ve died. I thought she might defend me, and instead what she did was shut herself away.]

Despite her cries for help echoing through the neighborhood, no one emerged, while her abuser stood behind her, machete in hand.

On the brink of losing his mother, her son started throwing rocks at his aunt's house, hoping to summon his uncle, her sister-in-law's husband, to intervene, which he later did. "Porfavor lléveme al hospital que no me quiero morir, me estoy desangrando. Por favor no me quiero morir" [Please, take me to the hospital, I don't want to die, I'm bleeding. Please, I don't want to die], Guerrero recalls yelling, and he obliged. Meanwhile, her son contacted her own sisters, and together they rushed to the hospital, taking custody of her children and filing a report with the authorities. As she lay in the hospital bed, battling for her life, she found solace in her unwavering faith. "Mi médico por excelencia es Jesucristo y ustedes son ayudantes. Amén, amén, amén" [The ultimate doctor is Jesus Christ, and you are His assistants. Amen, amen, amen], she affirmed to the medical team. She prayed insistently:

Yo le pedí al Señor, "Señor, yo no me quiero morir, pero si me muero, yo me quiero ir con usted al cielo. Pero Padre, deme otra oportunidad porque yo tengo dos hijos que me necesitan. No los puedo dejar solos. Yo tengo mis hijos, Padre, yo no me puedo morir. Deme otra oportunidad."

[I pleaded with the Lord, "Lord, I don't want to die. But if I do, I want to go to heaven with You. But Father, give me another chance because I have two children who need me. I can't leave them alone. I have my children, Father, I can't die. Give me another chance."]

In that moment, it was her and God against the odds.

Since that day, when she came perilously close to losing everything, she has reflected on the quiet struggles of the pandemic era, acknowledging:

Pero como Dios todo lo hace. Los planes de Dios son perfectos. Yo digo que yo, a mi no me tuvo que haber pasado eso, ni tenía que haber pasado así, pero yo solo así me libré de ese hombre, porque era un infierno lo que yo vivía con él.

[But God does everything, God's plans are flawless. I say, that shouldn't have happened to me, nor did it have to be that way, but I was finally free from that man, because what I lived with him was hell.]

She states that while the violence should not have happened, it ultimately led to her liberation from her abuser, and she found refuge in that very fact.

Her brave story unveils the crucial roles played by various actors in the lives of survivors.

Family structures and neighbors emerge as pivotal figures in the protection of women. By recognizing that domestic violence transcends individual households and impacts entire neighborhoods, there is potential to incentivize collective power in safeguarding women.

Furthermore, the account of the unwavering support of Guerrero's son underscores the critical role of immediate family members in seeking solutions and providing strength during times of crisis. Undoubtedly, religion serves as a guiding force throughout all survivors' journey, shaping women's resilience and offering hope in the face of adversity.

In the face of a prevailing trend of state failures, women enduring domestic violence often undergo a journey with the support of various social actors, which include:

- Family, direct and extended. Within the familial sphere, both immediate relatives and extended family members, such as siblings, children, and in-laws, play crucial roles in offering support for women at risk or experiencing domestic violence.
- Community, particularly neighbors, allies, and feminist organizations. Women experiencing domestic violence often find solidarity and assistance in their social circles, which may include friends, neighbors, and community members who empathize with their situations. Other women who have faced similar challenges can provide invaluable support and guidance, fostering a sense of sorority. At the same time, civil society organizations such as feminist collectives, organizations, and shelters provide undeniable support to women in times of crises (Goodman-Williams et al., 2023).
- Faith. For many women, faith serves as a source of strength during times of adversity. Whether through religious teachings, spiritual practices, or the support of religious communities, faith can provide a sense of purpose, hope, and resilience that aids in navigating the complexities of domestic violence and its aftermath (Gezinski et al., 2023).

7.3 Religious influence and the pandemic: Assessing the impact of prominent institutions

At this point, it is evident that religious institutions play a prominent role in the lives of peri-urban women, permeating various aspects of everyday life, including their experiences during the pandemic. This section is intended to illustrate the extent of this influence. In-depth narratives reveal that every facet of life is to some extent, or another intertwined with divine

principles, shaping women's perspectives and actions in navigating the challenges brought forth by the pandemic, and similarly, the challenges derived from their socioeconomic realities. Moreover, religious institutions represent a social actor of great influence, as they not only support women's faith but accompany them in many aspects of life.

In addition to their services, support, and guidance, religious institutions possess a historical presence within the settlements, which translates into deep cultural significance. Religious institutions, unlike state actors, have been present from the beginning, even preceding formal education and social services in cases like La Era and Los Pinos. Throughout history, and notably during pivotal events like the construction of paved roads and access to the first sewerage system in La Era, or the opening of schools in Los Pinos, churches have played a significant role in advocating for the rights of peri-urban residents. Taking this into consideration makes it easier to understand the highly religious narratives exposed throughout the pandemic narratives. Thus, religion and culture within this landscape are difficult to separate. I argue that culture is highly religious; nonetheless, they are more than intertwined. In some scenarios, and certain modes of life such as recreation and community engagement, they are synonyms.

Thus, religion is a prominent factor and actor when addressing peri-urban society. Prayer, religious music, rituals, Sunday schools, and even Mother's Day celebrations in religious settings are central to women's lives within these areas. Interestingly, as the interviews progressed and we had a chance to view them collectively, it became increasingly apparent just how deeply entrenched the influence of the church is within the fabric of peri-urban life.

Religious influence can be evidenced in different ways. They include the number of religious spaces that serve as safe spaces for women, revealing their role as public space, with more

institutions of faith providing such safe spaces than any other actors. In addition, their influence was clearly evidenced during the pandemic scenario: unlike other institutions, religious leaders and their grassroots institutions accompanied women in their struggles amid the repercussions brought on by the COVID-19-related measures. Finally, the narratives that unfolded reveal their prominent influence in women's actions regarding their own bodies: religious narratives permeated women's perceptions of their access to sexual and reproductive rights and family planning.

To further illustrate this, I focus on the women themselves. At different ages and in their different locations, women in peri-urban landscape attend religious institutions, either Catholic or Protestant. Cristina, Alba (71), Isis (18), Yini, and María E. (63) all mention church as a social and public space. “Yo soy católica. La iglesia ayuda bastante. Yo siempre me pongo a orar. Pero estas son pruebas. Amén... Viera que bonito los domingos que venían todos, estamos extrañando eso. Primero Dios” [I am Catholic. The church helps a lot. I pray, these are all tests. Amen... It was so beautiful, the Sundays that everybody came, we are missing that. God willing], Marie E. shares about the pre-pandemic days when she would attend church and her grandchildren would visit her with no risk. For women in peri-urban landscape, church becomes a tangible space to find community.

Within the confines of these spaces, they find sanctuary from the pervasive violence that often plagues peri-urban living. Beyond domestic violence, women in peri-urban landscape often transit highly violent spaces. Their landscape is shaped by gang presence and criminal activities, where male presence dominates and controls most, if not all, public spaces. Thus, women frequently resort to religious institutions as their primary mode of public engagement. Women's

social experiences underscore the unique role that churches play in alleviating the harsh realities they endure. Moreover, beyond physical safety, churches offer women a sense of belonging within their communities, evidenced in the growing number of women pastors and congregants. By coming together in these spaces, they are able to forge friendships and even acquire leadership positions and opportunities for community organizing, enabling them to navigate everyday life. In essence, religion functions as a profound anchor, providing women with a sense of community, hope, and solidarity (Bryant-Davis et al., 2014).

Moreover, the prevalence of religious narratives within all interviews underscores the multifaceted nature of religious institutions within peri-urban landscape. To expand on this point, I argue that the pandemic further strengthened residents' relations with God. Although religious institutions and religious narratives were already strong and dominant, the pandemic served as a catalyst for the increase in their visibility and popularity. Yini illustrates this: "Señor usted es el que tiene el control de nosotros, me pongo a orar, le pido a Dios... Eso me ha ayudado bastante a fortalecer" [Lord, you have the control over us, I pray, I ask God... that has helped me strengthen], she says, highlighting the interconnectedness of faith and resilience during pandemic times.

Furthermore, besides faith being disseminated by religious institutions, religious leaders also served in active grassroots organizations, assisting residents with their dire needs. Pastor and community leader Carla explains her role assisting her community during the pandemic: "Entonces le dije a mi esposo, Voy a hacer gestión" [So I said to my husband, I'm going to take action], she explains, regarding her awareness of the socioeconomic situation that members of her church were going through. Determined to find solutions, she extended her efforts far beyond

providing religious resources to congregants. She diligently reached out to various organizations to ensure basic needs were met in her religious community. She encountered a mix of responses—some were unresponsive, others unable to assist, yet she persisted and recalled a Buddhist organization she had encountered in the past. “Nada que ver con el evangelismo” [Nothing to do with evangelism], Carla clarifies. Thanks to this intervention, she managed to secure 120 sacks of rice to support her list of 150 congregants in extreme need.

Together with her husband, who is also a pastor, she managed to secure additional aid in the form of two trucks loaded with clothing for humanitarian aid. Nonetheless, their arrival was met with hesitation by the community as the fear of potential COVID-19 infection was persistent among all residents. Thus, Carla and her husband continuously solved problems, and managed to collect and distribute donations within the first months of lockdown. With a keen sense of duty, Carla prioritized the most vulnerable residents in her community—mentioning the elderly, single mothers, and unemployed residents. Carla’s commitment to community activism remained steady throughout. Addressing essential needs, she showcased the church as more than a place of worship or provider of faith—religious institutions, in this sense, became a vital support system during the pandemic, filling gaps where the state fell short.

Furthermore, in a swift manner, the narratives unravel the extent of the church’s influence on women. Beyond faith and essential resources and services, the church and the women’s religious narratives highly influence women’s decision-making regarding family planning. Doris (24) shares that, “No usan métodos por la iglesia” [They do not use church methods], when asked about her access to sexual and reproductive rights. Her reply evidences the effect of religious narratives on women’s decisions on their own bodies, whereby women adhere to contraceptive

methods approved by the church only. María L. (40) also associates health practices with church-approved methods by stating, “Como pertenece a la iglesia católica, dan el collar” [As it belongs to the Catholic Church, they give the necklace], she shares, referring to her local health center and an alternative for family planning approved by her local church. Although there is no association between church funding and management of any of the local health centers in the research area, some sexual and reproductive resources are associated with church-related family planning methods, proving the influence of religious narratives in family planning.

The latter underscores a complex dynamic wherein the doctrines and teachings of the church hold significant influence in women’s decision-making. For women living in peri-urban areas, the intertwining of sexual decision-making and religious narratives is particularly striking. “No tengo acceso. No tengo marido, no planifico” [I don’t have access, I don’t have a husband, so I do not plan], Pamela responds, while sharing her perception that her access to reproductive rights and sexuality would be tied to a heterosexual partnership, highlighting a deeply engrained role for women as wives. I argue that this fact alone reveals the challenging landscape experienced by women in peri-urban and religious settings.

In one way, church serves as a safe space for women seeking community, yet its influence also poses significant challenges to their autonomy, particularly in the realm of sexual and reproductive information, access, and perceptions. Tied to this, another important detail is unknotted: religious influence in the sustaining of traditional family roles. According to the narratives, it seems that if women are not in heterosexual partnerships, they do not partake of the resources available for their sexual and reproductive rights, hinting at sex in peri-urban landscape

being a way to sustain traditional family structures. Paradoxically, religious narratives that help women harbor strength also influence their ideas, attitudes, and actions regarding their traditional social roles, often influencing the female role tied to being mothers and wives.

It is important to acknowledge how sexuality is interlaced with ideas of traditional family upbringing, in order to understand religion's true influence. Yet, to delve deeper into these associations and relations we welcome the stories of women survivors.

7.3.1 Surviving traditionality: The role of family and women as wives and mothers

In the context of peri-urban areas, when some women were asked about family planning, their narratives revealed preferences that hinted toward more traditional family structures. However, this dynamic was even more noticeable for women who are survivors of domestic violence, where the link between enduring years of abuse and adhering to conventional heterosexual family structures is evident. The perpetuation of violence over time underscores the entrenched societal norms that prioritize maintaining traditional family units, regardless of the harm inflicted on women. In examining such dynamics, it is imperative to acknowledge their deep-rooted connection to religious beliefs, particularly those influenced by Judeo-Christian ideals of family.

For Creativa, who had made up her mind to leave her partner and abuser after enduring years of suffering, the news of welcoming a child into her life changed her mind. She had children of her own already and caring for a new child with no father limited her decision to leave. “Yo ya había decidido dejarlo, yo estaba en eso, ya me iba, ya me iba, y en eso, una vez que me convenció, salí embarazada, entonces y ya dije yo, ya no me puedo ir, ya no lo puedo dejar” [I had already decided to leave him, I was in the process, once he convinced me, I got pregnant, and then I said

to myself, I can't leave anymore, I can't leave him], she explains. Her beliefs, deeply rooted in the religious beliefs that mark her upbringing, were that, despite the violence, her unborn child and her other children deserved a traditional household.

She was an active church member, and so was he. “Siempre me decía que nosotros teníamos que estar juntos, que yo me iba a ir al infierno si yo le dejaba, que iba a agarrar maldiciones para los niños si yo lo dejaba” [He always told me that we had to be together, that I would go to hell if I left him, that curses would come upon the children if I left him], she shares, while illustrating how her abuse was mixed with guilt and a deep religious manipulation that cornered her into staying in a highly abusive partnership for many years. He used to remind her that she had decided to be his partner, while he had accepted her with two children who were not his: “En el matrimonio uno tiene que aguantarse. Usted se metió a líos de mujer, ahora aguántese, y así me lo decía” [In marriage, one has to endure. You got yourself into women's troubles—now deal with it. That's what he would say to me], she says, paraphrasing something she had learned at a young age.

This belief followed her throughout all the challenges, the abuses, the harassment, and the deep psychological and physical violence she and her children survived. He also used to manipulate the children, while telling them that she was a bad woman who did not pray with him: “Ella deja que entre el diablo” [She lets the devil in], he said to her son. He even told her son she had abused him, highly influencing his behavior and creating a deep resentment toward his mother. In order to solve and survive such hardship she left her old church to avoid running into her abuser; despite the two unresolved reports with his name on them, he alleged that he was being persecuted for domestic and family violence, and she had to take measures to distance herself

and her family. Interestingly, even after all the years of religious abuse, she continued looking for religious resources elsewhere, as she tried to find hope and strength in her faith. “Empecé a buscar la iglesia, empecé a buscar a Dios. Ahí voy, estoy. Todavía estoy en el proceso. No sé cuánto tiempo me va a tomar, no sé cuánto tiempo le toca a las mujeres” [I started seeking the church, I started seeking God. I’m on my way. I’m still in the process. I don’t know how long it will take me, I don’t know how long it takes for women], she clarifies. Her story reveals the intricacy of sustaining family ties and the deeply ingrained beliefs of maintaining such family structures, which are frequently transmitted through religious institutions.

The case was similar for Guerrero, who met her former partner and abuser once she already had a child. He welcomed both of them into his life, offering them a traditional family and a household. “El no es el papá de mi hijo... Es el papá de mi hija” [He’s not the father of my son... he is the father of my daughter], she says, feeling the need to explain. She was aware that he was a very jealous man from the beginning. For years, he controlled her every move, including what she did, what they ate, and who she could talk to. She shares:

Era tanto, que él me celaba con su propio papá, con su propio papá. Si mi papá me llamaba: “¿Por qué tu papá te llama tanto?” Cuando el papá de él llegaba a visitarnos: “Yo miro que te reís mucho con mi papá.”

[It got to the point that he was jealous of his own father, his own father. If my dad called me, he’d ask, “Why is your dad calling you so much?” And when his dad visited us, he’d say, “I see you laugh a lot with my dad.”]

At the end, he had even taken away her cell phone, so she could not reach anybody, especially her sisters. Guerrero navigated each day with fear, almost tiptoeing around him to avoid his anger. The last time she saw him; she almost lost her life. The boiling point arrived when she dared to assert her independence, accepting an invitation from a friend for her birthday. In a moment fraught with tension, she encountered her abuser at a bus stop. His words, dripping with entitlement, echoed through her mind: “Vos querés caminar en la calle, como si fueras sola, soltera, no querés mando de hombre, perate que llegamos a la casa” [You want to walk on the street as if you were alone, single, you don’t want a man’s authority. Wait until we get home], he said to her, filled with wrath, while pushing her around the streets. She remembers being acutely aware of the consequences that awaited her.

She also felt embarrassed that people could see the way he treated her, and she asked him to stop several times. She clearly shares the last words he said to her once they arrived home, and before he brutally attacked her, leaving her in the hospital fighting for her life: “¿Quién te creés? Te voy a enseñar a respetar a los hombres. ¿Que no querés mando de hombre?” [Who do you think you are? I’ll teach you to respect men. You don’t want a man’s authority?], she recalls him saying.

Her brave recollection of the abuse showcases multiple factors, including her need to remain in a traditional partnership and the very patriarchal roles that continue to be replicated and reinforced for both women and men. This indicates the role of men as needing to be in charge, in an aggressive and even prehistoric way, with women forced to assert their right to mobility and self-determined behavior, in response to’ this control and authority. Once these extremely violent rules and patriarchal norms are questioned, or broken, most women survivors experience severe repercussions. Furthermore, even after having survived tormenting violence, the intricate and deeply rooted notions of traditions often leave survivors with an additional burden. “Sentía

tristeza porque es el papá de mi hija. Tenía muchos sentimientos encontrados.” [I felt sadness because he is the father of my daughter. I had many conflicting feelings,” Guerrero says regarding having to testify a week after being hospitalized.

Like both Creativa and Guerrero, Valiente already had children before meeting her last partner and abuser. She had escaped her rural area and with that an abusive relationship that forced her to escape into the urban landscape in hopes of a different life. “Esperando la posibilidad de formalizar un hogar con alguien, y 8-9 años después me meto con esta persona” [Waiting for the possibility of formalizing a home with someone, and 8–9 years later I get involved with this person], she openly shares, referring to her second abuser. Her story helps us grasp the idealized version most women have of family, and with that, of their roles as mothers and wives, within traditional societal norms.

Her second abuser appeared to readily embrace and support the children who were not biologically his, at least initially, demonstrating the qualities of a good man, or at least a good provider. She shares:

Él se fijaba lo que hacía falta en la casa y él compraba la comida, él se fijaba que no había leche, que no había pañales, él se fijaba, él iba a comprar las cosas, Si yo quería desodorante, él compraba, Él hacía todo.

[He noticed what was missing in the house and he bought the food, he noticed if there was no milk, if there were no diapers, he noticed, he went to buy things. If I wanted deodorant, he bought it. He did everything.]

In sharing this, Valiente reveals her need for stability and care, as well as the revelation of the set and traditional roles established in her former household. She recalls the years of abuse and embarrassment, and in particular the undeniable influence her last relationship had on her self-worth and self-esteem:

Sentía como mujer no valía. Yo pensaba que el paso de mi vida por la tierra ya era suficiente. Ya había nacido, ya me había reproducido, crecido, ya me había reproducido, y entonces ya me tenía que morir. Yo era un ser humano que no me arreglaba... Caminaba así. Yo vivía la vida por vivir.

[I felt that as a woman, I wasn't worth anything. I thought my time on earth had already been enough. I had been born, I had grown, I had reproduced, so I figured it was time for me to die. I was a human being who didn't even care for herself... I walked like that. I was just living life for the sake of living.]

She reveals her limited perceptions of her own gendered roles. Subsequently, there was a noticeable shift in their dynamic. Her abuser ceased his previous support, withholding money from her children and gradually allowing things to become precarious. As the patrimonial violence started to unfold, so did the escalated psychological and physical violence. Toward the end, she found herself comparing abusers, valuing the last abusive relationship as better, trying to find ways to understand her own lived experiences. Referring to her first abuser, she shares: “Le valía. Me pegaba, me pegaba como si yo fuera otro hombre. Pero [mi segunda pareja] me pegaba, me insultaba, me dañó física y psicológicamente. Me hizo terminar en un hospital, me hizo terminar desconfiando de la gente” [It didn't matter to him. He hit me like I was another

man. But [my second partner] hit me, insulted me, damaged me physically and psychologically. He put me in the hospital. He made me end up not trusting people.]

The effects of her most recent abuser seemed worse, due to the psychological deterioration she experienced. The effects were noticeable in the way she talked about herself and even in the lack of hygiene she recalls having. Like many women survivors, she anchored herself in faith and in the need to care for her children. Her narrative not only sheds light on numerous factors that contribute to violent dynamics but also exposes the internalized roles women often believe and replicate in pursuit of acceptance.

At this point, survivor narratives start to reveal a distinct notion of women's pursuit of a traditional household, accompanied by societal attitudes clearly ascribed to women. It is often expected that "good" women embody self-sacrifice and submission, and in most cases, this is linked to religiosity. The cases that follow also help us understand this a little bit more.

"Los malos entendidos que he tenido con mi pareja, así son cosas que me han pasado, pero Gracias a Dios, le digo, la vida sigue" [The misunderstandings I've had with my partner, those are things that have happened to me, but thank God, I say, life goes on], says Guardiana, explaining her own experience of domestic violence. She recalls that her relationship started to deteriorate once her partner and abuser had found another woman. This alone broke all her perceptions of the traditional household they had built over the years. "Una falta de respeto que él me haya sido infiel. [I call it a lack of respect that he has been unfaithful to me], she explains, while at the same time describing herself as a devoted mother and wife, always active in her role, never going out or drinking.

His infidelity profoundly shocked her, especially considering she had done nothing to “deserve” it. She shares:

Yo le dije que gracias a Dios yo no era así, porque yo sabía que yo era una gran mujer, el tipo de mujer que era y que yo si hubiera sido así que él no se hubiera metido a un hogar conmigo.

[I told him that thank God I was not like that, because I knew I was a great woman, the type of woman I was, and if I had been like that, he would not have entered a home with me.]

She continued to share; in comparing her values to those of the other woman, she reiterated the values of “a good woman,” a woman whom she considered deserved a man who would provide her with a home. This is a set of values she replicated with her belief. At the same time, she defined her partner’s lover as a sex worker, who served alcohol in a place nearby. In some ways, her narrative highlighted the “other woman’s” abuse toward her, highlighting the threats she received on the phone; in this way, she dismissed her abuser’s violent behavior, attributing it to the influence of alcohol and the sex worker’s impact on his attitude. Although the promise of a household was broken, she decided to give him another chance once he fell ill with COVID-19; after all, he was the father of her daughters, and he needed to quarantine.

For Abnegada, her encounter with infidelity was comparable. She recalls that things started to change once another woman was in the picture. She explains:

Yo me sentía tan bien con él, que yo por eso no trabajaba, porque lo que yo le pedía él me daba. Pero a raíz de esto, cuando él comenzó a andar con esa persona, ya después todo

cambió. Ya después todo fue diferente. Ya después él no me daba lo que me tenía que dar. Ya con mis hijas él comenzó a cambiar.

[I felt so good with him, that's why I didn't work, because whatever I asked him for, he gave me. But after that, when he started going out with that person, everything changed. Everything became different. After that, he stopped giving me what he was supposed to give me. Even with my daughters, he started to change.]

She recounts her experience of abuse and infidelity, and, more importantly, of the rupture of the traditional family they had both built together. She recalls that things started to change once the other woman started visiting their home repeatedly. In fact, she blamed the other's woman's desire for her own life for the breaking up of her years of partnership. "Ella comenzó a coquetearle a mi marido y esas situaciones comenzaron" [She started to flirt with my husband and these situations began to arise], she explains.

At this point, things started to change. He no longer provided for her and her daughters like he used to. With clear patrimonial violence put in place, physical / psychological abuse also started to unfold. Nonetheless, it was not until he decided to bring the other woman into their household that she reported the abuse to the authorities. Despite her initial intentions to address the situation delicately and preserve their familial harmony, she found herself confronted with the harsh reality of his betrayal. "Lo confronté, él me dijo que sí y que él tenía una relación con esa persona, que tenía un hijo con ella, y que tenía hasta un hogar" [I confronted him, he confessed to me that he had this partner, and he had a boy with her, he had a home], she shares, while explaining her former partner had always wanted a son, revealing patriarchal ideas of males as superior to females, which continue to be engrained throughout society.

After the court ruled in her favor, Abnegada recalls feeling a sense of guilt; beyond having ended years of a committed relationship, she was upset about structures changing. In particular, she was conflicted over her family being dismantled in front of her eyes: “No era mi intención sacarlo a el de su casa yo se cuánto le ha costado su casa y yo le dije, mi intención no era sacarlo de su casa sino que no metiera a esa mujer aquí.” [It was not my intention to kick him out of his house, I knew how much he worked for his house, and I told him, my intentions was not to kick him out but that he wouldn’t bring that woman here], she explains. Initially grappling with feelings of shock and disbelief, she struggled to reconcile herself with her new reality.

Throughout her narrative, there is a palpable sense of internal struggle as she navigates her emotions and attempts to make sense of the shifting dynamics within her traditional partnership. Her story helps us identify the societal pressures and expectations placed on women in similar circumstances. Despite enduring emotional and physical turmoil, many survivors are torn between leaving and remaining in traditional family structures, influenced by the role of a “good” woman—as one that remains self-sacrificing and tolerant, despite her partner’s transgressions.

Overall, Abnegada’s journey serves as an important reflection on the complexities of intimate partner relationships, and the profound impact infidelity has on relationships tarnished by abuse, revealing societal expectations that often compound survivors’ emotional burdens.

Like Abnegada, many women continue to find support in their faith and in their children—in this sense, sustaining traditional beliefs: “Yo creo en Dios y Dios ha sido mi fortaleza, ha sido mi

equilibrio, ha sido mi fuerza para yo salir adelante, y salir adelante por mis hijas” [I believe in God and God has been my strength, my balance, my force to move forward, and moving forward for my daughters]. Her story also helps us identify the years when she endured great psychological violence at the hands of her former partner and abuser, who would constantly tell her that no man would ever want to be with her, continuously insulting and humiliating her, shaping her perceptions. Continuing to support the ideas internalized by many of being a “good” woman, she shares, “Yo siempre, por tener un corazón... bueno y bondadoso. Yo no lo quise como lastimar a él, ni ofenderlo, Sino siempre aguante todas esas cosas” [But I always, I always, for having a... good and kind heart. I didn’t want to hurt him or offend him, so I always endured all those things], she shares. The latter helps us reiterate women’s rooted ideas of wives as self-sacrificing and good, no matter the scenario.

For Coraje, dismantling her family, albeit one with an abusive partner, was also hard. “De repente, mis hijas comienzan a extrañar a su papá” [My children suddenly miss their dad], she says. As her narrative unfolds, the influence of traditional values becomes increasingly apparent. She also recalls the support she received from her abuser’s family, sharing with a sense of nostalgia their separation. Amid the process of adapting to her transformed circumstances, a distinctive aspect emerges as she had been the primary breadwinner for her family throughout. Nonetheless, the yearning for a sense of familial continuity remains palpable.

This one aspect demands further examination. While the absence of violence, which Coraje often refers to as arguments, brings solace and a desired sense of peace, it is not without its own

complexities. The transition from being the sole provider to navigating a reshaped familial dynamic is a significant theme. Here, the traditional roles and expectations assigned to women in family settings may play a role in shaping perceptions and the permanent desire we continue to witness of women remaining in partnerships, no matter the consequences.

In the case of Resiliente, we witness a continued desire for traditionality and family. Although, in her case, she was the “other woman,” she started receiving “very strong threats” once she decided to keep her child, while her partner insisted, she have an abortion, threatening her with death. Yet she remained committed to her role as a mother. Her abuser offered her money with constant harassment, to which she responded with a high adherence to God: “Dios dio la bendición de dar esa vida” [God blessed with the ability to give life], she shares. Once her daughter was born, the challenges and threats only increased; nonetheless, her role as a mother allowed her to find strength amid her violent experience.

Finally, for Amada, who found herself shouldering the weight of dismantling her primary family’s structure, the journey toward healing from such emotional burdens continues to be hard. Reflecting on her actions, she expresses a complex mix of emotions:

Lo que hice, para mí es algo que está bien que lo hayan hecho. Lo que hice... si no lo hago, hubiera hecho lo mismo con mis otras hermanas. Pero para ellos, mi familia, no está bien lo que yo hice. Yo me siento mal, porque ellos me echan la culpa de lo que él hizo. Pero no es culpa mía. ¿Por qué me echan la culpa a mí? Yo no soy responsable de lo que él hizo.

[What I did, to me, it was the right thing. If I hadn't done it, he might have done the same to my other sisters. But for them, my family, it wasn't right. I feel bad, because they blame me for what he did. But it's not my fault. Why do they blame me? I'm not responsible for what he did.]

Despite her belief in the rightness of her actions, Amada continues to carry the repercussions of her actions, and in particular those for her family relationships. “Me echan la culpa de lo que él hizo” [They blame me for what he did], she repeats, her voice tinged with both frustration and sorrow. Her statement encapsulates the paradoxical nature of survivors' experience—having taken a stand against injustice yet bearing the brunt of blame and resentment for not having what they desired in the first place: a traditional family.

Survivors' narratives illuminate the profound complexities inherent in women's pursuit of a traditional sense of family and the support it potentially provides. These accounts underscore the enduring impact of abuse on survivors and the intricate dynamics that shape their responses. That is to say, women carry the burdens of maintaining family structures, yet men do not carry the same burden.

Embedded within the broader context of this research, survivor narratives serve as compelling case studies in resilience and agency amid adversity. As these narratives unfold, they reveal the ongoing pain and paradoxical experiences that forge survivor narratives. However, they also allow us to discern a sense of agency as women navigate their paths to finding family and solace within themselves. This newfound assertiveness is highlighted by their initial reluctance to confront their partners. Yet, as their stories progress, confrontation becomes inevitable and they all end up claiming accountability for the violence endured, asserting, in diverse ways, their

agency and ability to start over. This section invites an exploration into how individuals navigate and negotiate different elements, including faith, family, and support, amid domestic violence, shedding light on the enduring significance of tradition within contemporary contexts.

Lastly, the longing for traditions amid violence underscores the deeply ingrained societal norms surrounding family. This longing, intertwined with a sense of identity and belonging through the roles of mestiza women as mother and wives, adds depth to most survivor narratives. It prompts reflection on the enduring influence of tradition and the complexities inherent in renegotiating familial roles and dynamics.

7.4 The role of religion in domestic violence: Living and surviving religious influence

Religion serves as a constant companion for women in the peri-urban landscape throughout their lives, accompanying them from birth through hardship, and women survivors on their journey to liberation. However, within the context of domestic violence, religion assumes a complex and nuanced role. While religious narratives may sometimes attribute violent experiences to divine will, there exists a deeper layer of influence wherein religious institutions shape the perceptions of violence among mestiza women.

This section delves into the direct intersection between religion and domestic violence for women residents and women survivors. As established in the polity chapter, most women residents of peri-urban landscape could not identify domestic violence within their settlements. In fact, many reverted to confirming that they did not hear any violence during the strict lockdown. When asked for a more general assessment, based on the national statistics, a few women started to open up about a diversity of experiences of domestic violence. Alba (71)

shares: “Algún vecino solía ser muy violento con su esposa cuando bebía, pero cesó hace más de un año. El agresor ingresó a la iglesia y así dejó de ser violento. Lo concientizaron sobre tener amor a Dios” [A neighbor used to be very violent with his wife when he drank, but he stopped more than a year ago. The aggressor joined the church, and that’s how he stopped being violent. They made him aware about loving God]. She attributed the reduction in violence to a newfound connection to religious principles.

In this sense, religion or God, often perceived interchangeably, seems to be more than the ultimate provider of essential resources and services: religion / God is also a solution for domestic violence. Here, the role of religious institutions starts to shape perceptions of and responses to violence against women, shedding light on the socio-cultural complexities that underpin this phenomenon. For Alba (71), as for Daysi (24) and María Elena A. (63), the reason for the absence of violence in their settlements is strictly tied to the presence and protection of God. Yet reality proves them wrong.

For women survivors, the connection is even more evident. Resiliente shares, “Dios no le va a dar una prueba que no vaya a poder” [God won’t give you a trial you can’t handle], referring to her experience of domestic violence. In this sense, not only does religion serve as a tool helping her to endure the violence, but the violence endured is perceived as a test of her faith. In addition, the aftermath of her journey toward liberation is also tied to her religious belief: “Uno: agarrarse de Dios. Dos: grande e invencible, solo Dios” One: cling to God. Two: great and invincible, only God], she repeats, while continuing to heal from her violent past, enduring lockdown with her daughter.

Guerrera's harrowing story of violence reveals a similar sense of religiosity, not only as a tool but as a way to comprehend the violence endured. It is undeniable that many women find strength within their own faith. Yet, further than that, I argue that religion easily converts into a social actor that remains present throughout women's life journeys. Unable to provide explanations for the violent experiences, women find that religion and divine belief help cover the gaps. Guerrero's violent past serves as one example, where the more violence she endured, the stronger her faith and relationship to God became.

In the face of death, she and her entire medical team adhered to religion as the ultimate tool available to save her life. She shares, "Amén, amén, amén, tranquila. Dios está con nosotras y está con vos también, me dijo el doctor" [Amen, amen, amen, calm down, God is with us, and He is with you too, the doctor told me]. While fighting for her life, lying on a hospital bed, she recalls, God saved her life and kept her present for her children. She opened up about the long conversations she had asking God to allow her to live, prioritizing her children. It was thanks to him that she could share her story today, she stated. She continuously thanked God for not having lost her memory and even her sanity. "Dios todo lo hace" [God does everything], she says gratefully.

Guerrera continues to recover, renting a house in a different urban neighborhood, away and isolated from anyone who could share her location with her abuser or her abuser's family.

Although she struggled to keep food on the table during lockdown, trying to sell prepared food to raise money for her own food whenever she could, she was alive. That one fact allowed her to continue to adhere to her growing faith. She shares:

Dios me dio otra oportunidad. Dios me quitó ese miedo. Me pudo más el coraje, la fuerza de sobrevivir, el coraje de ser madre, el amor de madre por sacar a mis hijos adelante, y las ganas de vivir. Este coraje me arrancó, como la venda de los ojos. No sé cómo explicarte. Me dio como la fuerza para poder decir: ya no.

[God gave me another chance. God took away that fear. What moved me most was the courage, the will to survive, the courage to be a mother, a mother's love to raise my children, and the desire to live. That courage ripped off the blindfold. I don't know how to explain it. It gave me the strength to say: no more.]

Beyond simplistic interpretations of religious narratives as explanations for abuse, survivor narratives disclose the intricate ways in which religious institutions influence experiences of domestic violence. For example, beyond a sense of autonomy, as revealed in Valiente's faith, church provided a safe and potentially protective ally. It even became the only place she was allowed to go while enduring years of abuse and isolation. Experiencing all the consequences, both physical and mental, of domestic violence, she left what was left of her will to God. "Dios me tiene que llevar, pero no ahora, en unos años, que mis hijos ya sean unos hombres y mujeres de bien y puedan enfrentarse a la vida ellos solos" [God has to take me, but not now, in a few years, when my children are grown into respectable men and women and can face life on their own], she shares, revealing her emotional state during her years as a domestic violence victim. While she is addressing her life journey, her narrative begins to touch on several nuanced ideas concerning her religious approach, and the association with the violence she endured. It became clear that several religious ideas had been internalized in her body for years. She shares, "En la

iglesia, hasta el mismo sacerdote nos dice: ‘el hombre es el pilar de la casa’” [At church, even the priest tells us: “the man is the pillar of the home”].

In her case, a myriad of reasons supported her decision to remain faithful to making her partnership work. Many of these related to a traditional idea and obligation of remaining in partnership for her children. In addition, her former partner and abuser used her devoted faith and religious values against her, threatening her if she decided to dismantle her family. “La Biblia dice que la mujer se tiene que someter al hombre” [The Bible says that woman must submit to man], she recalls her abuser saying repeatedly. Yet after becoming able to leave the abuse, as well to talk about it, she continued to find solace in her faith: “También la Biblia dice que el hombre tiene que someterse a la mujer y el hombre tiene que respetar y hacer valer su hogar” [The Bible also says that man must submit to woman and man must respect and uphold his household], she shares, and reveals a new sense of questioning by adding, infuriated:

El pastor de la iglesia le dice a uno que uno tiene que obedecer al hombre porque el hombre... Y no es así. ¡O sea! Hay un montón de cosas que tienen que empezar, desde el mismo señor que da la misa, desde el pastor.

[The pastor at church tells us we have to obey men because they’re men... But that’s not how it is! There are so many things that need to change, starting with the very man who gives the sermon, the pastor himself.]

Although she continues to remain faithful, after her entire journey with domestic violence she understood that plenty of things needed to change, starting with the role of priests and pastors in actively disseminating a mistaken sense of family and duty through their sermons.

As with Valiente, the case of Creativa revealed that God, religion, and church were all present throughout her entire life. From her childhood to her partnership, and even within her social circles, church was always present. According to her, despite the challenges endured, both economic and in relation to her experience of domestic violence, it was God who helped her pay her debts after her separation from her abuser. It was God's will that she could secure food for her children. Furthermore, God and church were a space she could attend freely. Although lockdown limited her mobility and challenged her as she could no longer socialize at church gatherings, she looked for ways to worship online, allowing her faith to remain steady during the pandemic.

Moreover, church was also present within the violence she survived for years at the hands of her former partner. "Siempre hemos ido a la iglesia. Yo siempre he buscado iglesia, porque me involucré. Me mantenía como refugiada, según yo. Entonces él siempre me decía que nosotros teníamos que estar juntos" [We've always gone to church. I've always sought out the church, because I got involved. I kept myself there like a refugee, or so I thought. And he always told me that we had to stay together], she shares and revealed that her former abuser used her faith against her, convincing her they should stay together as a form of religious practice. Although he managed to take away her religious space from her after a violent incident, she remained devoted. Creativa shares, about the incident, "Lo último, fui a la iglesia. Me fue a gritar delante de todo el mundo, a agarrarme, a sujetarme, a querer quitarme los niños" [The last time, I went to church. He came to yell at me in front of everyone, grabbed me, restrained me, and tried to take my children], she recounts. Although in her narrative no one intervened, this last incident made her file for domestic and family violence again. Once redirected to the only women's shelter in

the Central District, she found a most deserved safety, forcing her to stop attending her old church in order to avoid her abuser.

Yet the role of religious institutions goes beyond a deep influence on her and her partner's belief systems: church, as much as the state, became a co-conspirator in the violence endured. She clearly recalls a day when her former abuser was beating her, and he called their church leader. She recalls:

Les hablaba a los líderes de la iglesia y les decía... No quiere orar y me estaba golpeando, ¿verdad? Entonces yo le decía al líder, "Líder, mire que me está golpeando," y él me decía, "Sí, hermana, pero nosotros no nos podemos meter." Imagínese, uno tiene que aguantarse. No nos podemos meter, no podemos hacer absolutamente nada. Entonces... y ese sentimiento, uno se tiene que aguantar. ¿Y qué iba a hacer?

[He called the leaders and told them... She doesn't want to pray, and he was hitting me, right? So I told the leader, "Leader, look, he's hitting me," and he said, "Yes, sister, but we can't get involved." Imagine that, you must endure it. We can't intervene; we can't do anything at all. So... and that feeling, you just must bear it. What was I supposed to do?]

Creativa opens up about the impact this one interaction had on her life, especially on her decision to remain with her abuser for many years. Despite her unwavering faith, she couldn't ignore the unsettling reality: when even the leaders of her church failed to acknowledge her distress, she knew she had to bear it alone. With no support from the institution that had been her lifelong companion, she felt powerless. Despite repeatedly filing reports for domestic violence and receiving inadequate interventions from various state and social agencies, she found herself

trapped in a cycle of helplessness. What she could do, besides separating, was to continue to strengthen her faith. In fact, she continued to look for God, and was quick to look for another church where she could continue to worship. Religion for her, as for many women survivors, was part of the solution as much as a part of the abuse.

For many women survivors, religion represents both a source of abuse and a potential refuge. They bear witness to the profound influence that religious upbringing and institutions wield over the dynamics of domestic violence. When confronted with inadequate state interventions and the seeming impossibility of breaking free from their abusers, survivors often turn to divine intervention for guidance and comfort.

I contend that religion occupies a deeply paradoxical role in society, affording women certain rights such as belonging and mobility while simultaneously reinforcing traditional gender norms that place them at risk. Beyond helping women with basic needs, as evidenced during the pandemic lockdown, religious institutions frequently fall short in addressing the scourge of domestic violence. This discrepancy can be attributed to various factors, including entrenched religious doctrines rooted in Judeo-Christian ideals of family structure, wherein heterosexual partnerships are upheld as sacred. Additionally, the societal perception of domestic violence as a private matter perpetuates a culture of silence and secrecy, hindering collective efforts to combat the issue.

Furthermore, while domestic violence continues to be regarded as a private and domestic household issue, associated only with limited numbers of victims and perpetrators, collective solutions to end the phenomenon cannot be put in place. This collective failure to confront the

problem underscores the urgent need for a multifaceted approach that addresses both the systemic roots of domestic violence (economy, polity) and the cultural barriers (society) to seeking help within religious communities. In fact, religious leaders in these urban landscapes are well placed to intervene, because they are highly regarded and respected within peri-urban landscape. That is to say, there is significant evidence of the influence of religion in all aspects of mestiza women's lives; therefore, if this influence were also used to protect them from abusers or disseminate within religious doctrines respect for women and shame for offenders, religious institutions would become an optimal solution for domestic violence.

There are some cases across peri-urban areas of Honduras of women pastors who have quietly played a pivotal role in aiding women who are enduring domestic violence. They have covertly established shelters within their churches and provided guidance on reporting abuse. Although these efforts may be limited in scope, they underscore the significance of female leadership, particularly within religious contexts. This also demonstrates the value of innovative leaders who, rather than rigidly adhering to overarching religious doctrines, adapt to the unique challenges and circumstances of their local communities. Further than that, these stories allow us to acknowledge the complex intersections of religion, gender, and violence, with the aim of effecting meaningful change and providing genuine support to women in need.

Through their unwavering commitment to their faith, women reveal an incredible capacity to adapt and endure. This resilience is often deeply rooted in their cultural and spiritual upbringing, providing them with a source of strength and empowerment in the face of adversity. By embracing their religiosity as a form of resistance against oppressive systems, mestiza women defy expectations and reclaim agency over their lives. In doing so, they challenge dominant

narratives that seek to marginalize or dismiss their experiences, highlighting the intricate interplay between religion, culture, and power. Their ability to find comfort and meaning within their own selves reflects a profound understanding of the complexities of identity and belonging, offering a powerful counternarrative to prevailing stereotypes.

7.5 Making sense of the narratives

Based on the narratives that give sense to the lived experiences of women, various social actors play significant roles in peri-urban and urban barrios and did so especially during the pandemic. The in-depth interviews reveal the multifaceted presence of these actors, ranging from religious institutions to grassroots organizations and governmental bodies.

The state emerged as a key provider of essential services, including limited food assistance, healthcare, and some sort of education. While some women acknowledged the state's support, others perceived its presence within their settlements as limited or even nonexistent. This perception could be rooted in the particular historical experiences of informal settlements as well as in the inadequacy of the state's response during the pandemic crisis.

As the narratives unfold, an undeniable and prominent actor is evidenced: religious institutions, who also played a crucial role, not only in providing essential support but also in offering spiritual comfort and hope. Churches in particular were deeply integrated into the fabric of daily and pandemic life, fostering a sense of community solidarity among mestiza women. Additionally, grassroots organizations, community leaders, and neighbors contributed significantly to supporting vulnerable women and their families. Their efforts ranged from organizing food distribution to advocating for the needs of extremely disadvantaged populations.

Overall, acknowledging the pandemic as nothing more than a scenario allows us to underscore the resilience and resourcefulness of peri-urban communities in navigating challenging circumstances. While state institutions and formal aid mechanisms were important, it was the collective efforts of various social actors that truly made a difference in the lives of peri-urban residents.

On the other hand, survivor stories prove to be crucial in mapping social actors that help us understand as much as to address the phenomenon of domestic violence. The social actors present throughout all survivor narratives include: 1) family: immediate and extended family members offer crucial support and sometimes serve as early warning systems for survivors; 2) community: allies, friends, neighbors, and civil society organizations, especially feminist collectives and shelters, provide vital assistance and sanctuary for women victims; and 3) faith: religious beliefs and communities offer strength, resilience, and hope throughout the survivors' ordeals.

Understanding these social actors and their roles underscores the need for holistic approaches to intervention and prevention, involving familial, communal, and spiritual resources alongside state institutions. Furthermore, when aiming to analyze society through the lens of Walby's theoretical gender regimes, attempting to separate religion from social dynamics in urban Honduras proved to be a daunting task. It became apparent that Honduran society is deeply entrenched in religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, delving beyond this initial observation, I argue that religion permeates every facet of women's lives, from birth to old age, serving as a constant presence and resource. Therefore, any attempt to isolate religion from the societal landscape renders the depiction of women's social resources incomplete and inadequate.

Moreover, when mapping out the various social actors that play crucial roles in addressing the phenomenon of domestic violence, religion emerges as a prominent force. This prominence manifests in two distinct yet interrelated ways. First, religion is woven into the fabric of women's narratives, serving as a guiding force that accompanies them through every trial and triumph. Throughout the pandemic, for instance, faith in God was interwoven with every aspect of survival, from securing basic necessities such as food to avoiding COVID-19 infection. Second, religious institutions themselves serve as grassroots and social organizations within the peripheries of urban communities.

In essence, religion is not merely a separate entity within society but rather an integral part of the social fabric that shapes women's experiences and resources. Recognizing the multifaceted role of religion in women's lives is essential for crafting any effective approaches to address social issues that affect them. Thus, religious institutions not only provide spiritual guidance but also offer practical support and resources to women in need, from providing shelter and counseling to advocating for single mothers. Without a doubt, religious organizations play a multifaceted role in addressing the complex issues surrounding the peripheries. By acknowledging the intertwined nature of religion and societal structures, we gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in supporting mestiza women and their experiences of domestic violence.

The stories shared throughout this chapter highlight the role of faith as a source of hope and resilience, while also shedding light on the challenges imposed by religious narratives on issues such as family planning and women's autonomy over their bodies, revealing the influence of religion in relation to sexual and reproductive rights. The influence of religious institutions, both positive and negative, is evident in the narratives of survivors like Creativa, Abnegada, Valiente,

Guerrera, and Coraje. While some find solace and support within their religious communities, others face barriers to seeking help and asserting their autonomy due to religious doctrines and traditional family values. The limited number of women pastors who quietly aid survivors demonstrate the potential for innovative leadership within religious contexts, offering a potential protective mechanism.

However, it is crucial to recognize the complexities and contradictions inherent in women's experiences of religion. While faith can provide strength and resilience, it can also perpetuate harmful gender norms and restrict women's agency. As we strive to address issues such as domestic violence, it is essential to approach women's relationship with faith critically, acknowledging the intersections of religion, gender, and power. Moreover, deeply engrained ideas surrounding traditional family structures—which are often linked with religious doctrines—where women are placed in the roles of wives and mothers, predominantly, as a way of social belonging, quickly become dangerous for many survivors. The entrenched and internalized roles associated with the female gender, which often portray “good” women as patient, kind, self-sacrificing, and in need of a heterosexual partnership to survive and / or belong, prove to place an enormous weight on women enduring domestic violence.

Ultimately, the paradox deepens when women discover a sense of autonomy within the same religious narratives that may have initially placed them in at-risk situations. Women often cling to their own faith as an initial and final lifeline extended by society for their survival. In this way, their resilience in navigating the complexities of religious adherence challenges simplistic notions of conventionality or ignorance. Instead, it unveils a nuanced and inherently decolonial perspective, particularly evident among mestiza women, who seek solace where it is offered and

available. I argue that by embracing their religiosity as a form of resistance, mestiza women challenge dominant narratives and reclaim agency over their lives. Their stories underscore the need for inclusive and empowering approaches to addressing the complex realities of women's lives within the Honduran urban landscape.

8 BROADENING THE DISCUSSION: FACTORS, CAUSES, CORRELATIONS, AND ASSOCIATIONS WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Long before the pandemic, scholars linked domestic violence to several economic, political, and social disadvantages (Fahmy et al., 2016; Slabbert, 2017; Williams, 1998), mostly turning to poverty for an explanation. In the literature, one of the most supported factors in domestic violence seems to be a history of violence, especially during childhood. According to scholars, having witnessed domestic violence as a child may factor in the acceptance of it as an adult, either as a victim or as a perpetrator (Astbury et al., 2000; Song et al., 2017). Another factor in the vast majority of domestic violence seems to be that of societal and cultural norms (Bucheli & Rossi, 2019; Wilson, 2014). Beyond that, country-specific studies have narrowed down specific factors. Owusu Adjah and Agbemaflle (2016) concluded that place of residence, alcohol use by husband, and family history of violence were the reasons behind women's risk of domestic violence in Ghana. In the case of Semahegn and Mengistie (2015), they significantly associated domestic violence in Ethiopia with substance abuse (alcohol consumption and chat chewing), family history of violence, being a housewife, being Muslim, being illiterate, living in a rural area, and, finally, a lack of decision-making power.

During the pandemic, scholars swiftly adopted a prevailing approach of highlighting the factors linked to the surge in domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis. Most continued to reiterate the strong causal relationship and association of poverty and domestic violence (Henson, 2020; Usta et al., 2021). On the other hand, Piquero et al. (2021b) pointed to drug and alcohol use, as did Chalfin et al. (2021). Other factors ranged from education (Kaukinen, 2020) to the inability to make ends meet, which points to economic factors as direct influencers for perpetrators (Gama

et al., 2020). In other cases, studies focused on a combination of various factors including poverty, alcohol, and mental distress (Hisham et al., 2022) to explain the increase, as well as the correlations among the factors. Some studies have even factored in depression and social media addiction to explain the excruciating experiences of women regarding domestic violence (Sediri et al., 2020).

The studies focused on narrowing down the big problem to different sociodemographic and even political conditions. While their findings hold significance in uncovering contextual factors that may exacerbate these occurrences, they fall short in providing a comprehensive overview and unraveling the root cause. While addressing factors such as alcohol consumption and ensuring economic stability can help to mitigate certain aspects of domestic violence, it is important to recognize that these measures alone are not comprehensive solutions. Domestic violence is a complex issue deeply rooted in power dynamics. It is deeply ingrained in the gender inequalities that persist within our contemporary and gendered relations. It is rooted in the patriarchal system we continue to replicate.

Thus, efforts to combat domestic violence require a multifaceted approach that addresses not only immediate triggers such as the ones evidenced throughout the different regimes narrated by women themselves, but also the broader societal attitudes and structures that perpetuate such violence. Education, awareness campaigns, legal reforms, support systems for survivors, and changing cultural norms are all essential components of a holistic strategy to effectively tackle domestic violence. Simply focusing on specific factors to explain domestic violence falls short of addressing the underlying systemic complexities that actually fuel this issue (Chalfin et al., 2021; Henson, 2020; Walby & Myhill, 2001).

Understanding the broader scope of the issue is crucial. It is not a simple equation involving victims and perpetrators: we have to start recognizing domestic violence as a systemic and global problem with multifaceted dimensions. The prevalence of domestic violence in least developed countries like Honduras is not solely a consequence of economic disparities or deep poverty levels, as is often propagated. Simplistic explanations hinder our ability to genuinely address the issue at hand.

The evidence highlighted through the voices of women throughout this manuscript reveal an issue triggered by gender subordination. Domestic and other forms of violence against women stem from gender subordination only. The idea, which translates into actions, that the female, and the value we assign to it, is lesser than the male propagates these occurrences. These ideas and actions pervade entire societies, economies, and policies, across the globe, resulting in cases like Honduras, which fosters a troubling relationship with the women who inhabit the land.

By dissecting the cause of domestic violence, we arrive at the undeniable truth. Only by addressing the intricacies of gender inequality and subordination can we hope to implement effective solutions that bring about lasting change and create safer, more equitable societies (Biroli, 2020; Malo, 2019; Vaid-Menon, 2020).

To further understand this, I include the voice of Honduran expert Ana Lizeth Cruz, and her participation in a virtual panel⁸⁵ held for this research. According to Cruz, the director and founder of the only domestic violence shelter in the Central District, “the root of violence against women and girls is inequity and discrimination, and those are related to power and control as acceptable norms” (Cruz, Ana Lizeth, personal communication, 2020). Yet, as all experts conclude, the pandemic served to reveal the overall incompetence to address inequity throughout all systems, which may put women at greater risk.

To this, we can add a series of conditions—or factors, as scholars often name them—that may increase domestic violence in certain scenarios, much like the pandemic. As Cruz better explains, “belonging to those excluded groups like people with disabilities, or Indigenous groups. Violence in childhood, begging etc.” could all make the problem much more complex or palpable, yet all those conditions and characteristics continue, creating an extensive list of vulnerabilities to be addressed.

Nonetheless, the root of the problem is clear, and it applies almost exclusively to all domestic violence experiences. The root problem is deeply engrained through all gender regimes, including economic, political, and social ones (Coker, 2002).

⁸⁵ Following the first phases of data analysis, on February 14, 2021, I held an online debate with six key actors and frontline workers of domestic violence in Honduras, called “Patriarchal Conversations and What Else?” with the intention of broadening the conversation and generating a discussion among participants so they could share their experiences of either supporting survivors during the pandemic and / or researching the issue of domestic violence. The panel focused on answering five key guiding questions divided among the expert panelists. The questions, intended to foster discussion, focused on clarifying the factors that exacerbated the problem of domestic violence in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. It allowed for a deeper reflection on the preliminary findings of the research.

There are of course elements in the Honduran stories revealed that help us dissect the issue further. I often refer to them as descriptors that help further illustrate the issue at hand. Initially, I refused to list the elements, as I understood the risk that this research would contribute to simplistically numbering factors in and associations with domestic violence. Although I continue to refuse to do that and choose instead to advocate for gender subordination as the root cause, I acknowledge that dismantling the problem may take significant time, effort, and resources. Thus, I want the research to name elements that in other scenarios of conflict and crisis may make a difference.

Beyond pointing to the evident economic disparities that characterize the stories, I use this chapter to mention three key elements that seem to propagate the issue and complicate the relations among the genders even further, particularly in crisis scenarios. The elements stem from the different regimes, and I argue that all are reflected in the economic disparities that characterize peri-urban living. I refer to:

- 1) motherhood, as an adherence to traditional gender roles assigned to women
- 2) legal measures concerning confinement and mobility restrictions
- 3) religious narratives as explanations for the truth and the role of religious leaders

These elements come up as new revelations of the matter under discussion and can help us untangle the truths required to answer the research question. How did peri-urban households become the most dangerous places to be women, during the pandemic?

First, women's economic journeys exposed the lack of education platforms, and the additional economic resources needed to help children stay in the school system during lockdown. This one

fact catapulted motherhood into being an important factor / role / element to consider in the stories of domestic violence. In fact, motherhood became an accentuated role for women during the pandemic, as during the school shutdown the role of mothers as main educators and caregivers was accentuated and prevalent. This, I argue, requires special attention.

Motherhood, in this sense, served a paradoxical role: while mothers are often tethered to traditional relationships with their partners out of fear of destabilizing their familial and economic support systems, motherhood also served as a catalyst for many survivors of domestic violence to leave their abusive partners. The desire to shield their children from harm motivated a lot of women survivors to act. Moreover, the maternal role provided a source of strength and purpose, empowering women to embark on new beginnings. On the other hand, motherhood is embedded in the traditional gender roles that were further replicated in the pandemic and persist in our contemporary mestiza societies. More than a factor or correlation, motherhood feeds the gender constructs and understandings we carry and replicate regarding gender subordination (Agarwal, 2021; Nash et al., 2021). Furthermore, I argue that this cannot be understood without understanding the influence of religion in the traditional roles and demands of motherhood for women.

Second, women's narratives reveal valuable insights into the stark disparities situated in the legal structures and the political context that surrounded their violent stories. In the case of the Honduran legal system, aid for women is already limited. In addition, as soon as the COVID-19-related measures were established, especially those pertaining to mobility restrictions, women were forced into total confinement, many with their abusers or potential abusers. The strict confinement experienced in the Honduran peri-urban landscape also affected men, reducing their

capacity to provide for their families and tarnishing their traditional gender roles (Gibbons et al., 2021; Silverio-Murillo et al., 2023). Thus, legal decisions concerning women directly affected the situations and stories that gave rise to domestic violence cases in the country.

In this sense, the Honduran legal system has a role as a co-conspirator in the stories of domestic violence. The narratives of survivors highlight the array of challenges women face in navigating the legal system when reporting domestic violence, which has often left them to fend for themselves and exposed them to revictimization and further patriarchal violence: during the pandemic the legal system stripped women of the limited opportunities available for protection, forcing confinement as a priority and not taking into account the situation of women in the peri-urban landscape or survivors of domestic violence (Menjívar & Diossa-Jiménez, 2023).

In the case of the pandemic, the strict social and physical distancing practices enforced by the government had profound impacts on women's mental health, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and feelings of isolation, depression, and fear. Thus, the legal measures regarding forced confinement disproportionately affected all women; in this regard, alternative support networks such as family, friends, shelters, and other survivors played a vital role in offering autonomy for mestiza women. The above-mentioned restrictions, set by law, need to be reevaluated, and women's lives set as a priority for future decision-makers (Espinoza Turcios et al., 2023).

Third and finally, during the examination of women's lived experiences various social actors emerged as significant contributors, yet the presence of religious institutions, accompanied by highly religious narratives, stands out as a prominent element. As previously discussed, religion

itself offers essential support for women, providing spiritual comfort and hope. Churches in particular played a vital and paradoxical role, fostering community solidarity among mestiza women. At the same time, they tried to influence women to remain in traditional family structures, treating them with disregard if those same relations turned violent (Leyton et al., 2023; Wolseth, 2008).

Survivor stories play a crucial role in mapping the role of religion in domestic violence. Religious institutions in this sense play a role in the complexities inherent in women's experiences. While faith can provide strength and resilience, it can also perpetuate harmful gender norms and restrict women's agency. In some of the documented instances, religious leaders were either directly informed about or witnessed the violence inflicted on women yet chose not to intervene. This display of double standards is disconcerting, as their reluctance to act stems from a belief in not intruding on or meddling in domestic matters. However, their involvement in women's personal lives is evident through the roles they advocate for them, as well as the sexual and reproductive norms women are expected to uphold. Therefore, given their significant influence as leaders, religious figures must adopt a more assertive stance against abusers.

Moreover, the deeply entrenched traditional gender roles that are often rooted in religious teachings exert a detrimental influence on women's lives. These roles perpetuate the expectation of female submission and discourage women from reporting abuse. Therefore, like any other institution, the church needs modernization and adaptation to contemporary circumstances. It is imperative for religious leaders and institutions to recognize the inherent risks faced by women and to incorporate solutions into their doctrines, teachings, and advice. By doing so, they can

address the harmful consequences of traditional gender norms and contribute to fostering a safer and more equitable society for all.

Women's relationship with faith must be examined further and critically, acknowledging the intersections of religion, gender, and power. Many women survivors considered their life-changing experiences of domestic violence to be a God-sent test, adhering to their faith for survival. Addressing these intersecting issues requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges the importance of religious beliefs while safeguarding women's fundamental rights and freedoms. More on this is provided under the section on policy recommendations.

Moreover, beyond connecting the factors and actors present in narratives of domestic violence, which are evidenced throughout the empirical results of this dissertation, the research aims to unravel domestic violence as a relational dynamic imbued with power imbalances, rather than being solely driven by economic, political, or social circumstances.

The evidence directs us to a point that could potentially broaden the discussion: rethinking gender.

Instead of solely considering the socioeconomic and political factors that are often associated with domestic violence, rethinking gender could potentially serve as a catalyst for transformative change. In other words, if gender subordination, based on the different patriarchal regimes, continues to be the reason for domestic violence, then the only sustainable solution is an exercise that helps us reconsider gender. Promoting flexibility in gender roles could mitigate othering tendencies and help women and men live free of such tarnishing roles and consequently the violence it results in (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

Domestic violence is a problem that stems from how we relate to one another, and not entirely from how we relate to economic, political, or social factors. That is to say, modern society is shaped by a context of asymmetry and inequality, which is revealed through the different gender regimes. Hence, the relationships among men and women are articulated in terms of power, translating gendered relations into relations of power (R. Segato, 2021b).

In this sense, domestic violence is used by some men as a means and not as an end. The violent offenses exposed through this research are not rooted in poverty or income scarcity, nor even in the poor legal structures or religious mandates that characterize mestiza stories. As a matter of fact, the violent offenses are being made across female bodies using economic, political, and social means as tools. The important element of the dependency of women on men persists throughout the different Honduran urban and peri-urban regimes. Thus, the current regimes (economic, political, and social) offer violence as a resource to conserve male power (R. L. Segato & Monque, 2021).

A more flexible understanding of gender roles could potentially contest such reality. Questioning traditional notions of caregiving as solely a woman's responsibility and providing as solely a man's duty, for example, could potentially create shifts in these dynamics. This goes beyond mere economic means, motherhood, and legal alternatives, which also need to be addressed: the viable solution touches on the very core of gender disparity. By challenging the rigid gender roles and expectations evidenced throughout this research's narratives, we open up possibilities for individuals to explore a wider range of roles and responsibilities (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

This is not just about embracing gender fluidity, although that could certainly be part of it. Rather, it is about reimagining the roles we have assigned to different genders and allowing for greater flexibility and fluidity within those roles (Rycroft-Smith & Andre, 2019). In conservative societies like Honduras, the chances of achieving this shift may seem discouraging, but it is essential for progress. By breaking free from traditional gender norms, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society where individuals are not confined by stereotypes. Ultimately, fostering flexibility in the possibilities available to different genders could have far-reaching effects, including a potential reduction in domestic violence. When individuals are not confined to rigid gender roles, they have greater agency to navigate their relationships and lives in ways that are fulfilling and not damaging to others (Roos & Zanoni, 2017).

In other words, I advocate for a society that resets its stories to allow different characters, replacing the submissive wife and the providing father, while accepting differences and diversity. This could potentially change it all. In this envisioned reality, traditional gender roles undergo a profound shift, further than just switching roles, with men taking on domestic responsibilities and women actively participating in public life. I talk about a potential life where men engage in cooking and cleaning without dependence on the productive or informal sectors, irrespective of their relationship status. I talk about embracing stories of women who opt out of traditional roles, choosing not to pursue motherhood or marriage while finding fulfillment within community life. A life where women and non-binary people are part of influential groups, allowing them to become leaders and decision-makers, to better inform populations about their needs and rights. A life accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as the non-binary and non-traditional family structures that are allowed to emerge. I contend that in embracing such diversity and

inclusivity, we would be surprised by the innovative solutions that emerge in response (Butler & Lourties, 1998).

In conclusion, the gender gap, the prevalence of disparities within the legal system, and the devaluation of women entrenched in traditional gender roles may stem from a lack of gender flexibility. Changing it would in turn result in a change within all these spheres. I argue that changing our preconceptions of gender, rethinking and expanding the meanings assigned to the genders, could potentially result in alleviation of the gender gap that persists through all gender regimes.

9 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Seeking to address the fundamental question of why peri-urban households became the most dangerous environment for women in Honduras, this qualitative research delved into the underlying elements that contributed, accompanied, and allowed for the experience of domestic violence in peri-urban Honduras during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. The study conducted 67 in-depth interviews spanning the initial 5 months of the pandemic lockdown (March–July 2020). Utilizing phone and video interviews, the research extracted comprehensive narratives from a diverse range of participants, including a) experts, b) peri-urban residents of Los Pinos and La Era peri-urban settlements, and c) survivors of domestic violence.

Although men were also interviewed, this research is primarily driven by women's voices, aiming to capture the full breadth of their experiences throughout the pandemic. Before imposing my own interpretation and analysis, I have prioritized sharing their stories. Through interviews with residents, we gain insight into a collective narrative that reflects the intricacies that are specific to the peri-urban landscape. It is important to note that while these stories are drawn from residents of Los Pinos and La Era, they serve to illuminate the nuanced realities of living within informal settlements in general, while also acknowledging the vast diversity inherent within peri-urban living. Most importantly, this dissertation is anchored in the voices of survivors, who help us trace a road map for the diverse experiences of domestic violence, illustrating the very elements and actors that shape their stories and resulting in potential alternatives for the elimination of the phenomenon. The narratives of both women residents and survivors provide a powerful testimony to the enduring legacy of domestic violence in the country. Narrating their pandemic experiences, women offered valuable insights that reveal the

systemic barriers and opportunities encountered by mestiza women throughout the different economic, political, and social structures we inhabit.

Peri-urban inequalities are not exclusive to women; however, they present additional characteristics that affect women in a differentiated manner. Historically, women and men in Honduras are often forced to fulfill traditional roles determined by a machista upbringing and high religiosity in the country. These primarily position women as caregivers, mothers, and wives, while limiting men to roles of economic provision (Lagarde, 2018). These same roles limit women's economic, political, and social opportunities.

Following the sociological theory proposed by Sylvia Walby, the dissertation embeds the diversity of narratives within different gender regimes—economic, political, and sociological—which helps provide valuable insights into the profound impact of the pandemic on women's lives, of which the most relevant are depicted as follows:

In terms of **the economy**, existing inequalities prevalent in peri-urban areas were exacerbated during the pandemic, adding to women's hardships. Most if not all women grappled with income scarcity, exposing them to alarming situations of food insecurity and financial dependency. This was due to the significant reliance peri-urban residents have on the informal sector, which was immediately disrupted by the COVID-19-related measures that were put in place to avoid the spread of the virus.

Despite food being available within these settlements, often referred to as barrios, income scarcity remained a dominant factor contributing to the prevalent **a) food inaccessibility** women continuously struggled with throughout the lockdown. Moreover, **b) water shortages**

compounded by increasing debts to the state further burdened women in peri-urban settings.

Their struggles in managing limited water resources intersected with the added stress of accumulating debts due to their inability to afford basic services like electricity and water during the pandemic.

The pandemic-related measures and their diverse economic influences also resulted in **c) heightened traditional gender roles, particularly accentuating women's roles as caregivers and mothers**. Motherhood emerged as a foundational identity and role, surpassing any other social construct for women. The responsibilities and challenges of nurturing and caring for children became even more pronounced, shaping women's experiences in profound ways. Even those without children or with older children found themselves exclusively viewed as caregivers, underscoring the persistence of conservative gender norms. Despite sharing confined spaces, men largely evaded caregiving and domestic responsibilities, exacerbating the burden on women within the domestic sphere.

For women survivors of domestic violence, the situation is even more dire. Many found themselves further isolated and economically vulnerable after reporting their abusers, who often served as their primary economic providers. Those who were their own providers faced additional challenges, as their violent relationships left them saddled with debt and other economic repercussions, pushing them to the margins of an already-limited economic market.

Regarding **the polity**, women's narratives offer profound insights into the repercussions of COVID-19-related measures, particularly in relation to **a) the complete shutdown and its effects on mental health and the production of fear culture**. The shutdown of schools, companies, stores, and streets, and strict confinement measures such as allowing people to leave

their households only once every 15 days for essential purchases, imposed immense personal and collective suffering, particularly among peri-urban women. On one hand, it deprived residents of the social benefits that often characterize the peri-urban landscape, where most residents commonly use their social and neighbor contacts to search for work opportunities and childcare and even to secure informal loans. The strict confinement also failed to protect women, leaving many confined with their abusers. In other words, the measures put in place by the state in order to reduce the spread of the virus did not serve the peri-urban population; quite the opposite—it compromised their main economic means of survival, driving them into an aggravated state of mental health, while replicating a culture of fear. For women survivors, it accentuated their existing vulnerabilities.

Chapter 6 also unraveled the state of **b) informality, community organizing, and access to sexual and reproductive rights**, which emerged as critical themes in women's experiences. Informality, ingrained in their daily lives, led women to rely on community-based organizations and neighborly support networks to navigate challenges. Meanwhile, access to reproductive rights became increasingly limited during the strict lockdown, relegating women's health concerns to emergency situations. Most women view access to sexual and reproductive rights as a luxury and not as a right.

Also examined was political access for women during the pandemic, specifically trying to understand the issue of domestic violence. Women residents' perceptions of **c) domestic violence reporting** revealed complex dynamics. Despite awareness of legal mechanisms, many women, influenced by societal norms and religious beliefs, denied the prevalence of domestic violence within their barrios. Even women in leadership positions often advocated for

reconciliation, reinforcing the perception of domestic violence as a private matter rather than a systemic issue requiring collective intervention.

Survivor interviews shed light on the barriers women face in accessing political and state resources while in diverse situations of domestic violence. Underreporting of initial offenses, reluctance due to economic and emotional dependencies, fear of shame and revictimization, and encounters with ill-trained state operators all contribute to the pervasive culture of recurrent silence surrounding domestic violence and to its continuous replication. At the same time, women's narratives underscore the importance of familial and community support networks in achieving autonomy and liberation from patriarchal violence. Feminist collectives and other civil society responses continue to represent a limited yet significant avenue for protection of mestiza women. However, the experiences of reporting domestic violence, and the exacerbated challenges brought on by the COVID-19 measures, highlight the many barriers that exist in relation to escaping abusive situations.

Finally, the examination of **the socio-culture** has produced an important declaration of this dissertation, regarding the extent to which religion and society in Honduras are interlaced. Religion as an institution, as much as religion as part of socially accepted narratives, is prevalent throughout women's stories: its influence is now undeniable. The chapter explored the extent to which religion influences patriarchal attitudes toward women, including severe repercussions such as domestic violence.

Throughout the chapter, women's narratives identify the omnipresence of religious institutions and the influence of faith as significant elements and social actors, which immediately started shaping pandemic experiences. While the state played a pivotal role in providing essential

services, including limited food assistance and healthcare, it was the collective efforts of social actors, with churches as leading actors, that truly made a difference in the lives of peri-urban residents. Religious institutions, in particular, not only provided crucial support but also offered spiritual comfort and hope, fostering a sense of community solidarity among mestiza women. Additionally, grassroots organizations, community leaders, and neighbors contributed significantly to supporting vulnerable women and their families, highlighting the resilience and resourcefulness of peri-urban communities in navigating challenging circumstances.

Even a brief overview of society in the La Era and Los Pinos settlements allows us to map more religious institutions than actors of any other type within the barrios. This is the case not only in volume but, as proven through the narratives, also in influence. Thus, **a) religiosity in the peripheries, and God, become the ultimate social resource for peri-urban residents**, and did so especially during the pandemic. Furthermore, attempting to separate religion from other social / secular dynamics proves to be a daunting task, as religion permeates every facet of women's lives, serving as a constant presence and resource. Therefore, any depiction of women's social resources would be incomplete without acknowledging the intertwined nature of religion and the rest of Honduran societal landscape.

In addition, this regime allows us to illustrate **b) religious influence during the pandemic**, highlighting the enduring influence of Judeo-Christian family structures, which emphasize the roles of women as wives and mothers within peri-urban communities. This influence is revealed even in women's perceptions of sexual and reproductive rights, as it manages to permeate women's decisions on their own bodies and family planning. In addition, religious institutions further strengthened their influence amid the pandemic, offering solid and constant support. They

proved to be active social actors, providing residents with many more elements than faith. This chapter demonstrated the role of religious institutions as grassroots organizations: much like the state, they provided help in the form of food staples (in this case to their congregants), while accompanying residents during the dire circumstances brought on by the pandemic. Unlike the state, the churches remained present throughout the lockdown.

Lastly, both women resident and women survivor narratives help us unfold **c) the role of religion in shaping domestic violence** within urban and peri-urban settings. Survivor stories serve as essential tools in mapping out the social actors involved, including family members and community allies, and they depict faith communities and their role in the diversity of violent experiences. On one hand, religion helped survivors navigate their devastating experiences, encouraging resilience and hope; on the other hand, it continued to disseminate the idea of women's duty to remain in abusive relationships in order to conserve traditional familial structures, further accentuating traditional, older roles of wives as always suffering and submissive. Some survivors even contacted their religious leaders or communities to share their experiences of domestic violence but received nothing but religious advice in return.

In addressing domestic violence, religion emerges as a prominent force, woven into women's narratives as a guiding principle. This nuanced understanding calls for inclusive and empowering approaches to addressing the complex realities of women's lives within urban and peri-urban contexts.

While the dissertation effectively pinpoints the roots of domestic violence within the patriarchal framework we inhabit, it also emphasizes the multifaceted nature of this issue, influenced by economic, political, and social dynamics. Recognizing these interconnected elements, without

attributing blame solely to any one element, is crucial for understanding the challenges faced by women who are victims and survivors. By acknowledging gender subordination as a central aspect of domestic violence, we can develop more targeted approaches to address it.

Regarding the context of the 2020 pandemic, valuable insights from the dissertation shed light on key factors exacerbating the impacts of such incidents, such as confinement measures and restricted mobility, which impact both women and men but have distinct repercussions for women's bodies.

9.1 Lessons learned and policy recommendations

- Recognition of the intricate effects of COVID-19 measures on women's lives is crucial for policymakers and leaders. Equipping them with insights into these impacts enables proactive preparation for similar crises, be they climate-related challenges or political turmoil, that disproportionately affect women. Overall, the dissertation illustrates the need for targeted and comprehensive interventions that not only tackle economic and political inequalities but also challenge internalized beliefs and promote collective and social action. Only through such efforts can we hope to mitigate the lasting effects of patriarchy on women.
- Viewing women's experiences through the lenses of different gender regimes highlights the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on their lives. It is not meant to fragment women's experiences; quite the opposite—it is meant to show the impacts more clearly and in a structured way, addressing the different spheres—economic, political, and social—and thus the actors concerned, with the aim of fostering more inclusive and

supportive reactions to survivors. The implementation of confinement measures, aimed primarily at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, inadvertently disadvantaged peri-urban populations, infringing on their rights to mobility and freedom while disrupting their primary means of survival. Alarming, this heightened the risk of domestic violence for women and exacerbated their isolation from sources of protection. In future interventions, it is crucial to weigh these harmful consequences, centering the voices of survivors. Confinement measures should be implemented with greater flexibility, ensuring the prioritization of women's lives and well-being.

- This dissertation underscores the critical importance of amplifying the voices of women in socioeconomically disadvantaged positions, especially women survivors in the discourse surrounding domestic violence. By centering their experiences, we not only shed light on the pervasive nature of this issue but also provide invaluable insights that can inform policy reforms and systemic changes. It is imperative that we prioritize the incorporation of religious and cultural perspectives into interventions aimed at combating domestic violence, recognizing the diverse contexts in which this phenomenon occurs and tailoring our approaches accordingly.
- Peri-urban settlements, commonly known as “barrios” or informal settlements, have long been characterized by systemic neglect, both from within and from external institutions, including the state. This marginalization takes many forms, from inadequate infrastructure and lack of public services to broader societal perceptions that mark these spaces as inherently precarious or dangerous. Residents often face serious barriers to

mobility, with limited access to both public and private transportation, and face widespread discrimination in the labor market. Crucially, these barrios are also sites of complex intersectional dynamics: while much of the Central District is demographically homogeneous, with a predominantly mestizo population, in line with the broader demographic composition of Honduras, intersectional dynamics still surface through class, gender, and localized forms of exclusion. Although Afro-Honduran and Indigenous populations are not significantly represented in this urban area, their historical and cultural presence elsewhere in the country remains important to the national context of racialized inequality. In this study, intersectionality is reflected less in ethnic diversity and more in the ways that gender, economic, and spatial marginalization intersect in the lives of participants living in the barrios.

Furthermore, state services must adapt to the realities of these communities instead of dismissing them as informal. Ignoring these realities only exacerbates the problem, leading to further marginalization and perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Therefore, there is an urgent need for state institutions to acknowledge and accommodate the unique characteristics and needs of informal settlements. Failure to do so will only perpetuate the problems addressed in this dissertation, while further disadvantaging peri-urban populations.

- The narratives shared by survivors shed light on the systemic shortcomings in the political resources available to women in Honduras. The legal framework in Honduras falls short in adequately safeguarding women, with poorly trained personnel and limited

protective measures for those in violent situations. Presently, two legal avenues exist for victims: the Domestic Violence Act, which ostensibly supports and believes victims; and reporting of family violence through the Penal Code. In theory, the Domestic Violence Act aims to protect women by enabling them to identify initial offenses such as screams, shoves, and threats, yet in reality many victims refrain from reporting such incidents until violence escalates. Most survivors endure years of abuse before seeking recourse under the Domestic Violence Act. Experts often advise reporting under the Domestic Violence Act due to its provision for removing the abuser for at least 24 hours, offering a crucial window of separation for the victim.

- On the other hand, the practicalities of pursuing legal action via the penal avenue prove daunting, requiring significant resources in terms of time, finances, and emotional energy from victims.

The differences between the Domestic Violence Act and family and intrafamily reporting create confusion for the overall population, including victims. Survivors proved to have reported cases more than once, with no escalation or support, as reported instances of domestic violence continue to be treated as isolated events instead of systemic failures for women. Thus, the Honduran political framework regarding domestic violence underscores the need for reevaluation and clearer dissemination of information across various channels.

- Women's survivor stories underscore the fact that domestic violence is a phenomenon that escalates over time. It rarely begins abruptly but, rather, evolves and intensifies with each passing event. What is crucial to understand is the extensive duration of the abuse that many women endure. From the voices of survivors, it is evident that it can take up to a decade for women to recognize the violence they are experiencing and to find the appropriate means to leave, often endangering their lives in the process. This reality exposes a significant gap in the legal system, particularly the statute of limitations, which is set at 6 months within the Honduran legal framework. This limitation fails to align with the protracted nature of domestic violence experienced by survivors, highlighting the urgent need for legal reforms that better reflect the realities of the issue.
- Feminist collectives, a cornerstone of civil society responses, have proven crucial for women from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Asociación Calidad de Vida, a civil society organization reliant on nearly 90% international funding, stands as the sole refuge for women in the Central District. However, with only 22 spots available when the research was conducted, for domestic violence victims and a growing number of people in need, its capacity is severely limited. Despite state referrals to such shelters, the financial and political support to shelters was found to be lacking during the pandemic, revealing a deficit in political will. Recommendations drawn from this dissertation stress the urgent need for additional shelters dedicated to women affected by domestic violence, providing immediate avenues of protection. Although women ideally would not have to leave their homes to escape violence, the reality of survivor narratives often contradicts this notion: despite societal expectations, many women find themselves compelled to flee

abusive situations for their own safety. While taking the decision to do this can be fraught with challenges and uncertainties, it is often a necessary step toward reclaiming their autonomy and securing their well-being. While shelters alone cannot resolve the issue, they are indispensable, especially in crisis scenarios like the pandemic.

This vulnerability was underscored again in early 2025, when USAID—and U.S. foreign assistance more broadly—underwent a significant pause and freeze in funding, including in Honduras. This action, initiated by a “stop-work” order, disrupted numerous programs across sectors, particularly those focused on HIV response and women’s rights. For organizations like Asociación Calidad de Vida, such disruptions threatened ongoing services, posed the risk of staff reductions, and raised serious concerns about the long-term impact on the country’s most vulnerable populations, including women survivors of violence. The freeze highlighted not only the precarious nature of aid-dependent civil society work but also the way political shifts far beyond national borders can directly destabilize life-saving infrastructures (Haug et al., 2025). This dissertation underscores the urgent need to expand and secure shelter infrastructure as a critical form of emergency protection.

The Honduran context demonstrates the need for more sustainable, locally based support systems that are not exclusively tied to volatile international funding. It is imperative that the state increases funding for institutions like Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz, Visitación Padilla, which offers 24-hour services to victims and remained active throughout the pandemic, offering round-the-clock support via calls and messages to

women in distress. These organizations play a vital role in providing safety and support to women in crisis situations. Furthermore, these initiatives, already proven to be effective, require special attention and state-allocated resources to fund alternative support systems tailored to the diverse needs of women facing domestic violence. By investing in these services, the state demonstrates its commitment to addressing the systemic issues underlying domestic violence and ensures that women have access to the resources necessary to escape abusive environments and rebuild their lives.

- Recognition of survivor status is not only an act of affirmation but also a powerful tool for restoring autonomy. It enables women to identify and name violence in all its forms, physical, emotional, sexual, financial, or psychological, and by naming it, they gain the language and agency to seek protection and support. Acknowledging abuse breaks the silence and allows survivors to see it not as a private burden but as a violation of their rights. In this context, the role of family and neighbors cannot be underestimated. Their emotional encouragement and practical support, such as offering shelter, accompanying survivors to services, or simply believing them, are often vital lifelines that help survivors navigate the deeply intimidating systems of reporting and support.

Crucially, survivor narratives consistently show that when survivors lack allies—whether women or men—who believe them, the risk of further abuse and domestic violence increases significantly. Isolation increases vulnerability, and disbelief from others can further silence survivors and discourage them from seeking help. In contrast, the presence of even one trusted friend or advocate can make all the difference. A person who listens,

validates, and stands by a survivor can be the reason they escape violence, and in some cases the reason they stay alive.

- While legal avenues such as reporting remain critical in addressing domestic violence, this dissertation highlights the pivotal role of support from family and friends for women survivors. Recognizing and disseminating the importance of this support network, whether it involves neighbors, relatives, or friends, has the potential to save lives. Likewise, when the opposite occurs, for example, when women do not support each other, it can potentially increase the risk of violence from male abusers. This advice challenges each reader, each member of society, to reflect on our roles within our communities. It is a call to stop behaviors that exacerbate problems for victims, such as victim-blaming or dismissing their stories within our communities. It also challenges us to consider the impact of our biases and gender perceptions on our communities.

The urgency of community engagement and support mechanisms also stands out, especially in environments where formal structures may be lacking. By fostering solidarity within communities and / or barrios, we can create a network of support that serves as a lifeline for those experiencing domestic violence, offering refuge and resources when formal avenues fall short.

With this awareness, and by acknowledging our unique roles as social actors within our societies—whether religious or not—we can all contribute to solutions for domestic violence.

- Building on this research, it becomes clear that pandemic crises present an opportunity to leverage existing community organizations located in the most disadvantaged barrios. The study highlights the untapped potential of health centers and water or community boards in general as critical resources for addressing domestic violence.

First, health centers are frontline institutions with strong community and health system ties. Therefore, it is imperative that staff at these centers are not only well equipped but also adequately trained to recognize and respond to the early signs of domestic violence. By strengthening their capacity to identify and assist victims, including providing specialized training for social workers, health centers can serve as critical points of intervention. The harm caused by domestic violence can be significantly reduced by timely identification and referral of victims to appropriate support services.

In addition, the research highlights the importance of water boards, as observed in the case of Los Pinos, as potential hubs for community support and intervention. However, this potential goes beyond water boards to include any popular or cohesive grassroots organization within each barrio. These organizations, if properly equipped and if staff are properly trained, can serve as initial reporting mechanisms and safe spaces for victims of domestic violence. By disseminating knowledge and procedures within the barrios, these community organizations can effectively facilitate access to support services.

However, the effectiveness of such initiatives depends on robust dissemination strategies and ongoing community engagement. Efforts to raise awareness of the role of health centers, water boards, and community organizations in addressing domestic violence must be comprehensive and inclusive. By strengthening the capacity of health centers, water boards, and grassroots organizations to respond to the needs of survivors, we can build the resilience of vulnerable communities and promote a safer, more supportive environment for all.

- The complicity of religious institutions in perpetuating traditional gender roles, deeply rooted in antiquated religious narratives, cannot be overlooked in the context of domestic violence against peri-urban women in Honduras. The testimonies of survivors provide a poignant illustration of the pressure to stay in abusive relationships, driven by the societal and religious expectation that women should never be single. This underscores the urgent need for religious institutions and their leaders to confront the harmful consequences of their teachings and actively engage in solutions to combat domestic violence.

But simply acknowledging that domestic violence exists is not enough. It is essential that religious institutions undertake a thorough reassessment of their teachings and practices to determine how they have contributed to the marginalization and subjugation of women. In addition, the patriarchal structures that perpetuate these harmful norms must be challenged and dismantled with a tangible commitment on the part of religious leaders.

Involving religious leaders in addressing domestic violence is also essential. Local reporting mechanisms should explicitly include church officials, given their significant influence over disadvantaged communities. This collaborative approach not only recognizes the reality of religious influence: it also harnesses it as a force for positive change.

- Real progress requires a critical examination of the role religion plays in perpetuating gender-based violence and a concerted effort to actively promote gender equality and women's empowerment within religious contexts. Only then can we truly create a society in which all women are free from the shackles of domestic violence.

As we move forward, it is essential that we continue to lift up women's voices, dismantle the structures that perpetuate violence, and focus on all the attitudes, actions, laws, and dynamics within all gender regimes that continue to reinforce the subordination of women. Part of the path to sustainable solutions is to build communities that stand in solidarity against domestic violence. It is only through collective action and unwavering commitment that we can hope to create a society that is free from the scourge of domestic violence.

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ANNEXES

THE ANNEXES HAVE BEEN REMOVED FOR LEGAL REASONS AND ARE NOT INCLUDED
IN THE PUBLISHED VERSION OF THE THESIS